

[home](#) : [index](#) : [ancient Greece](#)



Ancient Macedonia

Macedonia: ancient landscape and state, situated in the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and northern Greece, best known because its king Alexander the Great (336-323) conquered the Persian Empire and inaugurated a new period in Greek history.

The study of ancient Macedonia is bedeviled by the Macedonian question. Scholars from modern Greece and the former Yugoslav republic of Macedonia have made bold statements on the nature of ancient Macedonia, which in their more extreme variants can be summarized as "the ancient Macedonians spoke a Slavic language" and "Macedonia has been Greek for at least 3,000 years". Unfortunately, politicians in both nations argue (with a textbook example of a *non sequitur*) that the borders of the past should also be those of the present.

Of course, modern politics can not be based on ancient history. Scholars who allow themselves to be used for political purposes, overestimate the importance of their field of study. They also force others to digress longer and more often than they like on the relation between ancient Macedonia, the Slavs, and Greece, which must therefore be the *leitmotiv* of this article too. Those interested in the origin of the debate, can read the [appendix](#).

Country

Macedonia as a whole consists of two parts:

1. The fertile alluvial plain, watered by the rivers Haliacmon and the Axios, simply called Macedonia (or Lower Macedonia, to prevent confusion). It is situated immediately north of the holy mountain Olympus. In Antiquity, the plain produced sufficient cereals to permit export, but it was also rich in cattle, sheep, and remarkably strong horses. The coast is flat and there are only a few natural harbors, which helps to explain why the Macedonians never became a sea-faring nation.
2. The mountains, usually called Upper Macedonia. There were arable tracts but the country was predominantly pastoral. Its forests produced pitch and especially timber, there was some iron and gold mining, and hunters made sure that Macedonia could also export furs.

Today, Lower Macedonia is completely within the borders of modern

Macedonia

Greece; the northern part of Upper Macedonia constitutes the former Yugoslav republic of Macedonia.

Although the two landscapes are different, they share a continental climate with cold winters. This climate makes the Macedonian vegetation different from the rest of the Aegean region.

Language

At first sight, it appears that the inhabitants of the Macedonian alluvial plain spoke Greek. A fourth-century curse tablet from Pella, published in 1994, is written in Northwest Greek, and later inscriptions are in Attic Greek. Many personal names (like *Philippos* and *Alexandros*, *Zeus* and *Herakles*) are Greek as well. That the Macedonians spoke Greek, looks like an inevitable conclusion.

However, there is some room for doubt. To start with, there are also Macedonian names that have no Greek parallel (*Arridaeus* or *Sabattaras*). In the second place, in many semi-literate societies, there is a difference between the spoken and the written language. It would not be without parallel if a Macedonian, when he wanted to make an official statement, preferred decent Greek instead of his native tongue. (Cf. the altars of the goddess [Nehalennia](#), which were all written in Latin, a language that was almost certainly not spoken by the people who erected them.)

Thirdly, many historical sources are written in Greek, and it was a common practice among Greek historians to hellenize foreign names. For example, the name of the powerful first king of the Persian empire, [Kuruš](#), ought to be transcribed as *Kourous* or *Kouroux* in Greek, but became *Kyros*, because this looks like a Greek word ("Mr. Almighty"). The name that is rendered as *Alexandros*, which has a perfect Greek etymology, may in fact represent something like *Alaxandus*, which is not Greek. A related argument that forces us to hesitate is that the Greeks nearly always converted the names of foreign deities. Supreme gods like Jupiter and Marduk are called "Zeus". So, the fact that Greek authors use Greek names for Macedonian people and deities does not prove very much about the Macedonian language.

None of this *forces* us to say that the Macedonians did not speak Greek, but it *leaves the possibility* that things were not what they seem. There *is* room for skepticism.

This is why linguists take several remarks by the authors of ancient dictionaries, which otherwise might have been interpreted as indications for a mere difference in dialect, very seriously. For example, there is evidence that Greeks were unable to understand people who were *makedonizein*, "speaking Macedonian". The Macedonian king [Alexander the Great](#) was not understood by the Greeks when he shouted an order in his native tongue and the Greek commander Eumenes needed a

Macedonia

in his native tongue and the Greek commander Demosthenes needed a translator to address the soldiers of the Macedonian [phalanx](#). The Greek orators Thrasymachus of Chalcedon and [Demosthenes of Athens](#) called Macedonian kings like Archelaus and [Philip II](#) barbarians, which *prima facie* means that they did not speak Greek. Now this happens in polemical contexts and is certainly exaggerated, but the statements need to refer to *some* kind of linguistic reality.

We know frustratingly little about the Macedonian language/dialect. For instance, we don't know anything about its grammar or syntax. We do not even know whether the Macedonians spoke one language at all; many societies, now and then, have more than one language. All we have is a set of about 150 words that were recognized as Macedonian in Antiquity, many of which are derived from a Macedonian-to-Greek dictionary by a man named Amerias. These 150 words can be divided into two groups:

1. Words that have a counterpart in Greek. For example, the Macedonian title *Nikatôr* ("victor") is obviously the equivalent of Greek *Nikêtêr*. Usually, the Macedonian words are voiced and lack aspiration whereas Greek words are voiceless and aspirated: for example, Greek *aithêr* is the equivalent of Macedonian *adê* ("sky").
2. Words that do not resemble a Greek word: *sarissa* ("lance"), *abagna* ("rose"), *peliganes* ("senate"). It is certain that these words are Indo-European.

Linguists have attempted to establish connections between the non-Greek words with other Indo-European languages, but this is difficult. For example, *abroutes* ("eyebrows"), looks like the [Avestan](#) word *bruuat.biām*, which suggests an eastern origin of the Macedonian language; but if the /T/ in *abroutes* is a writing error and should be read as a /F/ (digamma; pronounced as /w/), there is nothing special about it, because **abrouwes* corresponds to the Greek *ophrues*. It is not easy to find parallels for a vocabulary if even a simple writing error can have grave consequences. Things are even more complicated because the languages of the neighboring Thracians and Illyrians, where we would seek for parallels first, are equally poorly understood.

Much is still uncertain, but two conclusions appear to be irrefutable:

1. The Macedonians did not speak a Slavic language, which belongs to an altogether different branch of Indo-European, called Balto-Slavo-Germanic;
2. Macedonian and Greek were related but different, but it is not certain whether they were different languages (which means that they have a different grammar and syntax) or dialects.

It is also certain that the Macedonian language became increasingly hellenized. Evidence for the pronunciation of Macedonian in the second half of the fourth century can be found in the cuneiform texts from

[Babylon](#). If Macedonian was still unaspirated and voiced when Alexander the Great conquered the Persian Empire, the Babylonian scribes would have spelled the name of the king's brother, called [Philippos](#) in Greek sources, something like *Bi-lip*+ending. However, the first syllable is always *Pi*, which also represents a sound like /vi/. This suggests that the Macedonians had began to aspirate their consonants and were losing voice. The name *Berenike* (the Macedonian equivalent of Greek *Pherenike*) may also have been pronounced according to the Greek fashion, because it is rendered in Latin as *Veronica*.

Finally, it must be stressed that, despite what modern politicians and some modern scholars argue, language says not much about ethnicity. (People can speak Frisian and have a Dutch passport, whereas people speaking Dutch can live in Belgium and Surinam and feel offended when they are called Dutch.) The identification of "one language, one nation, one state", is nineteenth-century and says nothing about Antiquity. Still, language is one of the factors that is used to classify people, just like religion and a shared past, so it is not altogether irrelevant either.

[home](#) : [index](#) : [ancient Greece](#)

[home](#) : [index](#) : [ancient Greece](#)



Ancient Macedonia

Macedonia: ancient landscape and state, situated in the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and northern Greece, best known because its king Alexander the Great (336-323) conquered the Persian Empire and inaugurated a new period in Greek history. The first part of this article can be found [here](#).



Coin of Alexander of Macedonia (C!!)

Ethnogenesis

As we have seen [above](#), the Macedonians spoke a language that shared a part of its vocabulary with Greek and appears to have shared a part of its development with Thracian and [Phrygian](#). It is not known when those who spoke Macedonian settled in their country, and even less is known about the language that was spoken before their arrival, but it seems that the speakers of Macedonian accepted words from this substrate language.

The settlement of these people between others marks the beginning of the history of Macedonia. Although [Homer](#) does not mention the Macedonians as member of the Greek coalition in the [Trojan War](#), his younger contemporary [Hesiod](#) presented the Macedonians as related to the Greeks. Outsiders had a similar mixed opinion: the Persians called both nations [Yaunâ](#), distinguishing between those *tyaiy paradrayâ* ("Greeks across the sea") and those *takabarâ* ("with sunhats", i.e., Macedonians). An observer in 500 BCE who knew that the Macedonian kings would one day embark upon a policy of hellenization, might have concluded that the Macedonians would one day be assimilated by the Greeks.

This did not happen, however. The Macedonians of the plain became one state with the people of Upper Macedonia, even though the latter spoke other languages, related to Illyrian and Thracian, and in spite of religious differences. The mountain tribes worshipped snakes, joined in orgiastic cults, and venerated Dionysus, whereas the Macedonians of the plain worshipped Zeus and [Heracles](#) (as the Greeks called them). How and why did these two groups become one nation?

We have hardly any written evidence, and what we do have is often biased. Still, it seems that the Persian conquest was the decisive factor. It had been subdued by [Megabazus](#) and since c.512, king [Darius I the Great](#) received tribute from Amyntas, the king of Lower Macedonia, who also gave his daughter in marriage to an [Achaemenid](#) nobleman. In the [Achaemenid royal inscriptions](#) written after this moment (e.g., [DNe](#)), Macedonia is mentioned among the subjects.

Twenty years later, the Persian general [Mardonius](#) organized Macedonia as one of the regular tax districts of the empire. Darius recognized the Macedonian leader, Amyntas' son Alexander, and may even have awarded him the Persian rank of [satrap](#). Usually, these officials were responsible for more people than just their own nation. For example, the satrap of [Lydia](#) was also the ruler of several nearby Greek towns. We may assume that Persian recognition and support gave Alexander a decisive advantage over the mountain tribes that Mardonius had added to his realm. There is little unambiguous proof, but it fits Achaemenid practice.

However this may be, Alexander was a loyal ally of Darius' son [Xerxes](#)

Macedonia

when he tried to conquer Greece in 480. As is well known, the Persian annexation of Greece was not successful. In 479, the Greeks defeated the army of Mardonius near [Plataea](#). During the next years, the [Athenian](#) alliance, the [Delian League](#), expelled the Persians from Europe.

These years were decisive for the development of the Greek and Macedonian self-image. Until then, they had probably seen each other as different but related nations; after 479, relations worsened and two new cultural and ethnic identities started to grow. Darius and Xerxes had grouped the Macedonians of the plain into one political unit with the mountain tribes, and Alexander kept it this way. At the same time, the Greeks, who had only been united by religion, their legendary cooperation during the Trojan War, and their language, started to recognize that they also shared their cooperation in the Persian War. As former allies of Xerxes, the Macedonians could not be Greeks.

Of course, the separate development of Macedonia and the Greek cities did not prevent close ties. Greece needed the timber and cereals that Macedonia exported and Alexander needed support to control the mountain tribes. He tried to deny the increasing differences by calling himself *philhellenos* ("friend of the Greeks"), and claimed that his family descended from the Greek city of Argos ([text](#)), a claim that was recognized by the authorities at the Olympic Games. Still it must be noted that the title *philhellenos* itself implies that the nation that Alexander represented was not Greek (no Greek king needed to call himself "friend of the Greeks"). Alexander also claimed that he had never been fully loyal to his Persian overlord, but this is contradicted by his behavior during the war, by the marriage alliance, and -as late as the 460's- by his support of [Themistocles](#), who had been exiled by the Athenians and was on the run to Persia.

When Alexander died in 454, he left behind a kingdom that consisted of the inhabitants of the central plain, of mountain tribes and some territories that Alexander had conquered (or reconquered after they had revolted during the collapse of Persian power). The tribal barons recognized Alexander as their overlord, and although future kings would meet with opposition, the hegemony of the Argead dynasty was never seriously challenged. Macedonia's foreign policy had also been created: it wanted to cooperate with its southern neighbors. A nation was born.

Early history

Greece and Macedonia had been on opposing sides during the Persian war. Other developments acerbated the opposition. As long as Athens ruled the waves, naval commerce was easy and safe, and many towns in the Aegean Sea experienced an economic boom. Athens, [Miletus](#), Argos, and Corinth benefited, but Macedonia, which lacked a good port, did not. (Even Sparta had better access to the interregional trade routes.) Compared to the Greek towns, Macedonia remained a backward land with conservative customs.

Macedonia

Alexander was succeeded by his son Perdiccas II (454-413). A summary of his foreign policy explains why it took so long for Macedonia to become the superpower that it potentially was:

- In 433, he had to fight against Athens, which supported one of his dynastic rivals.
- In 431, he concluded a peace treaty with Athens but
- he immediately quarreled with Methone, an Athenian ally. Athens was too occupied with the [Archidamian War](#) against Sparta to intervene at full strength.
- In 429, he had to ward off an attack from the Thracian king Sitalces, who had probably been convinced to attack Macedonia by the Athenian ambassador [Hagnon](#).
- In 424, Perdiccas supported the Spartan general [Brasidas](#), who in return helped him to strengthen his grip on Lyncestis, one of the western mountain districts; after Brasidas had snatched the strategically important city [Amphipolis](#) away from the Athenian alliance ([text](#)),
- Perdiccas concluded an alliance with Athens, but
- in 418, he allied himself to Argos.
- But after a couple of years, he joined Athens again.

This means that he revised his position to Athens six times. Perdiccas was, in fact, toying with the Athenians. He needed them because they bought his timber, but he was ready to benefit when they were weak, and certainly wanted to keep them away from Macedonia as far as possible. On the other hand, the Athenians knew that Perdiccas could not afford a full-blown conflict and they had means to manipulate him as well: for example, by supporting rival candidates to the Macedonian throne.

However, this is only a part of the story. It's only the second half of it. Without any doubt, relations to Greece were equally complex during the first twenty years of Perdiccas' reign. Moreover, similar complex international relations must have existed to the Epirotes in the west, the Illyrians in the northwest, the Paeones in the north, and the Thracians in the east. Only Macedonian kings with special qualities were able to forge their own foreign policy; it was very easy to lose the initiative and become a pawn of foreign powers.

Fortunately, Perdiccas' successor was every inch as competent as his father and grandfather, even though he abandoned Perdiccas' policy. Archelaus (413-399) preferred to ally himself closer to Athens, which was no longer a superpower after it had incurred the wrath of the Persian king [Darius II Nothus](#), who started to support Sparta in the [Ionian War](#). Archelaus used the profits of the timber and grain trade to improve the Macedonian infrastructure. The historian [Thucydides](#) was impressed:

The forts that are now in Macedonia were built by

Macedonia

Archelaus [...], who also built straight roads through the country, reorganized the cavalry, the arming of the infantry, and equipment in general, so as to put the country in a stronger position for war than it had ever been before.

[*History of the [Peloponnesian War](#), 2.100.2;*
tr. Rex Warner]

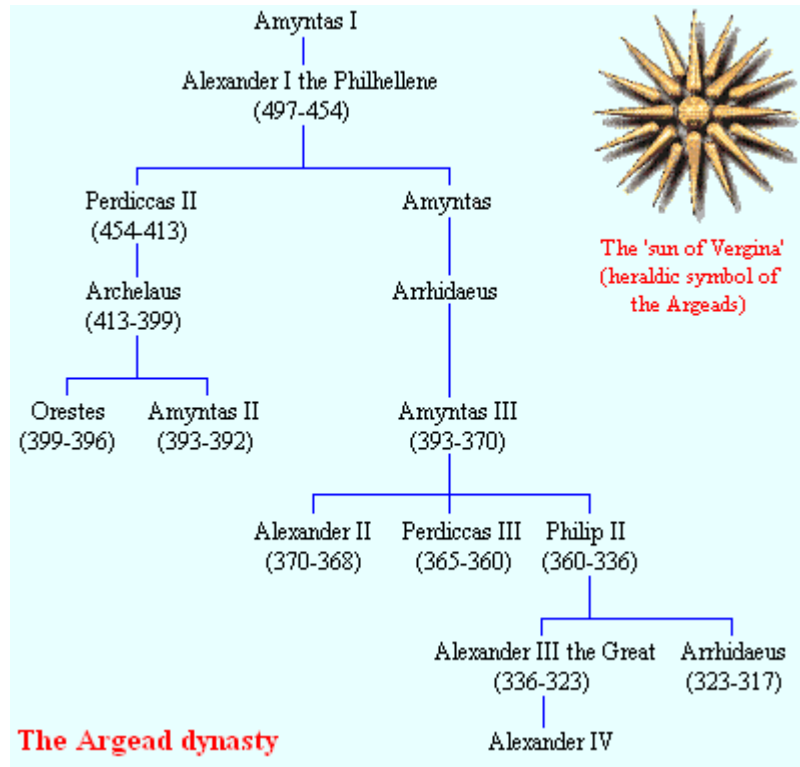
Archelaus also did his best to adopt the Greek way of life. Even a town in the interior like Aeane became an important city that resembled the *poleis* of the south. In c.410, the old capital [Aegae](#) was replaced as royal residence by Pella, a newly founded city. The Athenian playwrights [Euripides](#) and Agathon were invited to Macedonia, and the famous painter Zeuxis also came to Pella.

Archelaus also organized Olympic Games in Dion, at the foot of the holy mountain Olympus. This is interesting, because it suggests that -even though the king may have won a victory at the "real" Olympics- ordinary Macedonians were not allowed to compete in Olympia, and were, therefore, not recognized as Greeks. This is confirmed by the list of victors at Olympia. A substantial part of which survives and it mentions no ordinary Macedonians until the reign of [Alexander the Great](#).

Not even Archelaus' own claim to Greekness went unchallenged. Although an author like Thucydides accepted the king's descent from Argos, his contemporary Thrasymachus of Chalcedon exclaimed: "Must we Greeks become slaves of the barbarian Archelaus?" This was, of course, meant as an insult to a man who had done much to look like a Greek, and we may not take this as evidence that Archelaus' policy had failed. On the contrary, it proves that the Thrasymachus understood Macedonian foreign policy, which in turn shows that Macedonia had become a power that mattered. All the same, it is certain that the Greeks did not know what to think of their increasingly powerful neighbor.

After the assassination of Archelaus, the Macedonian rulers were not in a position to live up to their claim to be Greek. There was no strong king and the Illyrians, Athenians, Spartans, Thebans, and the Greeks from the nearby Chalcidian League tried to expand their influence in Macedonia. In rapid succession, Orestes (399-396), Aeropus (396-393), Amyntas II and Pausanias (393-392), Amyntas III (393-370), Alexander II (370-368), and Ptolemaeus (368-365) were king. Some of them did not even belong to the Argead dynasty.

Macedonia



The barons benefited from the decline of royal power. They may have been able to gain control of the export of cereals and timber, and showed their wealth in splendid tombs. At the same time, they may have started to claim descent from figures of Greek legendary history. For example, the rulers of Lyncestis (a barony in the west of Macedonia) claimed that the Bacchiads of Corinth were their ancestors. Elsewhere, the dynasty that ruled the Epirote Molossians claimed that Achilles was its ancestor, the Enchelei of Illyria did not settle for anyone less than Cadmus, and even as far away as Lavinium in Latium, a sanctuary was dedicated to Aeneas.

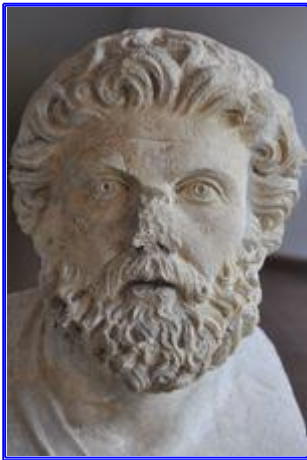
[home](#) : [index](#) : [ancient Greece](#)

[home](#) : [index](#) : [ancient Greece](#)



Ancient Macedonia

Macedonia: ancient landscape and state, situated in the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and northern Greece, best known because its king Alexander the Great (336-323) conquered the Persian Empire and inaugurated a new period in Greek history. The first part of this article can be found [here](#).



Portrait of Philip, from Welschbillig (Germany). [Rheinisches Landesmuseum, Trier](#).

Philip

Macedonia had been plunged into a crisis after the death of Archelaus in 399, but recovered when the young Perdiccas III became king in 365. At first, he appeared as weak as his predecessors, and the [Athenians](#) were able to force him to cooperate with them in an attempt to conquer the city of [Amphipolis](#). Once this strategically important city had been captured, however, Perdiccas kept it for himself and broke off the collaboration in a move for which his ancestor Perdiccas II ([above](#)) would not have felt ashamed.

Amphipolis controlled important gold mines, and from now on, the king was a rich man, wealthier than any of the barons of Upper Macedonia. He now had the means to recruit large armies without being dependent on others, and could pursue the hellenization policy that had been initiated by Alexander I ([above](#)). Immediately, Perdiccas invited the Athenian Callistratus to reform the Macedonian economy and toll system. He was not the only Athenian who went to the north: Euphraeus, a student of [Plato](#), settled in Pella as court philosopher. However, Perdiccas would not see the edifice for which he had laid the foundations, because in the last weeks of 360, his army was defeated by the Illyrian king Bardylis. The young king was killed in action.

He was succeeded by his brother [Philip II](#) (360-336), who had lived in Thebes and had studied [Epaminondas'](#) use of the [phalanx](#). Once Philip had become king, he embarked upon a very efficient policy of conquest. Although he briefly gave up Amphipolis to regain Athenian support and avenge himself upon the Illyrians, he seized the town again at the earliest possible occasion, promised it to the Athenians under the condition that they would give him the port of [Pydna](#), and in the end kept both towns. Like other Greek *poleis* that Philip captured, they retained some of their autonomy and Greeks in Macedonian service could proudly continue to call themselves after their home towns: [Aristotle of Stagira](#), [Callisthenes of Olynthus](#), [Nearchus of Amphipolis](#).

Philip had read the signs of the times. The allies of Athens were about to revolt (the "Social War"; 357-355) and the Athenians were unable to punish the Macedonian king, who proceeded to capture other Greek

Macedonia

punish the Macedonian king, who proceeded to capture other Greek towns in the neighborhood, improved his army, pacified the Illyrians, allied himself to the Molossians of Epirus (by marrying [Olympias](#)), defeated the Thracians and conquered "New Macedonia", intervened in the Third Sacred War (355-346), and gained control of both Thessaly and a vote in the council that controlled the oracle of [Delphi](#) (the Amphictiony). Without any doubt, the king of Macedonia had become the most important man in the Greek world.

The Athenian orator [Demosthenes](#), who hated Philip like the gates of hell, called him a barbarian and tried to win the Greeks for a united anti-Macedonian policy. However, other Greeks acquiesced in the rise of Macedonia. Not only was its king allowed a vote in the Amphictiony but he was also permitted to compete at Olympia. The Greeks recognized him as "one of us". The attitude is summarized by the orator Isocrates, who tried to convince Philip not to follow up his successes by the conquest of Greece, but to lead the united Greek towns in a war against the barbarian Persians. Isocrates congratulates the king that his ancestors had not tried to become monarchs in Greece, but instead

left it and devoted themselves to establishing a kingdom in Macedonia; for they knew that the Greeks were not accustomed to put up with monarchies, while the rest [i.e., the non-Greeks] were unable to order their life aright without such a form of government. The result was that [...] their rule was one of quite a different character from the rest; for they alone among the Greeks claimed to rule over a people not of kindred race.

[*To Philip*, 107-108;
tr. J. A. Freese; modified]

In other words, if Philip proceeded to conquer the Persian barbarians, he was merely continuing the family tradition to conquer nations "not of a kindred race". As it turned out, Philip appreciated the suggestion, but he judged it better to subdue the Greeks first. In 340, he provoked a crisis, and in 338, he mopped up the last Greek resistance in the battle of [Chaeronea](#).



The theater of [Aegae](#) where king Philip was murdered.

At the same time, the Persian king [Artaxerxes III Ochus](#) died ([text](#)). It was the perfect moment for an Asian expedition, and the Macedonian king forced the Greeks to join a military alliance (the [Corinthian League](#)) to attack Persia. However, Philip was assassinated before he could leave ([text](#)). The Asian campaign was to be led by his famous son [Alexander](#).

Macedonia



Aristotle (Archaeological Museum, Palermo)

The historian [Arrian of Nicomedia](#) says that Philip

found the Macedonians wandering about without resources, many of them clothed in sheepskins and pasturing small flocks in the mountains, defending them with difficulty against the Illyrians, Triballians and neighboring Thracians. He gave the Macedonians cloaks to wear instead of sheepskins, brought them down from the mountains to the plains, and made them a match in war for the neighboring barbarians. He made his subjects city dwellers and civilized them with good laws and customs. He annexed much of Thrace to Macedonia, seized the most favorable coastal towns, opened up the country to commerce, and enabled the Macedonians to exploit your mines undisturbed.

[*Anabasis*, 7.9, modified; [full text](#);
tr. M.M. Austin]

Although this is exaggerated, it is true that during the reign of Philip, Macedonia became a superpower. As a consequence, his crown prince Alexander was educated at an international court, where Macedonians, Greeks (e.g., [Nearchus](#)), Thracians, and even a couple of Persians (e.g., [Amminapes](#) and [Artabazus](#)) appear to have become more or less integrated. Religiously, Macedonia was an open society as well. A town like Aphytis boasted a sanctuary for [Ammon](#), an Egyptian deity.

Those living in Philip's kingdom could, whatever their ethnicity, join his Companion Cavalry and receive land to maintain their horses. In fact, Philip created a new nobility that he used as a counterweight to the old barons. Still, although Philip was not obsessed with ethnicity, independent military commands were reserved to Macedonians (e.g., [Parmenion](#) and [Attalus](#)).

Philip's contemporary, the Greek historian [Theopompus of Chios](#), put it well when he said that "Europe had never seen a man like king Philip, the son of Amyntas," and it is no coincidence that Theopompus called his books on the mid-fourth century BCE the *Philippic History*. It can be argued that not even Philip's son Alexander the Great has done so much to change the course of Macedonian and Greek history.



Bust of Alexander the Great,
from Delos, now in the
[Louvre](#).

Alexander

Alexander had been raised at an international court. One of his teachers had been Aristotle, who had told the crown prince that he should treat the Greeks and Macedonians as his equals, and the Persians who he wanted to conquer as subjects. Alexander followed Aristotle's advice. Although he sacked the Greek city of Thebes ([text](#)), he entrusted important commands to Greeks like [Erigyius](#), being more generous to the Greeks than his father had been.

Political reasons played a role. The Asian campaign officially was a panhellenic ("all-Greek") enterprise to punish the Persians for their attack on Greece in 480-479. To some extent, this was empty propaganda - the Macedonians were the last ones who could punish the people they had once loyally supported. On the other hand, Alexander had been educated as a Greek. Accepting the Greeks as equals must have been his natural attitude.

From their side, the Greeks finally opened the Olympic Games to all Macedonians, who were now fully recognized as Greeks. Again, this must have had much to do with politics, but on the other hand, it was hard to deny that the Macedonian kings had hellenized at least the elite of their country, which must have been bilingual and showed sincere interest in Greek culture. And it could not be denied that during the Asian war, Greek and Macedonian interests coincided. Accepting each other must have been uneasy, but was a simple recognition of facts.

In 334, Alexander crossed the [Hellespont](#) and started the conquest of the [Achaemenid Empire](#), which was finished by 330, when the last Persian king, [Darius III Codomannus](#), was killed. After this, he conquered modern Uzbekistan and Pakistan, returned, and died in [Babylon](#) on [11 June 323](#). He was succeeded by his brother [Philip III Arridaeus](#). The story is told [elsewhere](#).

For Macedonia, the successes of Alexander had disastrous consequences. He needed many soldiers and repeatedly had to ask for reinforcements, which his governor in Europe, [Antipater](#), was not always able to send. For example, between 333 and 330, Greece was unquiet because the Spartan king [Agis III](#) tried to expel the Macedonian garrisons. Antipater needed the soldiers himself. By the end of Alexander's reign, the Macedonian army in Europe was crippled by serious manpower shortage, and after the death of the great conqueror, the Greeks achieved some spectacular successes during their war of liberation, the Lamian War (or "Greek War", as it was called back then). Antipater even needed reinforcements from Asia, led by [Craterus](#), to restore Macedonia's control of Greece.

Another result of Alexander's spectacular conquests was the creation of new kingdoms: the [Seleucid Empire](#) in Asia and the [Ptolemaic Empire](#) in Egypt and Syria. The military elite of these oversea empires initially tried

Macedonia

to retain its Macedonian character. For example, the political body of the European settlers in Babylon was called *peliganes*, a Macedonian word, and not *gerousia*, as a Greek would have called it. However, there were simply not enough Macedonians. If the conquerors were to maintain control of their new territories, the Greeks had to have equal rights, which they soon received.

Men like Alexander and his [successors](#), who had received a Greek education and sometimes claimed to descend from legendary Greek heroes, were responsible for the expansion of Greek culture to the east. They accepted the Greeks as partners in rule. At the same time, the Greeks accepted the Macedonians as one of the Greek nations.

What in fact happened was the creation of a new type of Greekness. One was not only *born* as Greek, but could also *become* a Greek by accepting a Greek education. The Macedonians were the first ones to be assimilated, but Egyptians, Jews, and Babylonians followed, and later, Romans and Gauls were also accepted as "culture Greeks". This process has a parallel in the loss of political influence, which is the subject of the next part of this article.

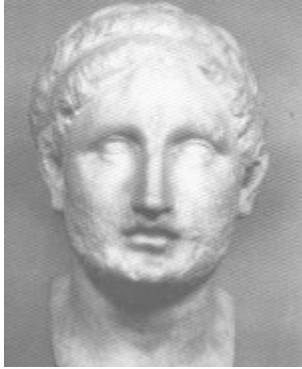
[home](#) : [index](#) : [ancient Greece](#)

[home](#) : [index](#) : [ancient Greece](#)



Ancient Macedonia

Macedonia: ancient landscape and state, situated in the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and northern Greece, best known because its king Alexander the Great (336-323) conquered the Persian Empire and inaugurated a new period in Greek history. The first part of this article can be found [here](#).



Philip Arridaeus? (Museo archeologico nazionale, Napoli; [@!!!](#))

After Alexander

When [Alexander the Great](#) had left Macedonia to conquer the [Achaemenid Empire](#), he had appointed [Antipater](#) as his viceroy. This officer remained supreme commander of the Macedonian forces in Europe after the death of the king ([11 June 323](#)), even though a courtier named [Perdiccas](#) became regent of the new ruler of the Macedonian empire, Alexander's half-brother [Philip III Arridaeus](#), who was mentally unfit to rule.

Perdiccas' regency was short-lived. One of Alexander's generals, [Ptolemy](#), had become [satrap](#) of Egypt and ignored Arridaeus and Philip. And when the two last-mentioned decided to restore order in the south-west of the empire that Alexander had acquitted, Perdiccas was assassinated by his own officers, somewhere on the banks of the river Nile. After this event, it was almost certain that the Macedonian empire would fall into pieces. Antipater, who was in the position to negotiate a deal between the rival factions (the [Triparadisus settlement](#)), accepted the regency and took the royal family with him to Europe. He left [Antigonus Monophthalmus](#) in charge of the Macedonian forces in Asia.

The story of the next twenty years is very complex (for the details, go [here](#)). For our purposes, it is sufficient to know that Antipater died soon after his return to Europe (probably in the autumn of 319; [text](#)), and that he left the Macedonian royal family in the hands of an officer named [Polyperchon](#). Although he was the new regent, he was no match for Cassander, a son of Antipater who claimed and obtained his father's position as *de facto* ruler of Macedonia and the Greek world. During his coup, king Philip Arridaeus was killed ([text](#)), leaving [Alexander IV](#), the son of Alexander the Great, as only surviving member of the Argead dynasty. The boy was killed soon afterwards ([text](#)).

Macedonia was exhausted after the Persian war, and compared to the other [successors](#) of Alexander, Cassander refrained from war as much as possible. One of his successes was gaining control of [Athens](#), where he disbanded the democracy and appointed Demetrius of Phaleron (a student of [Aristotle of Stagira](#)) as governor. Other towns were garrisoned. This may have stabilized the region. Cassander also did his best to improve the economy, and founded important cities like Cassandria (formerly known as Potideia) and Thessalonica, which he named after his wife, a sister of Alexander the Great.

Macedonia



Demetrius with bull's horns, the symbol of the sea-god Poseidon (Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York)

Things took a turn for the worse when the son of Antigonus, Demetrius, liberated Athens (307; [text](#)). Cassander rapidly lost control of Greece, and at one point was even confronted with an invasion from the south. The armies of Demetrius and Cassander faced each other for some time in 302, but it soon became apparent that another war zone, Anatolia, was more important. Demetrius joined his father at [Ipsus](#) in [Phrygia](#), and Cassander sent troops to [Lysimachus](#), the ruler of Thrace, who had invaded Anatolia. Another general, [Seleucus](#), appeared on the scene too, and in 301, Antigonus and Demetrius were defeated. The result was that Asia was to be divided between Seleucus and Ptolemy of Egypt.

For a while, Cassander's control of Macedonia seemed secure, but he was unable to recover Greece. In 298, he died. Only a few people mourned the man who had massacred the Macedonian royal house and garrisoned Greece. There was confusion about the succession, and Demetrius was able to get himself recognized him as king (294; [text](#)).

For six years, he controlled Macedonia and a large part of Greece, but then, his subjects revolted. It is not known why, but it is tempting to suppose that they were shocked by Demetrius' forced conscription, which must have been a disappointment after the quiet last years of Cassander. Demetrius now installed his son Antigonus Gonatas as governor of Greece, and decided to launch an all-out attack on the east. If he could defeat Seleucus, he could reach the eastern parts of the known world, gather troops, and return with a large force. It was a gamble, and few will have been surprised by its failure (285).

The next years were chaotic. Lysimachus of Thrace and king [Pyrrhus of Epirus](#) tried to intervene, an adventurer named [Ptolemy Keraunos](#) was able to seize power, but was defeated when the Galatians -a Celtic tribe- invaded Thrace, Macedonia, and Greece. In the end, Antigonus Gonatas, the son of Demetrius, seized power in Macedonia and founded a new dynasty.

| | |
|-----------------------------------------|---------|
| Demetrius I Poliorcetes | 294-288 |
| Antigonus II Gonatas | 283-239 |
| Demetrius II | 239-229 |
| Antigonus III Doson | 229-221 |
| Philip V | 221-179 |
| Perseus | 179-168 |

The great wars were now over, but peace was a rare thing in the ancient world. Antigonus Gonatas had to defend himself against Pyrrhus (who was killed in action in 272) and was faced by a large insurrection in Greece. During this Chremonidian War, Athens and Sparta, supported by king [Ptolemy II Philadelphus](#) of Egypt, tried to expel the Macedonians, but in the end, Antigonus kept what he had. However, the Greeks had learned that they had to create federations of city states

Macedonia

to defend themselves with more success. The [Achaean](#) and Aetolian leagues were to become important factors during the next decades.

After the reign of Demetrius II (239-229), Antigonos III Doson became king. During his reign, the Spartan king Cleomenes III tried to restore his city's fortunes, and the people of the towns in the Achaean League felt threatened. They invited Antigonos to rescue them. At Sellasia, north of Sparta, Cleomenes was defeated. Sparta was occupied, Arcadia became part of Antigonos' possessions, and when the king died, Macedonia resembled a superpower again.

The Roman age

Antigonos' adopted son Philip V really believed that he was as powerful as his namesake [Philip II](#), and made a disastrous mistake when in 215 he signed a treaty with [Hannibal Barca](#), the [Carthaginian](#) general who was successfully fighting against Rome. Philip promised that he would attack Rome's Illyrian [province](#), and Hannibal hoped that this would distract Rome's attention from the Italian theater of operations. This was a serious mistake. The Romans were able to ward off the Macedonian attack, and -worse- were able to turn to the tables when the Aetolian League became their ally. Other Greek towns and states followed, and it soon became clear that Philip would never be able to help Hannibal. In 205, the Peace of Phoenice put an end to the First Macedonian War.



The battlefield of Pydna and Mount Olympus (background)

When Hannibal had been defeated, Rome wanted revenge. During the Second Macedonian War (200-196), Philip witnessed the destruction of all that he owned. In 197, the Roman legions of Flaminius defeated the Macedonian [phalanx](#) in the battle of [Cynoscephalae](#): a severe blow for the prestige of Macedonia. Nor was this the end of Philip's humiliation. The Romans retreated their troops and created a power vacuum that the [Seleucid](#) king [Antiochus III the Great](#) could not leave empty. This gave Rome the motive to invade the Aegean region again, and this time, Philip was even forced to act as ally.

His son Perseus inherited a strained relation to Rome, but was able to gain support in Greece. The Romans, however, had decided to isolate and destroy him. In 171, war broke out, and in the third year, Lucius Aemilius Paullus defeated Perseus in the [Battle of Pydna](#). Macedonia was cut into four republics, with [Amphipolis](#), Thessalonica, Pella, and Heraclea in Lyncestis as capitals. The final blow came in 148, when the Romans finally annexed Macedonia, added southern Illyria (capital: Apollonia), and transformed it into a tax-paying province. Greece followed two years later.

The new province was developed carefully. A road, the [Via Egnatia](#), was built and connected Apollonia with the capitals of the former republics. Later, this road was continued to [Byzantium](#). Macedonia was important, because it protected the wealthy Aegean provinces against

Macedonia



A coin of one of the four Macedonian republics ([Bode-Museum](#), Berlin)

raids from northern tribes. At the same time, Macedonia was midway between Italy and rich territories of the east, and it comes as no surprise that several important battles during the Roman civil wars were fought in this province: in the [battle of Pharsalus](#), [Julius Caesar](#) defeated his enemy Pompey the Great (48), and in the [battle of Philippi](#), Marc Antony and Octavian defeated the assassins of Caesar, Brutus and Cassius (42).

During the Roman empire this giant province was divided. Once the country south of the [Danube](#) had been pacified, Moesia and Thrace became independent. During the reforms of the reign of [Diocletian](#) (284-305), Macedonia received the rank of diocese. In the territory of the old province, the new provinces Macedonia I (capital: Thessalonica), Macedonia II (Stoboi), Thessalia (Larisa), and Epirus Nova (Dyrrhachaeum) were created, to which Achaëa and Creta were added.

After the battle of Adrianopel, in which the Visigoths defeated the Roman emperor [Valens](#) (378), the invaders were allowed to settle in Macedonia, which suffered badly. Still, Thessalonica remained an important city, guarded by the [Second Flavian legion Constantia](#), and Macedonia continued to export cereals and timber. The emperor [Justinian](#) (527-565) repaired many buildings and forts, but was unable to prevent that at the end of the sixth century, Macedonia was invaded by Avars and Slavic tribes, who reached Thessalonica, were repelled, returned, and finally settled down.

Appendix: the Macedonian question

In the nineteenth century, the power of the Ottoman empire on the Balkan peninsula was in decline and new kingdoms like Serbia, Greece, and Bulgaria, came into being. They all claimed the area that was known as Macedonia, which was usually described as inhabited by Bulgarians, although there were local nationalists who stressed that the Macedonians were an independent nation. After the Balkan Wars (1912-1914), the country was carved up between the three states and the Serbian and Greek authorities launched harsh policies to change the ethnic composition of the land they had conquered. For example, the "Slavophone Greeks" of Thessalonica were restricted in their cultural activities, sometimes forced to resettle, and replaced by Greeks who had been forced to leave their ancestral towns in the west of Turkey.

After the Second World War, Serbia was the most powerful state in the Yugoslav federation, and the Yugoslav leader Tito tried to counterbalance Serbia's hegemony by giving Macedonia some autonomy, arguing that the Macedonians were an ancient nation and were no Serbs. (In other words, Tito recognized that the earlier policy of forced Serbianization had failed.) Another motive was Tito's hope to incite a revolt in Greek Macedonia, which might result in the annexation of Thessalonica as Yugoslavia's southern port. (The city itself, which had been an important center of Judaism, had suffered from mass

Macedonia

had been an important center of Judaism, had suffered from mass deportations, and Tito may have thought that seizing an almost empty city would be easy.) Although Greece was divided by civil war, Tito soon discovered that the Greeks had thoroughly hellenized their part of Macedonia.

During the Cold War, Yugoslavia tried to remain out of the conflict between East and West. Bulgaria, however, was part of the Soviet Alliance, and every time the relations between Sofia and Belgrade deteriorated, anti-Yugoslav propaganda was directed at the Yugoslav republic of Macedonia by the Bulgarians. They also stressed that the inhabitants were no Serbs. As a result of all this, nationalist ideas that had existed among some early twentieth-century Slavs living in Macedonia, were kept alive.



Like all nationalists of all nations in the world, those in Macedonia had thought about the origin of their nation. Of course they had a Slavic heritage, which meant that they were related to the Bulgarians and Serbs, and had -according to most scholars- settled on the Balkan peninsula in the Early Middle Ages. However, the Macedonian nationalists claimed that the Slavs had *always* lived on the southern Balkans, and they sought arguments to prove that the language spoken by the ancient Macedonians was in fact an early form of Slavic. These ideas were -to put it mildly- highly controversial, and were disputed by historians from modern Greece, who claimed that the ancient Macedonians spoke Greek (cf. our discussion [above](#)).

After the end of the Cold War, Yugoslavia disintegrated and in 1991, its southernmost republic became independent. This would not have caused great problems, but the new state demanded an outlet to the sea and already printed banknotes with the White Tower of Thessalonica. These territorial claims were not appreciated in Greece, and a major diplomatic crisis started, in which the Greeks claimed that Macedonia had been Greek for the past 3,000 years. As late as 2008, seventeen years later, Greece vetoed Macedonian membership of the NATO, but generally speaking, the conflict has lost much of its heat.

Summing up: there are nationalists in the former Yugoslav republic who claim that their ancient ancestors spoke some sort of Slavic, and conclude that therefore, modern Macedonia can lay territorial claims to all parts of ancient Macedonia; and there are Greeks who say that the ancient Macedonians spoke Greek. Greece has not made territorial claims.

Probably, both the Slavonic Macedonians and the Greeks claim too much. As we have already seen [above](#), there is no evidence that the ancient Macedonians spoke a language related to Slavonic Macedonian, and there is no evidence that the Macedonians were regarded as Greeks before the reign of Alexander the Great.

Thanks

... to professor Ruijgh, who discussed the Macedonian language with me but died before he could see this article, and to Gerard Boter, who offered many suggestions to improve this article.

[home](#) : [index](#) : [ancient Greece](#)

source:

<http://www.livius.org/maa-mam/macedonia/macedonia.html>