How Alexander Spread Greek Ideas

The first part of Alexander’s plan to unite different cultures under one government involved Greek culture which he deeply admired. He wanted to spread Greek ideas to the far corners of his empire hoping Greek culture would blend with the cultures of conquered people.

One way Alexander tried to accomplish his goal was by building Greek-style cities. He established many cities in different parts of the empire. Like Greek cities, they had marketplaces, temples, and theaters. Settlers from Greece flocked to Alexander’s cities. They brought with them Greek laws, art, and literature. Alexander wanted local soldiers and government officials to speak only Greek.

The most famous of the new cities was called Alexandria. It was located in Egypt near the sea.

Alexandria was designed with wide major streets crossed by narrower streets. It had many Greek features like a marketplace, a university, a gymnasium, and a theater. The city also boasted law courts and a library. There was even a temple dedicated to Poseidon, the Greek god of the sea.

In time, Alexandria became one of the ancient world’s most important centers of trade and learning. Its library contained more than half a million books. It was one of the largest libraries in the world.

How Alexander Used Religion

The second part of Alexander’s plan to unite different cultures under one government involved religion. Alexander used religion in two ways to inspire loyalty among his followers and the people he conquered.

First, he honored the Egyptian and Persian gods. He treated them as equal to Greek gods. He visited oracle sites, made sacrifices, and had temples built in their honor. On one such occasion, he visited the oracle site of the Egyptian god Ammon. When he arrived, a priest welcomed him as “God’s son.” The priest’s words helped Alexander gain the loyalty of the Egyptians.

Second, Alexander encouraged the idea that he himself was a god. After his visit to the Egyptian oracle, he began wearing a crown of two rams’ horns. This crown was the sacred headdress of Ammon. Seeking Alexander wearing the crown encouraged the Egyptians to accept him as a god.

Alexander also made sure to spread the story of the priest’s greeting throughout the empire. Later, he required all Greeks to accept him as the son of Zeus.

Was Alexander sincere in his religious beliefs? It is hard to say for sure.
How Alexander took the ways of the Conquered

The third part of Alexander’s plan to unite different cultures under one government was to show respect for the cultural practices of the people he conquered. He did this by adopting some of these practices.

For example, in Persia he adopted the Persian system of government. He allowed Persian governors to run the day-to-day business of their lands but was careful to appoint Macedonians to head the army. He also made sure his own people controlled the taxes that were collected.

Alexander also borrowed Persian customs. He began wearing decorative Persian-style clothes and welcoming official visitors as a Persian king would, in a luxurious tent. The tent was supported by 30-foot columns that were covered in gold, silver, and precious stones.

Alexander demanded that his visitors greet him in the Persian style. A visitor had to kneel in front of the throne and bend over until his head touched the ground. Alexander then raised his visitor to his feet, kissed him, and called him “Kinsman” (family).

Finally, Alexander encouraged marriage between Macedonians and Persians. He himself married the eldest daughter of Darius, the Persian king.

Historians aren’t sure why Alexander acted this way. Some think he was trying to be a more accepting ruler, others think that he truly considered the people he conquered to be Greek equals.