

Alexander died young, in 323 BCE. His generals divided the conquered territory and made themselves kings, but soon became rivals and often enemies. Egypt was ruled by Ptolemy I and his descendants, and most of the conquered part of Asia was governed by Selucus I Nicator and his descendants.

Greece had previously set up extensive colonies around the Mediterranean and Black Seas, so its influence was already great in southern Europe and the Near East. Greek became the international language used by rulers and traders, and Greek culture became the standard for the upper classes in conquered areas and elsewhere. Macedonians and other Greeks moved to cities in the conquered territory, often taking official positions.

The ancient name for Greece is “Hellas,” and the Hellenistic Period is the era of Greek dominance after the death of Alexander.

Investigation: Alexander’s Motives

When Alexander the Great and his army moved into India, his troops objected to going farther. Greek historian Arrian of Nicomedia records the speech Alexander supposedly made to the troops on that occasion. The last part of the speech is below.

A problem: Arrian was writing about 450 years after the events he describes, so was probably saying what he thought Alexander might have said. He did, however, have eyewitness accounts (no longer available) so he’s generally considered a fairly reliable source.¹

1. ***Assuming the ideas expressed in the speech below are accurate, what seems to have motivated Alexander to become a conqueror? Record the idea or ideas behind his actions.***
2. ***List other possible ideas that might have motivated him and explained his actions.***

I could not have blamed you for being the first to lose heart if I, your commander, had not shared in our exhausting marches and perilous campaigns. If you had done all the work and then other people gained the rewards, your wishing to turn back would be natural.

But that is not the case. You and I, gentlemen, have shared the labor and shared the danger, and the rewards are for us all. The conquered territory belongs to you; from your ranks its governors are chosen. Already the greater part of its treasure has passed into your hands. When all Asia is overrun, then indeed we will have gone further than the mere satisfaction of our ambitions: the utmost hopes of riches or power which each one of you cherishes will be far surpassed, and whoever wishes to return home will then be allowed to go, either with me or without me. However, I will make those who stay the envy of those who return.

¹ Internet Ancient History Sourcebook <http://legacy.fordham.edu/Halsall/ancient/arrian-alexander1.asp>

Investigation: Greeks in Egypt

In 285 BCE, the first Greek king of Egypt, Ptolemy I “Soter” (Savior), decided to turn the throne over to his son, Ptolemy II, Philadelphus. A description of part of the celebration, is below, taken from the account of Athanaeus (History, Book V, Chap. 25). (Athanaeus gave as his source Callixenes of Rhodes, who wrote a history of Alexandria.)¹

The account and photographs that follow suggest shared ideas of Hellenistic Greeks, including Ptolemy and the Greeks that ruled the Egyptians. Read the account and record the idea or ideas that apparently motivated their actions.

First I will describe the tent...it was amazingly beautiful. It had room for 130 couches [for banqueters] arranged in a circle. The roof was held up on wooden pillars 75 feet high of which four were arranged to look like palm trees. On the outside of the pillars ran a portico...on three sides with a vaulted roof. Here the feasters could also sit down. The interior of this was surrounded with scarlet curtains; in the middle of the space were hung unusual hides of beasts, strange both for their varied color, and their remarkable size. The open area surrounding this portico was shaded by myrtle trees, laurels, and other shrubs.

The entire floor was spread with every kind of flower... Even though this entertainment took place in midwinter, the show of flowers was quite incredible to the foreigners...giving the appearance of a most divine meadow.

By the posts around the tent were placed animals carved in marble by the best artists, a full hundred in number; while in the spaces between the posts were hung pictures by Sicyonian painters. [*Sicyon was considered the center of Greek art, with a famous school for painters. -ed.*] Alternately with these were carefully selected images of every kind, and garments embroidered with gold and splendid cloaks, some having portraits of the kings of Egypt wrought upon them, and some stories from mythology. Above these were placed alternating gold and silver shields.

[A long account follows of the golden couches, golden tripods, silver dishes, and lavers, jewel-set cups, etc., provided for the guests.]

¹ William Stearns Davis, Readings in Ancient History: Illustrative Extracts from the Sources, 2 Vols., (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1912-1913), Vol. I: Greece and the East, pp. 329-332. (adapted)
<http://legacy.fordham.edu/Halsall/ancient/285ptolemyII.asp>

An important part of the celebration was the procession through the city of Alexandria. (The gods named in this part of the account are Egyptian.)¹

[The procession began with a large group of people wearing various costumes and symbols of celebration and religion.]

...Next came a four-wheeled carriage, 21 feet long and 12 wide, drawn along by 180 men, on which was the statue of the god Osiris, 15 feet high, pouring wine out of a golden vase, wearing a scarlet costume down to his feet, with a yellow transparent robe over it, and over all a scarlet cloak. In front of the statue was a large golden bowl, and a tripod with bowls of incense on it. Over the whole was an awning of ivy and vine leaves. The priests and priestesses of the god were in the same carriage.

This was followed by a smaller chariot drawn by 60 men, in which was the statue of the goddess Isis in a robe of yellow and gold. Then came a chariot full of grapes, and another with a large cask of wine, which was poured out on the road as the procession moved on; and then costumed figures, and more chariots of wine. Then 80 Delphic [Greek] vases of silver, and other vases; and 1,600 dancing boys in white costumes and golden crowns. Then a number of beautiful pictures; and a chariot carrying a grove of trees, out of which flew pigeons and doves, so tied that they might be easily caught by the crowd.

On another chariot drawn by an elephant came another figure of Osiris, shown as he returned from his Indian conquests. He was followed by 24 chariots drawn by elephants, 60 drawn by goats, 12 by lions, seven by rhinoceroses, four by wild asses, 15 by buffaloes, eight by ostriches, and seven by stags. Then came chariots loaded with the tributes of the conquered nations; men of Ethiopia carrying 600 elephant's tusks; 60 huntsmen leading 2,400 dogs; and 150 men carrying trees, in the branches of which were tied parrots and other beautiful birds. Next walked the foreign animals, Ethiopian and Arabian sheep, Brahmin bulls, a white bear, leopards, panthers, bears, a giraffe, and a rhinoceros.

...Then came crowds of singers and cymbal-players, and 2,000 bulls with gilded horns, crowns, and breast-plates.

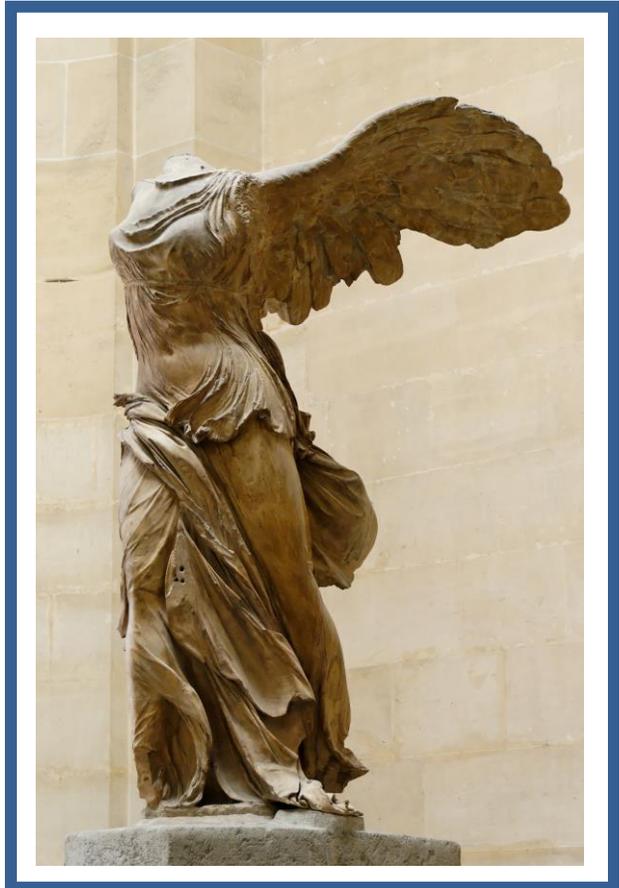
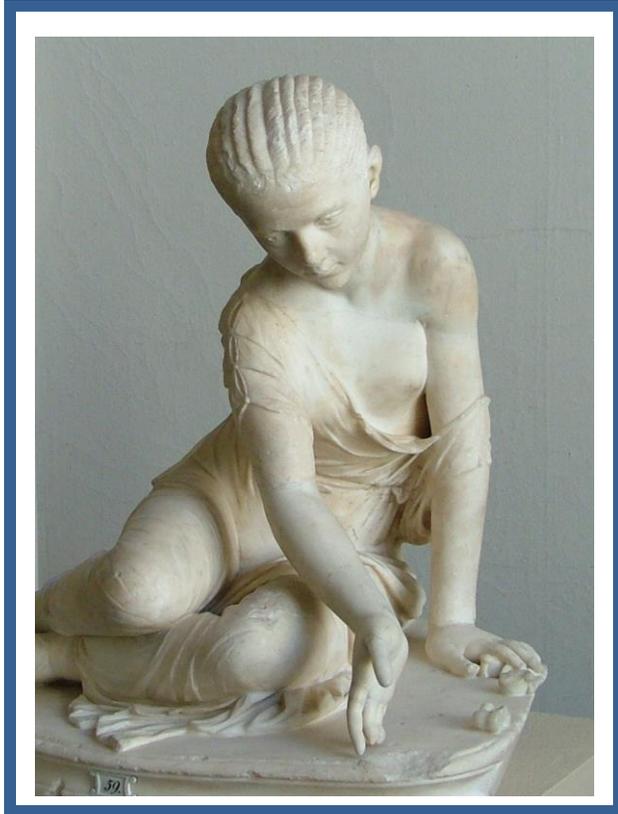
Then came [*statues of gods, including Alexander*] in a chariot pulled by elephants; then a number of thrones of ivory and gold; and on one was a golden crown, on another a golden cornucopia [*horn of plenty*], and on the throne of Ptolemy Soter was a crown worth 10,000 aurei [*over 3 million dollars*]; then 3,200 golden crowns, 20 golden shields, 64 suits of golden armor, and the whole was closed with 40 wagons of silver vessels, 20 of golden vessels, 80 of scented oils, 57,600 foot soldiers, and 23,200 cavalry on horseback. The procession began moving by torch-light before the sun rose in the morning, and the sun set in the evening before it had all passed.

It went through the streets of Alexandria to the royal tents on the outside of the city... 2,239 talents were spent on the amusements of the day [*about 35 million dollars*].

¹ Samuel Sharpe, *The History of Egypt under the Ptolemies*, London, 1838 (adapted) Sharpe's account is taken from Athanaeus, Vol. V., who gave as his source Callixenes of Rhodes, who wrote a history of Alexandria.

The Hellenistic period was one of high achievement in art.

Two marble sculptures from 2nd century BCE Greece--Left: "Girl playing knucklebones" (Altes Museum, Berlin). Right: Goddess Nike, "Winged Victory of Samothrace" (Louvre Museum, Paris)



Openwork hairnet with medallion. Ptolemaic Egypt, about 180 BCE. (Gold)

<http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/works-of-art/1987.220>

Governing a country requires organization—leaders and administrators. The best records we have of government during the Hellenistic period come from Egypt, because the dry desert climate helped preserve papyrus documents. Papyrus was exported by Egypt and used for records in other locations, but few of those still exist.

A list of some typical Egyptian records that still exist:¹

- Oath of office, Egyptian assistant to the agent of a royal banker (about 230 BCE)
- Various letters to officials requesting assistance or relief from taxes
- Petitions to the king or high officials for correcting injustices and corruption
- Instructions from higher to lower officials about agriculture management and tax collection
- Tax receipts (proof that taxes had been paid)
- Letters about managing irrigation water (218 BCE and 112/111 BCE)
- Orders for delivery of grain (265 & 252 BCE)
- Detailed list of laws for regulating and taxing agriculture (259 BCE)

Background for the document that follows: For governing purposes, Egypt under the Greeks was divided into 40 *nomes*, or administrative districts. (Nomes were originally set up by Egyptians before Persian or Greek rule.) Each nome was headed by three officials: The *nomarch* was in charge of agricultural production for the district, the *oikonomos* was the financial officer responsible for taxes and expenses, and the *basilikos grammateus*, or royal scribe, was responsible for record keeping. Nomes were subdivided into sub-districts and villages, each with three officials with duties similar to those for the nome. Officials at the nome level were generally Greek, those at the village level were sometimes Greek, more commonly Egyptian. Language differences between the rulers and the ruled were often a problem.

Egypt exported wheat to Greece and other countries, beginning long before Greeks took control of the country.

Oil was produced by pressing castor beans, sesame and other seeds and perhaps olives, although few olive trees grew in Egypt. Oil was used for fuel for lamps, in cooking, and for other purposes. Oil production and sale was a government monopoly. Weaving cloth (linen from flax) was also a government monopoly.

In Egypt under the Greeks, almost everything was taxed— individuals, houses, agricultural products such as grain and oil, products of artisans, land, livestock, rights for fishing, and rights to hold official positions. Taxes were paid in three ways—coins (generally not available to Egyptian peasant farmers), a portion of produce or products, and labor (corvée duty), working on public or royal projects, typically 10 to 24 days a year.

¹ Bagnall, Roger S. and Peter Derow, *The Hellenistic Period, Historical Sources in Translation*, 2nd Ed., 2004 Blackwell Publishing

Based on the records that follow, identify two or more of the most important Greek shared ideas that explain the kinds of actions the record describes.

Almost every paragraph suggests possible problems in administration. Identify and list these problems.

Instructions of the *Dioketes* (chief royal finance and interior official) Zenodoros to an *Oikonomos* (about 209 BCE):¹

You must inspect the irrigation ditches which run through the fields used by the peasants to bring water on the land cultivated by each of them. See whether the water intakes into them have the standard depth and whether there is sufficient room in them. Also inspect the gates that allow the water to flow into the ditches. Make sure they have been made strong, the entries into them from the river are thoroughly cleaned. Verify that the general irrigation system is in good condition.

In your tours of inspection, when you go from place to place, try to cheer everybody up and to put them in better heart. Not only should you do this by words but also, if any of them complain of the village scribes or the *komarchs* [village agriculture supervisors] about anything related to agricultural work, you should make inquiry and solve their problems as far as possible.

When the sowing has been completed, we suggest you make a careful round of inspection; for thus you will get an accurate view of the sprouting of the crops. You will easily notice the lands which are badly sown or are not sown at all, and you will find out those who have neglected their duty and will become aware if any have used the seed for other purposes.

You must regard it as one of your most indispensable duties to see that the nome be sown with the kinds of crops described by the sowing-schedule.

If some people have trouble paying their land-use rents or are completely unable to pay, you must investigate their situation.

Make a list of the cattle used in farming, on both royal and private land. Make absolutely sure that the calves born to the royal cattle, when old enough to eat hay, are taken to the calf corrals.

Make sure that the grain in the nomes, except grain required locally for seed and grain which cannot be transported by water, be brought down [*to the river*]. This will make it easy to load the grain on the first cargo boats that arrive; this requires careful attention. Take care also that the required supplies of grain, according to the list I send, are brought down to Alexandria without delay. The grain must be correct in amount but also tested and fit for use.

(Continued)

¹ APIS record: Berkeley.apis.234, P. Tebt. III 0703
<http://dpg.lib.berkeley.edu/webdb/apis/apis2?invno=&apisid=234&item=1>

Visit also the weaving-houses in which the linen is woven, and make sure to have as many looms as possible in operation. The weavers must supply the full amount of cloth officially ordered for the nome. If any of them have produced fewer than the pieces ordered, make them pay the standard penalty fee for each piece they failed to supply. Take special care, too, that the linen is good quality and has the prescribed number of weft-threads. Visit also the washing-houses where the flax is washed and make a list, and report so that there may be a supply of castor oil and natron* for washing. Keep careful monthly records so the treasury and the contractors will get their required share. If there is any surplus produced over what is booked in the first month, record the surplus in the next month as part of the monthly quantity. Make sure all the looms which are idle are transported to the nome's main town, deposited in the government warehouse, and sealed up.

Audit the revenue accounts, if possible, village by village (and you should be able to do this, if you work with zeal). If you are not able, then audit by *toparchies* [sub-districts], passing in the audit nothing but payments to the bank in the case of money taxes, and in the case of grain dues or oil-bearing produce, only deliveries to the *sitologoi* [royal officials in charge of grain]. If any payment is short, force the *toparchai* [sub-district officials] and the tax-farmers [contractors hired to collect taxes] to pay into the banks. If grain is missing, they must pay the amount specified in the ordinance. Similarly, shortage in oil-bearing produce must be paid for based on the amount of liquid oil that would have been pressed.

Everything listed here is important, but the highest priority are your duties observing the oil factories. If you are careful, the sale of oil from the nome will increase significantly, and the thefts will be stopped. Do this by inspecting the local factories and the storehouses for the produce both dry [seed that will be pressed to extract oil] and liquid, and by sealing them. Be sure that the amounts delivered to the oil makers are not more than needed in the presses in the factories. Make sure all the oil presses are in operation if possible (or most of them), and keep a close watch on unused presses. If a press is not in use, it must be disabled by removing parts and sealing those parts in the storehouses. If you neglect this, you'll get a bad reputation that will be difficult to overcome.

Since the revenue from the pasturage dues, too, is one of the most important, it will most readily be increased if you carry out the registration (of cattle) in the best possible way. The most favorable season for the cattle census is about the month of Mesore [August]; for the whole country in this month is covered with water. Then cattle breeders send their flocks to the highest places, being unable to scatter them elsewhere.

See to it, too, that the goods for sale be not sold at prices higher than those prescribed. Also make a careful investigation of those goods which have no fixed prices and on which the dealers may put whatever prices they like. Allow them a fair profit on the wares being sold, and make sure they are sold for reasonable prices.

(Continued)

*Natron: Naturally-occurring form of washing soda, found in dry lake beds in Egypt. Mixed with oil, it made an early form of soap.

Take care to inspect the calf corrals also, and do your best to ensure that the grain is supplied in them till the time of grazing, and the quantity prescribed daily be used for the calves. The fodder must be delivered regularly in full, both that from the local sources and, if they need more, from other villages as well.

Take care also that the planting of the local mature trees is done at the right season. For willows, mulberry trees, acacia trees, and tamarisk, about the month of Choiak [December]. The rest must be planted on the royal embankments, but the young ones must be planted in beds in order to have all possible attention during the time of watering. When it is the proper time for planting, then plant them on the royal embankments. The guarding of them must be done by the contractors in order that the plants suffer no damage from sheep or any other cause. In your further tours of inspection notice also whether any cut trees are left on the embankments or in the fields and make a list of them.

Make also a list of the royal houses and the associated gardens, stating what attention each one of these requires, and report to us.

We sent you a memorandum listing native soldiers and sailors that deserted their work. Make sure that those men who fall into your hands are kept together until they are sent to Alexandria.

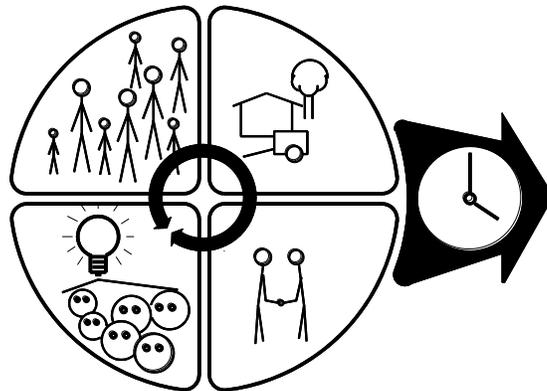
Take particular care that no embezzlement or any other wrong take place. Every resident in the country must clearly understand and believe that official corruption has been stopped and that they are free from the bad conditions of the past. No one [official] has the right to do as he pleases. If everything is managed properly, you will make the countryside secure and increase the revenue in no small measure.

Beginning in 207 BCE, native forces in Upper Egypt (south, up the Nile) rebelled against the government of Ptolemy V. The rebellion lasted until 186 BCE, when the rebel forces were defeated.

Diagram systemic relationships between Hellenistic Ideas and Patterns of Action identified in this unit.

Follow-Up: Taxation Today

1. *Engraved on the exterior of the IRS Building in Washington D.C.: “Taxes are what we pay for a civilized society.” Explain.*
2. *Choose one level of government in the area where you live—town, township, city, county, state, federal, or other. Find out what services it provides or responsibilities it meets and their annual costs.*
3. *Write questions useful in finding out the level of citizen understanding of what that level of government does, how much it costs, and how people feel about the services and their costs.*
4. *Use the questions to interview two or three adults.*
5. *Discuss the results. Identify and describe patterns in the responses.*



For Teacher/Mentor: Overview

A major difficulty in preparing materials for this course is finding adequate primary sources to illustrate important principles of historical change. Ideally, this unit would have introduced additional significant aspects of systemic relationships, such as **feedback** and **cumulative causation**. Unfortunately, available primary sources for the Hellenistic Period are inadequate to illustrate these processes of historical change.¹

Most of the available documents merely illustrate the tendency of Greeks (during that period) to develop domineering bureaucratic micromanagement in order to extract the maximum wealth from a ruled society via taxation.

The wealth was conspicuously consumed by the ruling class—spent on spectacles, art, and the trappings of religion, including elevation of rulers to “god” status with expectations of being worshipped. In Egypt, the old Egyptian religion was conveniently combined with that of the Greeks to help legitimize Greek domination.

The Hellenistic Period is important, of course, because of Greek intellectual and artistic influences on Rome and Western Civilization. For this reason, and to meet conventional expectations of content, this unit was included in the course sequence, even though it fails to cover new conceptual territory.

With one exception (see below), data in this unit doesn’t require detailed “close reading,” suggesting that time spent on it be limited. As with the units on India and China, the unit could be used for evaluation or for individual rather than group work. It’s possible (perhaps probable) that learners will find more in the data than we did.

The main objective is growth of learner analytical skills and understanding of systemic relationships.

Investigation: Alexander’s Motives

What drove Alexander to conquer? Contemporary data is missing, so his motives have to be inferred from his actions and third-hand accounts. However, he was raised in a society that valued military power and glorified victory, he had the direct example of his father’s actions, and his successes no doubt powerfully reinforced his mindset. Ego, power, and greed all likely played parts, as suggested in the speech used as data in this section.

We don’t suggest use of videos as data for analysis—they tend to entertain, but rarely have much educational impact. However, if learners would like a break in normal class routine, an illustration of Alexander’s battlefield tactical creativity can be seen at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iTAuU3DPtzQ> (approximately 50 minutes).

¹If any reader knows of sources that would be improvements over those used in this unit, we’d appreciate being notified. <http://www.marionbrady.com/ContactingUs.asp>

Investigation: Greeks in Egypt

This activity illustrates the over-the-top “conspicuous consumption” of Ptolemy I as ruler of Egypt, and the bureaucratic structure necessary to generate the taxes that sustained this behavior. Under Ptolemaic rule, spectacular parades (Greek “*pompe*”) were annual events.

Analyzing the instructions, *Dioketes* Zenodoros to an *oikonomos*, requires analysis on two levels. One—the more difficult—is analysis of the document as a whole to identify the shared ideas and values that are motivating the Greeks—an overarching concern for extracting taxes at maximum level from the Egyptians, and the Greek love for bureaucratic order, expressed in a hierarchy of officials with carefully-designated duties.

It’s not surprising, given the level of bureaucratic intrusion, that some would attempt to avoid taxes and gain untaxed wealth. This is a subtext—an underlying theme—in the instructions, relating the duties of the *oikonomos* in detail. Such steps as disabling unused oil presses and storing unused weaving looms imply the possibility of the equipment being used to press oil or weave cloth for illegal sale via private channels. Corruption was apparently common on the part of officials, as well, for example extorting taxes beyond those required by the government, and pocketing the excess.

If learners have completed Unit 12: Early Rome, they will be familiar with concepts related to autonomy and the consequences when it’s inadequate. Applying these concepts to the Greek rule of Egypt would be appropriate.

The activity of diagramming the systemic relationships should, at very least, point out the relationships between taxation and the rulers’ conspicuous consumption.

(HLB) September 2015