

2 From Argeads to Huns (c. 600 BC–c. AD 600)

The territory of geographic Macedonia has had inhabitants since the early Neolithic era (c. 6000 BC). The scanty archaeological evidence indicates two powerful influences shaping its development: the Aegean-Anatolian and the central European and internal Balkan. By the late Neolithic (c. 4000–c. 2800 BC), central and western Macedonia had sizeable populations, and the Early Iron Age (c. 1050–c. 650 BC) “probably saw the establishment of the basic ethnic pool from which the historical Macedonians and their neighbors were derived.”¹ The first inhabitants about whom information exists were Illyrian and Thracian tribes.

Historians still debate the origin of the Macedonians. Most recent archaeological, linguistic, toponomic, and written evidence indicates gradual formation of the Macedonian tribes and a distinct Macedonian identity through the intermingling, amalgamation, and assimilation of various ethnic elements. The Macedonians invaded the autochthonous peoples of the lower Danube—Illyrians, Thracians, and later Greek ethnic elements. Thracians probably dominated the ethno-genesis of Macedonian identity.²

The Macedonians developed into a distinct ethnic people with a language or dialects, about which we know very little, and customs of their own. They were different from the Illyrians to the north and northwest, the Thracians to the east and northeast, and the culturally more ad-

vanced Greeks to the south, in the city-states. By the fourth century BC, official communication took place in Greek; court and elite gradually became Hellenistic by embracing aspects of Greek culture. However, the Macedonians remained themselves: “they were generally perceived in their own time *by Greeks and themselves not to be Greeks.*”³

Insofar as the Macedonians embraced and used philhellenism, they did so to enhance their own interests.⁴ Indeed, “many [members of the] Macedonian elite may have talked like Greeks, dressed like Greeks, but they lived and acted like Macedonians, a people whose political and social system was alien to what most Greeks believed, wrote about, and practiced.”⁵

In any event, as E. Borza has pointed out, “the bloodlines of ancient people are notoriously difficult to trace. Besides, determining the exact ethnic make-up of the ancient Macedonians is not historically significant. However, . . . they made their mark [on world history] not as a tribe of Greeks or any other Balkan peoples, but as Macedonians.”⁶

The Early Kingdom (c. 600–359 BC)

Historians know little about the early history of the first Macedonian state. Many assume that it formed gradually from the early seventh century BC on. Its establishment started about 700 BC when Macedonian tribes under King Perdiccas I (founder of the Argead dynasty) began their migration from western and northwestern ‘Upper’ Macedonia to the central area of the plain of ‘Lower’ Macedonia.

The core of this Macedonian state was and remained the region between the rivers Ludias and Axios (Vardar), which included its first and later capitals—Aegae, Edessa (Voden), and Pella. From there, the kingdom expanded in all directions. In the process, it subjugated the Macedonian mountain tribes to the west and north and conquered, assimilated, or expelled the Thracian, Greek, and other indigenous peoples to the north and east. Under Philip II (359–336 BC), it reached its maximal extent, covering virtually all of geographical Macedonia—almost all of what today is Aegean (Greek) Macedonia and most of Vardar Macedonia (now the republic of Macedonia) and Pirin (Bulgarian) Macedonia.⁷

Evidence about Perdiccas’s successors until about 500 BC is extremely scarce. State formation and expansion apparently led these

rulers to war constantly with neighboring tribes. The Illyrians seem to have been their most determined opponents, especially during the reigns of Argaeus (c. 654–645 BC) and Philip I (644–640 BC). In the second half of the sixth century BC, Macedonia fell under Persian rule, and the dynasty's sixth ruler became and remained a Persian vassal.

Under his son and successor, Alexander I (c. 498–454 BC), Macedonia became much more active in the political life of the eastern Mediterranean. His byname, the “philhellene,” shows his appreciation of the culture of the Greek city-states, and he began the Hellenization of Macedonian court and elite.

Until the battle of Plataea (479 BC), when Macedonia regained independence from Persia, Alexander I played up to both sides in the Persian Wars to further his dynasty and state. He took advantage of the fighting to subdue the independently minded princes of Upper Macedonia. Moreover, he captured the Greek colony of Lydia and pushed his eastern frontiers to the lower Strymon (Struma) River, an area with rich mineral—particularly silver—deposits. Athens's long-standing ambition to control the entire Thracian coastal area inevitably clashed with Macedonia's pursuit of an exit to the sea.⁸

In the second half of the fifth century BC, Macedonia's political and economic development seemed vulnerable to Athens's growing power as head of the Delian confederation and the leading Greek power and to its Thracian allies. However, Alexander I's son and successor, the politically astute and skillful Perdiccas II (454–413 BC), ably used to Macedonia's advantage the intensified antagonism and struggle for hegemony among the Greek city-states, especially between the two chief rivals, Athens and Sparta. He allied himself early on with Athens; next with the old Greek and Thracian cities along the Aegean coast in the north against Athens; then with Brasidas, the famous Spartan leader; and still later with Athens again. In short, he became master at playing off the Greek rivals against each other to safeguard his kingdom's power and economic influence.

The Peloponnesian Wars (431–404 BC), which exhausted the Greek city-states, especially Athens, without resolving any of their problems, created a more stable environment for further Macedonian consolidation. Archelaus I (c. 418 or 413–399 BC), son and successor to Perdiccas II, implemented reforms to enhance the court's power and the state's unity. He transferred the capital to Pella, almost on the sea,

near the estuary of the Axios (Vardar) River and with far greater political and economic growth. Greek architects designed the court, to which the ruler invited leading Greek artists and writers; it became a center for the spread of Greek cultural influence. Archelaus built roads and fortresses, reformed the army, and modernized its equipment. In foreign policy he maintained friendly relations with Athens and established a solid basis for Macedonian influence in Thessaly, the gateway to the Greek world.

However, his reign ended in 399 BC and gave way to almost four decades of instability, internal anarchy, and foreign interventions. Macedonia experienced three rulers in the 390s and six more before Philip II became king in 359 BC. During this time, Macedonia faced threats from the Illyrians in the north and the Chalcidic League in the east. Amyntas III (c. 390–370 BC), the era's only ruler of any stature, allied himself with the Spartans and with their aid defeated and dissolved the League. His son, Alexander III (c. 369–368 BC), however, oversaw defeat of the Macedonians and their expulsion from Thessaly by the forces of its Chalcidic League ally, Thebes. The period of weakness ended with the death of his brother Perdiccas III (365–359 BC) fighting the Illyrians.

Expansion and Empire (359–323 BC)

Philip II (359–336 BC), their younger brother, launched the kingdom's most glorious era. He transformed the country from a weak and fragmented land to Balkan dominance.⁹ He weakened the clan aristocracy and centralized administration. His financial reforms, including introduction of a gold coin, spurred growth of trade and commerce and made Macedonia a political and economic factor in the eastern Mediterranean. He reorganized the army; modernized its training, tactics, and weaponry; and harnessed it for territorial expansion.

In the late 350s BC, he fought the Paionians and the Illyrians, expanded to Lake Lychnida (Ohrid) in the northwest, and secured access to the sea by capturing trading centers on the Macedonian and Thracian littoral. Although he thereby threatened the interests of Greek city-states, particularly Athens, the latter could not retaliate. As before the ruinous Peloponnesian Wars, deep rivalries divided the Greek city-states, with alliances frequently changing and wars too common.

The long-lasting crisis in the Greek world and the existence of its pro-Macedonian factions helped Philip establish hegemony there. Between 356 and 338 BC, he conquered Thessaly, Chalcidice, and then Thrace. At the decisive battle at Chaeronea in 338 BC, he crushed the combined Greek forces, under Athens and Thebes, and subjugated all of the peninsula. In the Congress of Corinth, which Philip soon summoned, the city-states recognized the hegemony of Macedonia.¹⁰

Philip planned to turn next to the east and fight the common enemy, the Persian empire. His untimely assassination in 336 BC thrust that task onto his able 20-year-old son and successor, Alexander IV, the Great (336–323 BC). Alexander led his armies on an extraordinary march eastward. In three major battles between 334 and 331 BC, he destroyed the might of the Persians. By 331 BC, after his victory at Gaugamela, he was master of the Near and Middle East. He had fulfilled his father's plans and ambitions.

Alexander's motivations and intentions after this victory (and the murder of Darius III the following year) are difficult to determine, and historians still debate them. Alexander proclaimed himself successor of the Persian "King of Kings" and marched his wary and discontented troops further and further east through Central Asia. By the time his rebellious troops balked at going any further, he had conquered a vast empire stretching from the western Balkans east to India and from the Danube and the Black Sea south to Egypt, Libya, and Cyrenaica. His death of fever at Babylon in 323 BC, on his painful return journey, ended his triumphal march and launched the collapse of his virtually ungovernable empire.¹¹

Division and Decline (323–168 BC)

Alexander's successors long struggled for the spoils, from 323 until 281–277 BC. By then, Macedonian rulers governed three Hellenistic states in Alexander's former empire: the Seleucids in the former Persian empire in Asia, the Ptolemies in Egypt, and the Antigonids in Macedonia, including mainland Greece. This cultural fusion of Greek, Egyptian, and Persian elements dominated the eastern Mediterranean and embodied the Hellenistic Age, lasting until the Roman conquest in 168 BC.

Alexander's campaigns and the posthumous struggles greatly weakened Macedonia, which lacked political authority and stability, had ex-

hausted its human resources, and lost its economic strength. In the third century BC, the Antigonids oversaw recovery and consolidation. Antigonus II Gonatas (277–239 BC) restored the monarchy's authority. His successors Demetrius II (239–229 BC) and Antigonus III Doson (229–221 BC) fought rebellious Greek city-states and the Achaean and Aetolian Leagues and reimposed uneasy control. When Philip V (221–179 BC) became king, Macedonia again dominated the Balkans and was the strongest factor in the eastern Mediterranean.¹²

By then, however, Macedonia's real competitor for Balkan hegemony was no longer its weak and divided neighbors or the Greek city-states, but powerful Rome. The Romans, already in control of the western Mediterranean, wanted to expand eastward and openly courted Macedonia's neighbors and opponents.

The unavoidable struggle between these two great powers terminated in the so-called Macedonian Wars, which took place over almost half a century. In the first conflict (215–205 BC), Philip V, who sought access to the Adriatic, attacked the Roman client state in Illyria and fought a coalition of Greek and neighboring states. Philip secured relatively favorable peace terms, but the war changed little: Rome was not a direct participant in the war but in the long run benefited the most. Philip's inability to assist his ally Hannibal completely isolated the Carthaginian, with whom Rome was waging a mortal struggle.

In the second Macedonian War (200–197 BC), the Romans invaded the Balkans to support the anti-Macedonian coalition there. Philip's army did well until a disastrous defeat at Cynoscephalae in Thessaly in 197 BC. The humiliating peace treaty forced Macedonia to recognize the independence of the Greek city-states. Macedonia's hegemony over the Balkans and its dominance in the eastern Mediterranean were over.

During the third Macedonian War (168 BC), Persius (179–168 BC), Philip V's successor and the last Macedonian ruler, sought to create an effective coalition before the final confrontation with the Romans. Despite Balkan weariness with Rome's overwhelming influence and presence, he failed to bring these states together, winning over only the kings of the Illyrians and Odrisians. In the war's only and decisive encounter, the powerful Roman army, under Consul Lucius Aemilius Paulus, crushed the Macedonians. The battle, near Pydna on 22 June 168 BC, ended Macedonian independence and launched Roman rule, which was to last under Rome and its successor, Byzantium, until the Slavic incursions of the sixth century AD.¹³

Roman and Byzantine Rule, Goths, and Huns

(168 BC–c. 600 AD)

Applying the rule *divide et impera*, Rome split Macedonia into four weak, autonomous republics, or Meridiams. It denied them the right to links of any kind and rendered them totally dependent on Rome, which exploited them. Oppression provoked a massive mid-century revolt under Andriscus, a son of Persius's. Disgruntled Thracian tribes joined the Andriscus Rebellion. After its suppression in 148 BC, Rome deprived Macedonia even of its nominal autonomy and transformed it into a Roman province; a Roman administrator governed it, with the four sections as administrative units. As Rome's first province in the Balkans, it became a center for the empire to project its strategic interests in the eastern Mediterranean.

During the many centuries of Roman rule, the geographic-ethnic conception of Macedonia changed frequently as administrative units shifted. The province originally included parts of Illyria, Thessaly, and Epirus. Late in the republic (first century BC), it extended to the Rhodope Mountains in the east, stretched almost to the Danube in the north, and included Illyria in the west. After Augustus created two types of provinces (senatorial and imperial) in 27 BC, Macedonia became a much smaller, senatorial province. The reform of Emperor Diocletian (AD 285–305) saw incorporation of Macedonia into the diocese of Moesia; and under Constantine (AD 306–337) it became part of the prefecture of Illyria. By the late fourth century AD, sources refer to two provinces: Macedonia Prima and Macedonia Salutaris. Late in the fifth century AD, Macedonia Prima had Salonika as its capital, and Macedonia Seconda, Stobi. After the division of the Roman Empire in 395 AD, Macedonia, like most of the Balkans, became part of the Eastern, or Byzantine empire.¹⁴

The frequent changes in the geographic and administrative definition of Macedonia between 168 BC and the sixth century AD went hand in hand with shifting ethnic structure. Under Alexander the Great, and as a result of his eastern campaigns, the Macedonian element in the population declined. After his death, the Antigonids' migration and resettlement policies strengthened the Greek segment.

The upper strata of Macedonians, Thracians, and Illyrians were culturally Hellenizing. Conquest led many Roman officials and colonists

to settle in Macedonia, and Romanization began. In the empire's last centuries, Macedonia experienced the effects of the Barbarian migrations and invasions. In the third–fifth centuries AD, Goths invaded and devastated Macedonia; in the fourth and fifth, the highly mobile Huns did the same.

In the sixth century, Slavic tribes began to invade and settle in large and growing numbers. Unlike the Goths and Huns, however, they planned to stay. They gradually assimilated the older inhabitants and altered permanently the ethnic structure of Macedonia. Available sources and evidence indicate that until the early twentieth century these Macedonian Slavs comprised the largest ethno-linguistic group in geographical Macedonia.¹⁵