

Discuss the relationship between Alexander the Great and Athens.

Alexander the Great is considered to be one of the most successful conquerors¹ in history because of his expansion of Macedon's empire (which was approximately 3000 miles, across two continents, by the time of his death in June 323BC), and how "he brought down the Persian empire and subdued Egypt" as well as pushing forward Greek culture and education². Alexander was viewed in many different ways, both in the land he conquered in the East and in the land he inherited from his father, Phillip II of Macedon. There were tensions between Macedonia and Athens due to the ways in which Phillip went ahead with his unifying of Greece, such as the Peace Agreement which he imposed, one that the Athenians were against due to their strong belief in the autonomy (self-government)³. Relations with the Athenians did ease somewhat under Alexander's rule, with the Athenians wanting to placate Alexander rather than provoke him.

The relationship between Athens and Macedonia was strained before Alexander came to the throne in 336, following the assassination of his father. Phillip began being considered as a true threat to the Athenian interests following the beginning of Macedonia's alliance with Olynthus (which had to resist Athenian attacks on Amphipolis, until the city was brought down by Phillip) against Athens⁴; the annexation of Amphipolis by Phillip was another reason for which the Athenians had little sympathy for Phillip and Macedonia⁵. The relationship between Macedonia and Athens deteriorated further when, in the late 340's, Phillip attacked Byzantium (modern day: Constantinople) and while doing so, seized all of the Athenian grain fleet. This was considered to be highly hostile act from the Macedonians as Athens was heavily dependent on its imported grain⁶. When Thebes also turned against Macedonia, Athens allied themselves with the Thebans, though were quick to send ambassadors for forgiveness when the Thebans were defeated at the Battle of Chaeronea (338 BC), a battle in which Alexander "proved his battle prowess by commanding the left flank of the Macedonian line and annihilating the 300-strong Sacred Band of Thebes"⁷. The relationship between Macedonia and Athens had been strained under Phillip.

The relations between Alexander and the Athenians were less strained than those previously had with Phillip, but they were still not completely placated once Phillip was assassinated and Alexander crowned. The Athenians did not take militant action when Phillip was assassinated, unlike some other Greek States such as the Thessalians in Thessaly⁸, though they did show signs that they would rebel against him. When Alexander had won over the support of the Northern and Central Greek states, following his diplomatic dealing of their resistance towards him (such as not punishing the Ambracians, after they sent apologetic embassies to him)⁹, the Athenians "ceded him honours even greater than

¹ <http://www.ancientathens.org/history/athens-and-alexander-great>

² Worthington, 2004, pg1

³ Worthington, 2004, pg50

⁴ Diod. Sic. 16. 8

⁵ Bosworth, 2001, pg15

⁶ Bosworth, 2001, pg16

⁷ Worthington, 2004, pg24

⁸ Worthington, 2004, pg50

⁹ Worthington, 2004, pg51

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those granted to Phillip”¹⁰. The relationship between Alexander and the Athenians was slightly better than that of the relationship with Phillip.

The Athenians were angered by Alexander’s Decree of the Exiles, which was announced at the Olympic Festival of 324. The Greeks, especially the Athenians because of their strong democratic society, felt that the Decree violated their autonomy; there are some scholars who say that the Decree was accompanied by a proclamation that Alexander should be worshipped as a God (Alexander believed himself to be the Son of Zeus and descended from Achilles¹¹), which would have angered the Greeks further, though there is no evidence to prove this theory¹². The discontent caused by the Exiles Decree was one of the causes of the Lamian War (323 – 322BC)¹³, as well as the Greek desire to be free of the Macedonian rule and regain their independence, this particularly applies to the Athenians¹⁴. The final years of Alexander’s reign affected the relationship between himself and the Athenians, as his decisions affected their strong sense of autonomy and could be construed as being egotistical, especially with his ideas of being descended from the Gods.

The relationship between Macedonia and Athens was strained when Alexander the Great came into power, because of the actions of and disagreements caused by his father, Phillip II. Tensions did decrease following Alexander’s ascension to the throne and subduing of the rebellions of the Greek states against him, as these proved his strength to the Athenians as well as the diplomacy he possessed, particularly with his dealing with the Ambracians. However, by the end of Alexander’s reign and life, the tension had once again increased, thanks in part to the Exiles Decree of 324BC and the Greeks having had enough of the Macedonian’s ruling over them, resulting in a war between Macedonia and Greek states, including Athens, following Alexander’s death in June 323BC (the Lamian War). The relationship between Alexander and Athens, as well as with Macedonia as a whole, varied over the course of time between Phillip and Alexander.

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¹⁰ Mensch and Room, 2005, pg18

¹¹ <https://www.ancient.eu/article/925/alexander-the-great-as-a-god/>

¹² Mensch and Room, 2005, pg150

¹³ Pearson, 1960, pg65

¹⁴ <https://www.britannica.com/event/Lamian-War>