

NOTES ON QUIZ #5

1. What is a polis? How did they come about? How did they relate to each other?

The polis was a form of city-state—a city and its adjoining territory forming a single political (and economic) unit. So the emergence of the polis involves formal political unification of an urban market center with its surrounding farmland territory, and centralization of government. Unification involves synoecism, whereby every village, town, and hamlet merge their political (and other) identities into a single unit. Also, rule by basileus (chieftain), characteristic of the dark age, gives way to collective leadership by a small group of magistrates (oligarchy) and an assembly made up of the citizens.

The aristoi—the wealthy, large-estate-holding, educated families—dominate the oligarchies and see it as their right and responsibility to govern. This creates tension with the common people (demos), who increasingly gain various levels of decision-making power.

2. Who were the Dorians? What effect did they have on Greece?

The Dorians were the second wave of Indo-European Greeks, arriving in a mass migration at the end of the Bronze Age. Their arrival in such great numbers helped to destabilize the Mycenaean Greek society, and as the Mycenaean urban industrial society collapsed the Dorians settled in the countryside to the west and the remaining Greeks settled more to the east. The Dorians who settled in the southern Peloponnese, the ancestors of the Spartans, conquered the people who lived there, the Laconians and Messenians, and made them a class of conquered serfs (the helots).

3. In what ways did the Greek “competitive spirit” affect the way Greeks thought about themselves and others?

The Greek communities each sought to develop into an ideal society. Their method was to strive against each other, as individuals and as communities, so that would each push themselves to become the best in competition with others doing the same.

This competitive spirit, also called the agonal society (*agon* = contest), was something that the Greeks saw themselves as sharing as a culture and helped define Hellas, the Greek peoples, as civilized compared to other peoples who did not strive toward the ideal and who enslaved themselves to kings (barbarians). This common striving among rivals was deliberately invoked by instituting the pan-Hellenic games, and the Olympic games specifically.

EC1. From a Greek point of view, all of the following were barbarians EXCEPT:

(d) Spartans

EC2. How did the Greeks approach religion differently from the peoples of Mesopotamia or Egypt? What did they have in common?

The Greeks had no priestly class. No one held power by determining and wielding distinct communication with and understanding of the gods. Consequently, instead of the imagery of the gods being shaped by priests (for their own ends), as in Mesopotamia and Egypt, Greek understanding of the gods was shaped by literature, which was owned and retold by the people.

This made the Greek gods agents of human morality, punishing those whose pride, arrogance, or greed caused them to place their own needs ahead of the community's.