



Western Civilization from Prehistory to 1650

Dr. Edrene S. McKay ■ (479) 855-6836 ■ Email: esm@online-history.com

TOPIC 5.1. THE HELLENISTIC AGE: CULTURAL DIFFUSION

Supplement to Chambers, *The Western Experience*, Chapter 3: Classical and Hellenistic Greece, pp. 89-100, or McKay, *A History of Western Society*, Chapter 4: Hellenistic Diffusion, pp. 93-119.

HELLENISTIC CIVILIZATION	<p>During the Hellenistic Age, Greek civilization became an international civilization. Political events united diverse Eastern and Western peoples and cultural developments resulted from this unification.</p>
East/West Links Cosmopolitan	<p>HELLENISTIC CIVILIZATION grew from the conquests of ALEXANDER THE GREAT, whose empire stretched from Greece to the Indus Valley. Soon after his death, the empire disintegrated into smaller realms ruled by his contentious generals and their descendants. However, the culture the empire established persisted for centuries. By forging political, economic, and social LINKS BETWEEN EAST AND WEST, Alexander enabled a truly COSMOPOLITAN SOCIETY to develop. Although cities retained control of their own affairs, the city-states gave way to kingdoms based on the near eastern idea of DIVINE MONARCHY. Macedonian and Greek elites ruled over these realms. These elites encouraged a Greek-speaking INTELLECTUAL CLASS that, in turn, ensured the spread of Greek ideas. ALEXANDRIA, Egypt, became the cultural center of the Hellenistic world, where easterners and westerners met and exchanged ideas about science, art, philosophy, and religion.</p>
Divine Monarchy Intellectual Class Alexandria	<p>Although Hellenistic civilization provided a common cultural framework, it often shaped only the lives of the ELITES AND CITY-DWELLERS. Greek culture hardly touched the traditional beliefs of the vast rural populations. Further, this culture sometimes CLASHED WITH NEAR EASTERN BELIEF SYSTEMS, most notably Jewish thought. Some Jewish scholars admired Greek thought and language, and many Jews outside Judea assimilated Hellenistic culture. However, when Antiochus IV tried to impose Hellenism on Judea, the Jews rebelled, reasserting their religious and cultural traditions. They also won political independence but soon lost it again to the Romans.</p>
Limited to Elites and City-Dwellers Clashed with Near Eastern Beliefs	<p>Hellenistic cultural achievements both amplified earlier Greek accomplishments and reflected the political and social conditions of the international civilization. As kingdoms replaced independent city-states, LITERATURE turned from politics to exploring, through a sophisticated realism, the DAILY CONCERNS OF ORDINARY PEOPLE. Theocritus' pastorals display careful attention to the natural world, while Apollonius' epic <i>Argonautica</i> succeeds most in its rendering of passionate love. Writers of New Comedy, such as Menandere, examined the private lives of wealthy city-dwellers, and Hellenistic romance treated the difficulties of separated lovers. Polybius and other historians tried to discover rational explanations for human events but did so, in true Hellenistic fashion, on the international scale.</p>
LITERATURE Daily Concerns of Ordinary People	<p>Greek science reached its height during this age, fueled by the data gathered through Alexander's conquests. Both Alexandria and Athens were prominent SCIENTIFIC CENTERS, the latter supporting the Lyceum founded by Aristotle. Alexandrian PHYSICIANS advanced medical knowledge by studying human anatomy and organ functions, and MATHEMATICIANS such as Euclid synthesized previous achievements. Archimedes of Syracuse both invented many practical devices and theorized the properties of static liquids. ASTRONOMERS debated the geocentric and heliocentric theories of the universe and mapped the stars, while GEOGRAPHERS worked to estimate the earth's circumference. Each of these achievements both confirmed the Greek ideal of independent reason and applied it in new ways.</p>
SCIENTIFIC CENTERS Physicians Mathematicians Astronomers Geographers	

<p>PHILOSOPHY Individual in Complex World</p>	<p>Hellenistic PHILOSOPHERS also preserved the rational tradition but turned from the problem of the citizen's relationship to the city to that of the individual's condition IN A COMPLEX WORLD. The four major schools plotted distinctive routes to personal fulfillment.</p>
<p>Epicureanism</p>	<p>EPIPUREANISM held that people could achieve happiness only by withdrawing from public life and, through the exercise of reason, freeing themselves from all sources of anxiety, including a belief in gods. Epicureanism also opened philosophical activity to all despite gender or social condition.</p>
<p>Stoicism</p>	<p>STOICISM did so as well through its idea of a world society bound by a shared search for harmony with the Logos. Everyone could achieve this harmony by mastering their passions through reason. Stoicism also encouraged participation in public life to foster harmony throughout world society.</p>
<p>Skepticism</p>	<p>SKEPTICISM denied that there is one true path to happiness. In its most sophisticated form, it insisted on the limits of reason, encouraging adherents to base morality not on fixed principle but on practical experience.</p>
<p>Cynicism</p>	<p>The most radical of Hellenistic philosophies, CYNICISM tried to free people to follow their own natures by denying all forms of authority and promoting ascetic self-discipline. By emphasizing personal fulfillment, Hellenistic philosophy did some of the work of religion, thus preparing the way for Christianity.</p>
<p>HELLENISTIC ART</p>	<p>HELLENISTIC ART reflected the age by preserving the Classical tradition while injecting into it new subjects and techniques. Patronized by powerful elites, Hellenistic artists glorified political leaders with works that were often as dramatic as they were classically proportioned. The exploits of Alexander the Great continued to inspire artists, but they also commemorated the deeds of the Hellenistic kings. Sculptors also experimented with the relationship between the statue and its space to depict varieties of dramatic action. Simultaneously, artists developed a distinctive mode of genre sculpture through which they explored common individuals in everyday situations.</p>
<p>DIFFUSION OF GREEK CIVILIZATION</p>	<p>Lasting from the death of Alexander the Great to the foundation of the Roman Empire, the Hellenistic Age saw the international DIFFUSION OF GREEK CIVILIZATION. So great was this diffusion that the traditional distinction between Greek and barbarian dissolved. Ultimately, Rome solidified this diffusion by institutionalizing Greek ideas, including Stoic universalism that became one of the foundations of Roman law. Further, Christianity turned the age's philosophical emphasis on personal fulfillment into a theology based on transcendent universal love.</p>
<p>ONLINE RESOURCES</p>	<p>For more information on the Hellenistic World, explore one or more of the following online resources:</p> <p>Alexander the Great: Biography of Alexander with audio pronunciation guides.</p> <p>The Library of Alexandria: Discusses the foundation of the library and the scholarship in mathematics and science completed there.</p> <p>Internet Ancient History Sourcebook: Hellenistic World: Primary sources from the Hellenistic period.</p> <p>The Significance of the Hellenistic Era: Explains the process of cultural diffusion.</p> <p>The Hellenistic Scientists: Discusses the scientists who continued the empirical traditions established by the Greek natural scientists (Democritus and Aristotle): Aristarchus of</p>

<p style="text-align: center;">DISCUSSION QUESTIONS</p>	<p>Samos, Archimedes, Eratosthenes, Euclid, and Hipparchus.</p> <p>The Philosophy Garden: Dedicated to the spirit of life pioneered by Epicurus and Lucretius. Includes primary sources.</p> <p>Stoicism: An introduction to this Hellenistic philosophy.</p> <p>The Stoic Philosophy as Described by Diogenes Laërtius: Primary source.</p> <p>Skepticism: Traces the development of this philosophy, which originates during Hellenistic times.</p> <p>Cynicism: Interesting website that helps you determine if you're a cynic. Be sure to take the cynic's self-test.</p> <p>Drawing on the resources you have had an opportunity to explore (textbook, course documents, online resources, library resources), answer one or more of the following questions:</p> <p>Homer's <i>The Iliad</i> profoundly inspired Alexander. He carried a copy of <i>The Iliad</i> with him into every battle and tried to live by its theme of "might tempered by mercy." Discuss what this theme means. Give examples of other events in history or current events when might was—or should have been—tempered by mercy.</p> <p>Once Alexander conquered Egypt, he was crowned pharaoh and regarded as a divine leader, descended from the gods. Research other leaders, past and present, who have been regarded as divine, and evaluate the impact such a belief has had on these rulers and their people.</p> <p>The number of leaders in world history who have been called "the Great" is very small. What unique qualities in Alexander's personality and heritage contributed to his "greatness" and popularity? Discuss the status of leadership in today's world. Do we have a similar or different definition of "greatness" for today's leaders?</p> <p>What were the defining features of Hellenistic cosmopolitanism? What were its limits?</p> <p>Who were the great figures of Hellenistic science? How did they build upon the achievements of earlier Greek scientists?</p> <p>What were the four major schools of Hellenistic philosophy? What were the basic principles of each?</p>
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