

Games and Cult:
The Festivals of Fourth
and Third Century B.C. Alexandria

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The paper highlighted the author's research on the influence of Alexander the Great's successors in Alexandria, Egypt—the Ptolemaic kings—upon the agonistic festivals they inaugurated or

reorganized. The ways in which dynastic cult worship interacted with the symbolism, design and format of the festivals, as well as the criteria that separated the new festivals from other festivals of the ancient world were discussed. For example, although Ptolemaic games followed classical agendas and format, they also ignored old tradition. Instead of honoring the established pantheon of gods, games sprang up to recognize living individuals and new foreign cult figures, such as Alexander, Ptolemy I and Ptolemy II. The festivals operated as celebrations of the individual, and were no longer used to transform society to Hellenism. Women, slaves and the poor—groups who normally played small roles in ancient festivals—were afforded opportunities to spectate and participate in the Ptolemaic games.

Questions of cultural interaction can also be approached through the study of the cult games of fourth and third century B.C. Alexandria. Festivals seem to have been appropriate mediums which provided continuity between old and new life styles; the study will attempt to show how both societal changes and tradition were manifested within the structure of agonistic festivals. Thus, something about the meaning and style of life in the world after Alexander the Great are revealed through the analysis of Alexandria's festivals.