

Alexander the great's policy of fusion

People



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From his conception, Alexander was destined for greatness. Born to Olympias, Princess of Epirus and Phillip II, King of Macedon, passion and purpose were the driving forces of his young life. As a young boy, in Philips absence, he entertained Persian envoys and much to the surprise of the guests instead of asking about the Persian hanging gardens, he asked about the state of the Persian army and the roads. Clearly, at his tender age, his thoughts were already set on conquering.

Years later, after the death of Philip in 336 BC, Alexander adopted Philips plans to conquer Persia and travelled across the Hellespont in order to rightfully earn his glory and write his name into the history books. In the years that followed, Alexander did just that, proving his tactical brilliance in battle and as a result, conquering the largest empire of the age. With Persians, Macedonians and Greeks under his rule, Alexander devised a policy that would ensure the smooth running of his empire.

It has been dubbed by scholars as his ' Policy of Fusion'.

What was Fusion?!

The dictionary defines fusion as: the process or result of joining two or more things together to form a single entity. In the case of Alexander, it refers to his ' fusing' of the Persians with the Macedonian and Greeks to create a super empire, combing the best of Persian and Macedonian Kingship. Alexander did not wish to destroy Persia and replace it with Macedonian rule, instead he took several actions to actively encourage the combination of the two cultures. His concept was simple: treat the natives as equal, not inferior, tolerate the native customs and religion and adopt some of the

native customs. According to Curtius Rufus, Alexander said: " Everything is taking on the same hue: it is no disgrace for the Persians to copy Macedonian customs nor for the Macedonians to imitate the Persians. Those who are to live under the same king should enjoy the same rights".

The nature of Kingship

Macedonian

The Macedonian nature of Kingship is that the King was ' prima inter pares'- first amongst equals. This meant that the King would not bask in splendour, he would wear the same clothes as his men and be approachable to them. (Alexander knew most of his men by name). The epitome of leading from the front, the King would play a major role in battles, earning respect from his men as they shared in the glory of victory.

Persian!

In stark contrast the Persian King had an exalted status as all subjects were required to perform proskynesis before him. He was considered to be god's representative on earth. He lived a life of luxury and was attended by ushers, bodyguards and eunuchs. Access to the court was controlled by the Vizier. His dress was extravagant and set him apart from his subjects. He wore a purple tunic, gold cloak and belt and a jewelled scabbard.

The vastly different styles of Kingship highlighted the need for a policy of Fusion.

Similarities and Differences

Philip:

Philip's policies for dealing with conquered people differed vastly to Alexander's Policy of Fusion. For after the Battle of Chaeronea the Greek States were forced to become a member of the League of Corinth of which Philip was hegemon. From the Greek States money, men and allegiance was needed to ensure peace. Although the Greek states had 'autonomy' it was within the Macedonian parameters. A bit of an oxymoron really; incarcerated freedom. Strict Macedonian Garrisons and a pro- Macedonian Government were in play to maintain order and provide a tool if there was disorder. Conversely, Persians and Macedonians were encouraged by Alexander to co-exist and live together, enjoying the same rights and governed by the same rules under the same King. Whether the purpose of Alexander's policies was 'homonoia', or as a practical means to rule or was an attempt to Hellenize Asia- Persians benefitted from his rule. In the case of Philip, the Greeks did not receive the same treatment. Lycurgus once famously said: "The Battle of Chaeronea marked an epoch for all ages. With the dead was buried the freedom of Greece."

The purpose of Philip's policies was entirely for the benefit of Macedonia. Hamilton states that: "Philip's policy was primarily aimed at the advancement of Macedon and for this he found Greeks useful, perhaps essential. Alexander and his contemporaries received a good Greek education and in them Greek culture was more securely rooted. But admiration for Greek culture need not imply a desire to secure the welfare of Greece..."

Was Fusion even Alexander's idea- Persian policies!

Although it is hard to define when exactly the idea first 'popped' into Alexander's head, it certainly would have manifested itself during the Macedonians' stay in Babylon. Because it was from here that he had the ability to fuse the two cultures, as after Gaugamela- the Persian Empire was effectively his. At the time Alexander's policy was considered revolutionary, the complete opposite of the Macedonian dealing with conquered people. However, as Fox suggests without the "Persian background Alexander's own plans for government have been made to seem unnecessarily radical." Persians in fact, had been fusing ideas and cultures for generations as "two hundred years before Alexander, they had overthrown the empire of the Medes and annexed the ancient civilisation of Babylon, but in each case they had availed themselves of their subjects' experience." Alexander's policy and the policy of the Persian King Cyrus (both earned the title 'Great') were very similar.

In around 550 BC Cyrus expanded his annexed Median and Persian lands to include the Fertile Crescent. After conquering "He adopted a policy of toleration toward the people he conquered. For example, he allowed them to speak their own languages, practice their own religions, and follow their own ways of life. He also declared the first Charter of Human Rights. Etched on a clay cylinder, this charter set forth Cyrus' goals and policies. His respect for the people made Cyrus popular and made it easier for him to create a peaceful and stable empire."

Reasons for Similarities or Differences!

Philip had no reason to fuse the Greek and Macedonian cultures as, aside from Macedonia being governed by an absolute monarchy and the Greek

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States being governed by democracy the two cultures were fundamentally the same. This was because "Macedonia was Hellenized. Alexander on the other hand, was dealing with two tangibly different cultures and needed fusion to effectively rule over both.

There were also differences too between King Cyrus, and Alexander's policies. King Cyrus's policy worked. As the most important man of the nation, if Cyrus tolerated the Medes and the peoples from the Fertile Crescent, the rest of his subjects would have too. Unlike the Greeks and Macedonians, they did not believe themselves to be superior to the people they conquered. The nature of Persian Kingship ensured the stability of the empire for the next 200 years. Alexander would have known of Cyrus's policy and could potentially have tried to mimic it, seeing as it was so effective. Without Persian Background Alexander's own plans for government have been made to seem unnecessarily radical (Fox).

Purpose

The purpose of Alexander's Policy of Fusion has been widely debated. There are several arguments.

On one hand, we have William Tarn's utopian view of homonoia- Alexander's desire for universalism, to create a 'brotherhood of man'. On the other, we have the juxtaposed AB Bosworth's view that Alexander did not really attempt to 'fuse' the two cultures together, instead he was really playing one off against the other. As discussed in Nicholas Ed Foster's thesis, both Classical Historians have flaws in their arguments. Tarn is perceived to practically worship Alexander and his achievements, focussing on creating

the big picture of the great king, while overlooking massacres that occurred during the campaign. Bosworth does the opposite, as he focuses on the massacres and ignores Alexander's intentions. There are other ideas surrounding the purpose of fusion, one is that it was used because it provided the practical means to rule the two peoples. Other's argue that fusion was an attempt to spread Greek culture.

Brotherhood of Man

At the time, Alexander's ideas were considered revolutionary. His actions completely went against the ideas of Aristotle, where captured people were barbarians, treated worse than animals. Alexander changed this completely. When he declared that all men were alike sons of one Father and when, at Opis he prayed that Macedonian and Persians might partners in the commonwealth and that the peoples of his world might live in harmony and unity of heart and mind (Tarn). According to Curtius Rufus Alexander justified his entire conquest by saying that he had hoped to annex his empire to many famous peoples. He also justified his actions around marriage by saying that his intention " was to erase all distinction between conquered and conquerer".

Practical Means to Rule

Alexander's Policy of Fusion is considered by some to have stemmed from necessity. Put simply, fusion was a practical way to bring Hellenic and Eastern cultures under one rule this was the purpose of it. Due to the vast expanse of the empire, the area simply became too large to be controlled solely by the Macedonian Army. Furthermore, " By appointing Persian

satraps, or in many cases simply leaving them in their previous positions of power, Alexander was able to prevent the rise of dissent from the populace.”

(Nicholas Ed Foster, Thesis LSU)

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Policy in Action:

Alexanders Policy wasn't a mere Policy of words, it was a Policy shown in action. Alexander showed his policy in various ways, both big and small.

After entering Babylon, Alexander was quick to initiate his policy of fusion through action. His first action, after entering the great city, was to restore the temples that were destroyed by Xerxes, including the great Temple of Bel, where he made a sacrifice. Much to the surprise of the Macedonians, respect was shown to Persian nobility, especially to Kings of the past. Bessus, for the murder of Darius, was paid special attention. After having his face customarily mutilated and torturing him, Alexander “ had him torn limb from limb. He had the tops of two straight trees bent down so that they met, and part of Bessus' body was tied to each. Then when each tree was let go and sprang back to its upright position, the part of the body that was attached to it was torn off by the recoil. (Plutarch)

Persians were given positions of power and included in Alexanders army. Previously considered ' barbarians' were made Satraps of provinces with the most significant being Mazeaeus re-established as satrap of Babylon and Porus, being given back his rule after his defeat at Hydaspes. Alexanders elite Companion Cavalry which previously was comprised of men from the

ranks of Macedonian nobility, who had proven their worth in the field of battle now included Persian Lords.

Alexander adopted the Persian dress, wearing the diadem along with a pure white robe and sash, a compromise between Persian and Median costume. " He may have done this from a desire to adapt himself to local habits, because he understood that the sharing of race and of customs is a great step towards softening men's hearts." (Plutarch)

Like his father Philip, Alexander also used marriages for political reasons. Through his own marriages to Roxanne (the captive daughter of Oxyartes, a Bactrian noble), to Barsine, the eldest daughter of Darius and (according to Aristobulus) to Parysatus daughter of Artaxerxes Ochus, Alexander had linked himself with both branches of the Achaemenid Persian House. Alexander also encouraged marriages between his men and Persian women. This was demonstrated at the mass marriages at Susa which according to Hamilton: " brought to a climax his policy of fusing Macedonians and Persians into a single race." It was at Susa that 90 of Alexanders men married noble Persian women at a mass celebration. The brides received considerable dowries.

One of the most dubious enforced actions introduced by Alexander was the Persian court practice, proskynesis. Researcher Herodotus of Halicarnassus observed the practice: " When the Persians meet one another in the roads, you can see whether those who meet are of equal rank. For instead of greeting by words, they kiss each other on the mouth; but if one of them is inferior to the other, they kiss one another on the cheeks, and if one is of much less noble rank than the other, he falls down before him and worships

him." As part of his Policy of Fusion, Alexander believed that the action would bring Persians and Macedonians together, however instead of this, it only managed to highlight the differences between races. While Persians already performed proskynesis to their King, for Macedonians, the action was reserved only for gods.

Along with his other actions, Alexander ensured sustainability for the future and had 30, 000 Iranian boys trained for the military, they were taught Greek, wore Macedonian attire and used Macedonian weapons. They were called ' The Successors'. According to Arrian, Alexander called them his Epigoni- his inheritors. The title for the boys was apt as they would inherit the empire, and before Alexander's death, they were obliged to him only.

Persian Reaction:

Implications and Impacts

The Persian people viewed Alexander as a liberator, his actions repeatedly encouraged them to trust him. Unlike the Macedonians, the Persians did not have to do anything to be a part of Alexander's policy, instead, Alexander's actions encouraged the Macedonians to adopt Persian customs. Through sacrificing to the Temple of Bel, ensuring a proper funeral for King Darius and hunting down Bessus for Darius's murder, Alexander showed great respect for the Persian people and their customs.

Before Persepolis Alexander's men followed their leader blindly. They would die for him. They would die for the noble cause of punishing the Persians. As Alexander started to implement his Policy of Fusion discontent began to brew amongst the Macedonian Camp. Having to live in harmony with the '

barbarians' who they came to Asia to conquer was something they were not prepared for. This was something they struggled with as the Macedonians and Greeks believed that they were the superior race. Furthermore, many Macedonians felt that Alexander was no longer loyal to them and thus became resentful. The strain in the relationship is shown through several events some of which are explicit reactions to fusion, while others are implicit.

Division between Old Guard and New Guard

The division of the Old and New Guard is shown through the Old Guard's more extreme reactions to Alexander's Policy of Fusion early on in the piece. Many of the Old Guard had fought under Philip and were used to his ways. This, combined with their distaste for the Fusion Policy and that the Old Guard felt that their actions at Battles past, had been forgotten created a divide between the young and old.

Philotas and Parmenio

In late 330 BC, in the early stages of the implementation of Fusion, a plot was hatched to kill the King. Philotas was informed to consult the King immediately, but failed to twice. Because of this he was connected to the plot and killed. Shot down by the Macedonian javelins together with his fellow conspirators (Arrian). There are several other factors that could have contributed to his death. Philotas was known to condemn the Policy. His death was a combination of Alexander's growing insecurity concerning plots and the Macedonian resentment of Fusion.

These factors blinded Alexander into believing Philotas's guilt. There is no hard evidence to suggest Philotas's guilt. The only proof of it appears to be his failure to organise an audience for Cebalinus or to inform Alexander of what he had been told (Hamilton). As a result of the danger of a Parmenio filled with vengeance at the death of his son, Parmenio was murdered too. These incidents prove how adamant Alexander was to continue with his policy, using brutality for the greater good of ensuring harmony between two peoples.

Cleitus

Cleitus the Black was the Commander of the Royal Squadron of Companion Cavalry and a friend of Philip. In Maracanda, 328 BC, at a drinking party Cleitus and some of the older members became offended by an insulting chant. The division between the old and young is highlighted as the "older members shouted their disapproval of both the composer and the singer, but Alexander and those next to him listened with evident enjoyment and told the singer to continue Whereupon Cleitus who, besides being naturally surly and having a savage temper, was by now drunk, became extremely angry" (Plutarch). In his speech, Cleitus vented all his feelings over the last few years, particularly around fusion.

"It was not right for Macedonians who were much superior to those who mocked them, even if they had met with misfortune, to be insulted before natives and enemies."

" The dead I call fortunate; they don't live to see the Macedonians flogged by the the rods of Medians and begging Persians for permission to have an audience with their king." (Plutarch)

... " Go, and live with foreigners, slaves who will bow down before your Persian girdle and your white tunic." (Plutarch)

As a result of Cleitus's comments, Alexander (who was also drunk) snatched a spear from one of his bodyguards and ran it through Cleitus.

Proskynesis

Historically, Persians had performed proskynesis when recognising someone of higher rank than them, as they had done to Darius, they prostrated themselves before Alexander. The action was not one of worship, merely recognising someone of higher rank. For the Macedonians however, the action was something only the slavish barbarians did. For them, the action was strictly reserved for gods. Despite Alexanders attempts to prove his divinity, he was human. What added salt to the wound was that before the campaigns he had adopted the historical Macedonian form of Kingship- prima inter pares- first amongst equals. Despite knowing this, Alexander had counted in the action to enhance his fusion policy. In 327 BCE Alexander attempted to introduce proskynesis at a drinking party.

According to Plutarch Alexander passed the cup to one of his friends, who took it, rose from his couch, turned to face the hearth, drank, and performed proskynesis before kissing Alexander and resuming his place. All the guests followed suit except for the philosopher Callisthenes, who refused to prostrate himself. One opposed to the action seems insignificant. Indeed, he

was the only person to voice openly his disapproval of what all the best and oldest of the Macedonians resented in their hearts. By preventing the introduction of this practise he saved the Greeks from great disgrace and Alexander from a greater (Plutarch).

Mutiny at Opis

One of the most illuminating examples of the Macedonian reaction to Fusion was the Mutiny at Opis- as it highlights the extent of the discontent between Alexander and his troops. With a previous mutiny, conspiracies and the rejection of proskynesis already under their belt, the arrival of the 'Successors' in Susa was the tip of the iceberg for the Macedonians. The 30,000 Iranian boys arrived in Susa wearing Macedonian clothing and carrying Macedonian equipment, performing a dazzling display of discipline and deftness "before the Macedonian Army. At Opis, Alexander announced that he was releasing from the Army those who, because of old age or disablement, were no longer fit for service and was sending them home (Arrian). This greatly vexed the Macedonian Army as they assumed that Alexander intended to replace them with the young 'war dancers' as they resentfully termed them (Hamilton).

This assumption, combined with their distaste in Alexander's dress throughout the campaign, his appointment (or re-appointment) of foreign Satrap leaders and inclusion of Persian in the Army (including into the prestigious Companion Cavalry) led to their response. Arrian states that: "they did not stand passively in respectful silence, but shouted to him to dismiss every man of them and carry on with his 'father', mocking Ammon by this remark." A mutiny against Alexander's actions as a result of his Fusion

policy is significant because it shows just how widespread the discontent was, this discontent was not something felt only by the Old Guard.

Patterns of Reaction

Fusion- Can we trust it?!

Fusion ruffled the feathers of the Macedonians. It created tension which led to recurring negative reaction. Although most Macedonians were opposed to the policy from the outset, the Old Guard seemed more offended by it and people knew where they stood. The execution of Philotas and Parmenio and the murder of Cleitus show just how important the policy was to Alexander and how seriously he took opposition to it. As time went on war weariness and Alexander's change in status from 'first amongst equals' to Son of Ammon started to take a toll on the rest of the troops, the discontent in the Macedonian Army regarding fusion became more widespread, ultimately resulting in Mutiny.

As none of the primary sources exist today, I have used all secondary sources in my report. This begs the question- can the sources be trusted? The secondary sources each used different primary sources from both the Good Tradition and the Vulgate. I used Arrian, Plutarch and Curtius Rufus. Arrian used mainly Ptolemy and Aristobolus but he also used Nearchus and Callisthenes. Plutarch used all sources, while Curtius Rufus used an unknown source, embellished with Cleitarchus who used sensational popular beliefs, rather than facts. This ultimately made Curtius Rufus less reliable than Arrian and Plutarch. However, it is highly improbable that the secondary sources used the primary sources word for word, rather they used the primary

sources to back up their own conclusions about Alexander. There is also the question of what the primary sources had to gain from their writing. Although the good tradition are considered to be more reliable than the vulgate, they were all close to Alexander and potentially built up his achievements for their own personal gain.

Conclusion:

In conclusion, Alexander's Policy of Fusion was implemented in order for Alexander to effectively govern both Persians and Macedonians. It sparked many negative reactions from the Macedonians who viewed themselves as superior. Initially the more extreme reactions were shown by the Old Guard, but with time, the whole of the army came to oppose the policy, as shown through the Mutiny at Opis. Despite the opposition, Alexander chose to continue to pursue his policy with great perseverance.

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