

# Greek Contributions to Civilization: The Hellenistic Period

# Alexander the Great and Hellenistic Culture

The Hellenistic Period starts with the conquests of Alexander the Great and ends late in the 1<sup>st</sup> century B.C.

Hellenistic culture fused Greek with Egyptian, Middle Eastern and Eastern cultures.

# Alexander and Hellenistic Culture

In the lands he conquered, Alexander

- introduced Greek language, literature and art;
- founded many cities to serve as centers of Greek culture;
- In Egypt, he founded Alexandria. Famed for its marble buildings, museum and library, it was the greatest Hellenistic city.

# Philosophy

Discontented with the old ideas and old gods, Hellenistic peoples sought new philosophies to guide them in their daily living.

- **Diogenes** (412-323 B.C.) the leading Cynic, taught that , to achieve contentment, individuals should practice self-control and independence. He rejected society's accepted values – wealth, power, pleasure, social position, and patriotism. Our word cynic describes one who sneeringly distrusts people's motives, attributing their actions wholly to self interest.

# Philosophy

- **Zeno (342-270 B.C.)**, the founder of Stoicism, urged individuals to live according to reason and be indifferent to pleasure or pain. Our word stoic means :one who calmly accepts pleasure without rejoicing and endures pain without flinching.”

# Philosophy

- **Epicurus** (341-270 B.C.) believed that people should seek pleasure and happiness. However, he emphasized that pleasures should be temperately chosen to attain a balanced, moral life. (Today, an epicure is “one who displays a highly refined taste in eating, drinking and other pleasures.”)

# Sculpture



Hellenistic sculptors carved realistic statues, including the Venus de Milo, the Death of Laocoon, the Dying Gaul and the Winged Victory of Samothrace.



# Science and Mathematics

- **Aristarchus** (310-230 B.C.), an astronomer, concluded that the earth revolves around the sun.
- **Euclid** (about 300 B.C.), a mathematician, systematized the subject matter of geometry.
- **Archimedes** (287-212 B.C.), a mathematician and physicist, discovered important principles regarding the lever, the pulley, and specific gravity.
- **Eratosthenes** (276-195 B.C.), a geographer, believed the earth to be round and accurately estimated its circumference.