

Persian and Greek Invasions of India

Persian invasion is traced back to 550 BCE when Cyrus invaded the North-Western front of India. Greek Invasion is traced back to 327 BC when Alexander invaded North-West India. Read about both the Persian and Greek Invasions in India for the [IAS Exam](#) (Prelims - Ancient India; Mains - GS I and Optional.)

Persian Invasion of India

A few important points about the Persian Invasion of India:

- Cyrus, the founder of the Achaemenid Empire in ancient Iran invaded the North-Western front of India in 550 BCE.
- At that time, there were many small provinces like Gandhara, Kamboja, and Madra who were constantly fighting one another.
- At that time, Bimbisara of the Haryanka dynasty was ruling over Magadha.
- Cyrus succeeded in bringing under Persian control all the Indian tribes west of the Indus like Gandhara.
- Punjab and Sindh were annexed by Darius I, Cyrus's grandson.
- Son of Darius, Xerxes, could not move ahead with the further conquest of India because of war with the Greeks. He had employed Indian cavalry and infantry.

What were the effects of the Persian Invasion?

The effects of the Persian Invasion in India:

- The Indo-Iranian contact lasted for about 200 years. It gave an impetus to the Indo-Iranian trade and commerce.
- Iranian coins are also found in the northwestern frontier which points to the existence of trade with Iran.
- The Kharoshti script was brought to northwest India by the Persians.
- Some inscriptions of Ashoka were written in the Kharoshti script in these parts.
- Kharoshti script is derived from the Aramaic script and is written from right to left.
- Probably, the rock inscriptions used by Ashoka in the 3rd century BCE were inspired by the Persian king Darius. The monuments of Ashoka's time, especially the bell-shaped capitals and the preamble of Ashoka's edicts, have a lot of Iranian influence.

Read more about the ancient [Magadha Empire](#) in the linked article.

Greek Invasion of India and its Impact - Alexander's Invasion (327 BCE)



- Alexander (356 BCE – 323 BCE) was the son of Philip of Macedonia.
- He became king in 336 BCE.
- At that time, i.e., in the fourth century BCE, the Greeks and the Iranians were fighting for the supremacy of the world.
- Alexander had conquered Asia Minor along with Iran and Iraq. He then marched into northwest India from Iran.
- He had annexed the whole of Persia (Babylon) by defeating Persian King Darius III in the Battle of Arbela (330 BC).
- Alexander was attracted to India's wealth. Apart from that, he was also believed to have a strong passion for geographical inquiry and natural history.
- In northwest India, just before Alexander's invasion, there were many small rulers like Ambhi of Taxila and Porus of the region of Jhelum (Hydaspes).
- Ambhi accepted Alexander's sovereignty but Porus put up a valiant but unsuccessful fight.
- Alexander was so impressed with Porus's fight that he granted him his territory back. Porus might have accepted lordship. The battle between him and Porus is called the Battle of Hydaspes.
- After that, Alexander's army crossed the river Chenab and annexed the tribes between Ravi and Chenab.

- But his army refused to cross the river Beas and revolted. They were exhausted after years of battles, were homesick and diseased.
- Alexander was forced to retreat in 326 BCE. On his way back, he died at Babylon in 323 BCE aged 32.
- His dream of an eastern empire remained unfulfilled. To mark the farthest point of his advance, he erected twelve huge stone altars on the northern banks of Beas. He remained in India for 19 months.
- After his death, the Greek Empire split in 321 BCE.
- In northwest India, Alexander left four of his generals in charge of four regions, one of them being Seleucus I Nicator, who would later trade his territories in the Indus Valley with Chandragupta Maurya.
- Eudamas was the last General of Alexander in India.

Effects of Alexander's Invasion

- Alexander's invasion augmented political unification in northern India under the Mauryas. The destruction of the small states in north-west India by Alexander aided the Mauryan empire's easy expansion and also encouraged the Mauryas to capture the northwestern frontier of India.
 - The most important result of this invasion was the establishment of direct contact between India and Greece in different fields. Alexander's invasion opened up four distinct routes - three by land and one by sea and these routes paved the way for Greek merchants and craftsmen to establish trade between India and Greece.
 - Alexander's historians have left clearly dated records of Alexander's campaign, which have enabled to build the Indian chronology for subsequent events on a definite basis. They have given important information about the social and economic conditions of that period. There is the mention of the sati system, the sale of girls at market places by poor parents and the fine breed of oxen in north-west India. Alexander sent 200,000 oxen to Macedonia for use in Greece. The historical records tell us about the most flourishing craft of that time - carpentry. Chariots, boats and ships were built by carpenters.
 - Post the invasion there were Indo-Greek rulers in the northwest part of India.
 - Some of the Greek settlements continued to live in north-west India, under both Chandragupta Maurya and Ashoka. The most important of them were the city of Alexandria in the Kabul region, Bonkephala on the Jhelum and Alexandria in Sindh.
 - Grecian impact on Indian art can be seen in the [Gandhara school of art](#).
-