

# The Hellenistic World

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(Hellenistic = “Greek-like” or “to imitate Greeks”)

## I. Macedonia & the Conquests of Alexander

A. Macedonians or “rednecks” to the north of Greece

### B. Philip II (359-336 B.C.E.) & the Conquest of Greece

1. Hostage in Thebes as a boy

2. Used Macedonian peasants as soldiers

“the Great”

a. Paid for a professional army

b. Created a new phalanx

i. Lightly armored

ii. Smaller shield and sword

iii. 18ft. spear

iv. Used flanking heavy cavalry

v. Good engineer with new weapons  
like catapults

c. Conquered Illyricum & Thrace

d. Great Orators Speak on Philip

i. Demosthenes (384-322 B.C.E.) in his Philippics  
warned about the threat to the north

ii. Isocrates (436-338 B.C.E.) saw Philip  
as a unifier of Greece

3. Battle of Chaeronea (338 B.C.E.)

a. Saw Athens, Thebes and a few others ally

b. Urged on by the oratory of Demosthenes

c. Philip won handily (outnumbered by 3000)

- i. Forced Greeks to ally into the Corinthian League
- ii. Philip became *hegemon* or leader
- iii. Philip desired unity against Persia

4. Philip was assassinated (336 B.C.E.)

- a. At daughter's (Cleopatra) wedding reception
- b. Killed by Pausanias, who was killed
- c. Possible plot by Alexander & his mom

C. King Alexander III "the Invincible" (336-323 B.C.E.)

1. Becomes king at age 20

- a. Was a teenage cavalry commander for dad
- b. Secures Greece by crushing Thebes
  - i. Slaughtered all adult males
  - ii. Sold women and children into slavery

2. Alexander's Conquests

a. Risky Persian Campaign

- i. Spring (334 B.C.E.), he enters Asia Minor with 37,000 soldiers & 5000 cavalry
- ii. Scientists, architects, historians, & engineers went along

b. Battle of Granicus River (334 B.C.E.)

- i. Stunning victory for Alex
- ii. Freed western Anatolia & the Ionians

c. Battle of Issus (333 B.C.E.)

- i. King Darius III fled the battlefield
- ii. Alex seizes Tyre & Gaza to take away

*the Phoenician naval threat*

*iii. Tyre fell with Alex building a mile long causeway (6000 dead & 20,000 sold into slavery)*

*d. Syria, Palestine & Egypt surrender (332 B.C.E.)*

*i. Alex becomes pharaoh & god Amon-Re*

*ii. He established the first city named Alexandria (scholarly city of commerce)*

*e. Darius III offers Alex all west of Euphrates River for peace & Alex refuses*

*f. Battle of Gaugamela (331 B.C.E.)*

*i. Alex led breakthrough of Persian lines*

*ii. Darius III flees again and is killed by one of his generals*

*iii. Alex captures Babylon, royal family of Persia & palace at Persepolis, he has burned*

*iv. Alex becomes “Great King of the Persians”*

*v. He moves on to the Indus Valley*

*g. Battle of the Hydaspes River (326 B.C.E.)*

*i. Barely defeated the Raja Porus*

*ii. Alex fights his way down the Indus River Valley & is badly wounded with an arrow through the chest*

*h. Alex’s men mutinied*

*i. Alex takes his men home via two routes*

*(1) ~½ go by sea*

*(2) ~½ go by way of the Gedrosia*

## Desert of southern Persia

- ii. Alex sets up his capital at Babylon
- iii. Ruled like a Persian ruler
- iv. Died a suspicious death (323 B.C.E.)

### 3. Alexander's military successes

- a. Philip left Alex a great military
- b. Alex was a great tactician using the topography to his advantage
- c. Brilliance & no fear put him in the front lines
  - i. Led the troops personally
  - ii. Great rapport with the troops
  - iii. Drove the men mercilessly
  - iv. Utilized Persian troops as well
- d. Developed excellent siege warfare

### 4. Alexander's Ideals

- Always had the Iliad & dagger under his pillow
- a. Based upon his tutor, Aristotle
  - b. Idealized the Iliad & Achilles
  - c. Saw himself as related to Heracles
    - i. Loved the idea of being the god-king
    - ii. Kept a strong military under one command
  - d. Wanted a unified empire (2 cultures)
    - i. For a real reason of unity or easier to rule
    - ii. Alex sponsored the mix wedding at Susa by 10,000 men
    - iii. Alex est. about 70 cities of "Alexandria"
    - iv. He settled Greeks and Macedonians

- throughout his empire
- e. At his death he said, “to the strongest”  
would go his empire

## II. World of the Hellenistic Kingdoms

- A. Three major plus other separate kingdoms emerge
1. Antigonids of Macedonia
  2. Seleucids of Syria, Persia & India
  3. Attalids of NW Asia Minor (Pergamum)
  4. Ptolemies of Egypt
- B. Antigonid Kingdom of Macedonia
1. Alexander’s family was exterminated
  2. Antigonus Gonatus wins control (276 B.C.E.)
    - a. *Grandson of a great general*
    - b. *He established an uneasy peace between Macedonia & Greece*
- C. Seleucid Kingdom
1. Founded by Seleucus I Nicator (“victor”) (358-281 B.C.E.), an officer for Alexander
  2. Driven from India by Chandra Gupta Maurya
  3. A trade and diplomatic relationship is made with the Mauryan Empire
- D. Kingdom of Pergamum
1. Freed itself from the Seleucids
  2. Ally of Rome it fought off the Seleucids
  3. By 63 B.C.E. Rome annexed Pergamum & Seleucids
- E. Ptolemaic Kingdom of Egypt

1. General [Ptolemy](#) I Soter (“Savior”) (367-283 B.C.E.)
2. Longest lived of Alexander’s successor kingdoms
3. Ended with the reign of Cleopatra VII (30 B.C.E.)

#### F. Threat from the Celts/[Gauls](#)

1. Inhabitants of Europe
2. Sacked Italy & Rome in 390 B.C.E.
3. About 300 B.C.E. invaded Macedonia & Greece
4. [Attalus](#) I Soter (269-197 B.C.E.) of Pergamum defeats the Galatians in 230 B.C.E.

#### G. Political & Military Institutions

1. Despotic monarchical nations are established
  - a. Localized democracy existed
  - b. Greco-Macedonian elite ruled & dominated the Hellenistic kingdoms & cities
    - i. True Greeks ruled
    - ii. Acculturated Greeks ruled
2. Strong military based upon the designs of Philip
  - a. Inclusion of war elephants from India
  - b. Perfection of siege towers & catapults
  - c. Galleys became huge with 20-30 banks of oars

#### H. *Hellenistic Cities*

1. *Military garrisons became cities*
2. *Some cities were est. from scratch*
3. Greek & Macedonian settlers were wanted, esp. as administrators
4. Classical Greek language, architecture, design &

government were all common

5. Greek cities were the power base for rulers against the non-Greek locals
6. *Greek cities formed two important leagues*
  - a. *Aetolean League of central Greece*
  - b. *Achaean League of the Peloponnesus*

### *I. Economic Trends*

1. *Lots of farming with lots of slaves*
2. *Manufacturing from Greece, Mid East, to Egypt*
  - a. *Alexandria, Egypt had the most*  
*(glass, oil, parchment, textiles, linens, & metals)*
  - b. *Trade was extensive, despite many wars*
    - i. *From murex to slaves*
    - ii. *Grain was the most important, esp. from Egypt, Sicily and the Black Sea region*

### *III. Hellenistic Society*

#### *A. New Opportunities for Upper-Class Women*

1. *The Hellenistic Queens led the way in taking leading roles in government, the arts and in intellectual pursuits*
2. *Women took a huge role in managing businesses*
  - a. *Sparta had begun the trend with up to 40% of the private land controlled by women*
  - b. *In Athens, little changed for women*
3. *Women were educated in some parts, esp. in regards to artistic pursuits like poetry & music*

4. *Even some aristocratic women held local offices*
5. *Prostitution was common, esp. with the **hetairai** or upper class companions*

## **B. The Role of Slavery**

1. Very common
2. Four sources of slaves:
  - a. Children of slaves
  - b. Children sold or abandoned by parents
  - c. Persons kidnapped by pirates
  - d. Prisoners of war
3. Delos was a central trade area with upwards of 10,000 processed a day
4. *Work varied*
  - a. *For the government or government industry*
  - b. *Domestic work or to become concubines*
  - c. *Mining & farming*
5. *Many slaves themselves were Hellenized*

## **C. The Transformation of Education**

1. *Greek gymnasium becomes a secondary school*
  - a. *Paid for by the wealthy*
  - b. *Included music, physical exercise, literature and esp. Homer*
2. **Gymnasiarch** *oversaw the upper-class education*
  - a. *Unpaid prestigious position, but was excused from most financial civic duties*
  - b. *He had students compete in contests*



*c. Hellenistic kings encouraged education for future bureaucrats*

#### *IV. Culture in the Hellenistic World*

##### *A. New Directions in Literature*

- 1. Time of great patronage by monarchs especially in Alexandria, Egypt & its circle of poets*
- 2. Theocritus (~342-291 B.C.E.) of Alexandria & his “little poems” on love and nature*
- 3. Playwright Menander (342-291 B.C.E.) and his writing of New Comedy – often involving a prostitute*
- 4. Historian Polybius (203-120 B.C.E.) who wrote a massive 40 vol. work on the Mediterranean world with emphasis on the rise of Rome (5 vols. survive)*

##### *B. Hellenistic Art*

- 1. Great patronage in competing thru. decorations*
  - a. Heavy use of Corinthian columns (ornate)*
  - b. Great age of artists portraying realistic art*
  - c. Some intermingling of Hindu/Buddhist/Hellenistic art*
- 2. Portrayal of humanity as it really is*
  - a. True beauty in the eye-of-the-beholder*
  - b. Exudes emotion & feeling (today)*

##### *C. A Golden Age of Science and Medicine*

- 1. Science studied separately in a systematic fashion*
- 2. Aristarchus (~310-230 B.C.E.) went with the*

heliocentric universe, rather than geocentric

3. [Eratosthenes](#) (~275-194 B.C.E.)
  - a. Earth is 24,675 miles around it
  - b. Off by less than 200 miles
4. [Euclid](#) (~300 B.C.E.) of Alexandria and his seminal geometry text called Elements
5. [Archimedes](#) of Syracuse (287-212 B.C.E.)

Often heard to utter “[EUREKA](#)” upon a discovery

- a. Developed pi in the west
- b. Archimedes Principle of water displacement
- c. [Archimedes Screw](#) for [lifting](#) water
- d. Developed the block & tackle or compound pulley
- e. Romans killed him for hindering their siege

6. Huge on medical study, esp. in regards to human anatomy and vivisection

## D. Philosophy: New Schools of Thought

1. [Epicurus](#) (341-270 B.C.E.) & Epicureanism
  - a. Famous school in Athens dealt with pleasure
  - b. He denied an active role by gods
  - c. Reality is all atoms moving through the void
  - c. Pursuit of ethical pleasure leads to happiness
  - d. Passive pleasures, by avoiding worry & responsibility and don’t serve in a public role
2. [Zeno](#) (287-212 B.C.E.) of Athens & Stoicism
  - a. Most popular philosophy of Hellenism & Rome
  - b. Happiness found in virtue

stoa = “porch”

- c. Live in harmony with divine will
- d. Live according to nature & you have free will
- e. Be a good citizen & serve government
- f. All are equal at the level of the soul and have a divine spark

3. No longer was the *polis* everything

## V. Religion in the Hellenistic World

### A. Mystery Religions (cults)

- 1. Secret initiations and promises of salvation
- 2. Greatly influenced by Egyptian religions
- 3. Had openly available temples in the east
- 4. Most such faiths had a deity that died and rose again for the benefit of salvation for the followers
- 5. Initiation was a very emotional experience
- 6. Cult of Isis from Egypt
  - a. Spread with Hellenism
  - b. Isis was god of women, marriage & children
  - c. She was the bringer of civilization
  - d. The faith was a competitor of Christianity

### B. The Jews in the Hellenistic World

- 1. Hellenistic world had syncretism  
(Same gods, but different names)
- 2. Jews were unique with their monotheism
- 3. Seleucids ruled Judaea
  - a. [Antiochus](#) IV (175-163 B.C.E.)
    - i. Tried to placate Romans with new laws

- (1) Ended the Sabbath & circumcision as rites of Judaism
- (2) Put Jupiter in the Jewish Temple
- ii. Rebellion under Judas Maccabeus in 164 B.C.E. saw the temple retaken
- iii. Event is celebrated every year with Hanukkah (“rededication”)
- b. Jews had great freedom till Roman rule
  - i. They were scattered throughout the Mediterranean World
  - ii. Avoided true citizenship to worship Yahweh and not foreign deities



