

Abstract

Managing an empire – teacher and pupil

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The conquest of the Achaemenid Empire by Alexander the Great has often been seen, from a western standpoint, as a major change in the history of the Near East, whereby the Greeks imposed their own, supposedly superior methods on indigenous populations inhabiting the region.

This paper discusses a number of government practices that the Greeks took over from the Persians, often with some modifications. The Achaemenid Empire had, after all, endured for over 200 years, which it is unlikely to have done without a solid administrative structure.

The division of the empire into administrative regions, the splitting of authority between civil, financial and military branches, the detailed organisation of financial administration, the practice of land grants, the cooption of local elites and the use of the Royal Road are some of the areas that will be discussed. Even in the field of coinage, an eminently Greek practice, the Seleukid kings may have, surprisingly, utilised administrative controls inherited from the Achaemenids.

Rather than considering the arrival of the Greeks as bringing something entirely new to the management of an empire, one should probably see them as apt pupils of excellent teachers.