

Classical Civilization in the Mediterranean: Greece and Rome

The Persian Tradition

- Founded by **Cyrus the Great**, the Persian Empire was tolerant of local customs, developed iron technology, organized an effective government and military, developed a new religion (**Zoroastrianism**), and supported a great artistic tradition.

Patterns of Greek and Roman History

- The rise of the dynamic **city-states** of classical Greece began around 800 B.C.E., reaching a high point in the 5th century B.C.E., when **Pericles** governed **Athens**.
- Following the **Peloponnesian Wars** between Athens and **Sparta**, decline set in, but a new pattern of expansion occurred under **Alexander the Great**. Greek values spread widely in the ensuing **Hellenistic** period.
- As Hellenism declined, Rome was emerging as an expanding **republic**, defeating **Carthage** in the **Punic Wars** and later becoming the **Roman Empire** after the death of **Julius Caesar**. For roughly 200 years, the Empire enjoyed great power and prosperity.
- Despite the efforts of emperors like **Diocletian** and **Constantine**, the ensuing 250 years brought a slow but decisive fall.

Greek and Roman Political Institutions

- Greece and Rome featured an important variety of political forms. Both tended to emphasize **aristocratic rule**, but there were significant **democratic elements** as well.
- In the Greek **polis**, those who were citizens participated actively in political life. In Athens, the system of **direct democracy** allowed citizens to shape policy in general assemblies.
- In the Roman republic, the **Senate** was the main legislative body, but under the autocratic empire, the Senate's influence waned.
- Later, Rome added emphasis on law and created the institutions necessary to run a vast and decentralized empire.

Religion and Culture

- Greek and Roman culture did not directly generate a lasting major religion, though **Christianity** arose in the classical Mediterranean context. Greco-Roman religion used epic poems and mythology to explore human foibles and passions.
- An emphasis on **rationality**, especially in **philosophy**, science, and a strong artistic and architectural tradition, permeated classical Mediterranean culture.
- **Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle** are the most well-known Greek philosophers.

Economy and Society in the Mediterranean

- Greek and Roman societies mirrored many standard social features of an agricultural economy, including a large peasantry and a land-owning aristocracy, and dependence on trade and commerce.
- Differing versions of the patriarchal family structure existed in both Greek and Roman culture.
- Distinctive features included **slavery** and a slightly less oppressive attitude toward women than was true in classical China.

Toward the Fall of Rome

- **Rome began to decline** after about 180 C.E. Symptoms were gradual, including loss of territory and economic reversals.
- Ultimately, invaders periodically raided Rome until the empire finally collapsed.

Multiple-Choice Questions

1. While the types of government in the early Greek polis (city-states) varied, they were LEAST likely to have been
(A) aristocracies.
(B) monarchies.
(C) tyrannies.
(D) theocracies.
(E) democracies.
2. The major impact of Alexander the Great's conquests was the
(A) elimination of foreign influences from Greek culture.
(B) establishment of a unified government for the eastern Mediterranean.
(C) birth of mystery religions and the forced migration of the Jews.
(D) spread of Greek culture throughout the eastern Mediterranean.
(E) destruction of regional trade and commerce.
3. In comparison to the Hindus, Persians, and Chinese, religiously the Greeks
(A) most resembled Hinduism's polytheism with its caste system.
(B) never developed a major religion.
(C) developed a compassionate system similar to Buddhism.
(D) sought universal harmony in a manner similar to Daoism.
(E) avoided portraying gods with human characteristics.
4. Greco-Roman philosophers attempted to understand human nature through
(A) emotion, especially the desire for love and brotherhood.
(B) its rigid adherence to societal norms with rewards and punishments.
(C) human sin, salvation, and redemption.
(D) human relationships to the state and society at large.
(E) rational observation and deduction.

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5. Mediterranean agriculture under the Greeks and Romans was
- (A) extremely efficient and self-sufficient, supplying large surpluses for trade.
 - (B) not as dependent on irrigation as were other classical civilizations.
 - (C) heavily reliant on imported grain stuffs and the export of cash crops.
 - (D) yielded insufficient surpluses to support high urban populations.
 - (E) favored the small farmers instead of the large, landed estates.
6. Roman classic culture
- (A) owed a great deal of its diversity to trade with China.
 - (B) developed in relative isolation.
 - (C) borrowed heavily, especially from the Greek and Hellenistic states.
 - (D) influenced heavily the cultures of Africa and southwest Asia.
 - (E) was highly innovative in the arts and sciences.
7. Greco-Roman art and culture emphasized all of these qualities EXCEPT:
- (A) human achievement and striving.
 - (B) public utility and usefulness.
 - (C) order, symmetry, and balance.
 - (D) realism.
 - (E) atheism.
8. Rome successfully expanded for all of these reasons EXCEPT:
- (A) it possessed a disciplined, trained military.
 - (B) it had a rich agricultural economy, which supported a large population.
 - (C) Roman government proved flexible and tolerant.
 - (D) Roman leaders made citizens out of conquered elites.
 - (E) it had no organized and powerful rivals to oppose expansion in the area.
9. What sentence best describes both Roman and Chinese gender relations?
- (A) Roman and Chinese women had numerous political rights.
 - (B) While subordinate to men, Roman women were considerably freer and less oppressed than were their Chinese counterparts.
 - (C) Both cultures were matrilineal—husbands resided with their wives' families.
 - (D) Over the centuries, women's lives improved and their rights increased.
 - (E) Rome and China were patriarchal societies where elite women had considerable influence.
10. With regard to merchants, classical civilizations in Rome, Greece, and China
- (A) accorded them high social status.
 - (B) saw little use for their talents in otherwise largely agricultural societies.
 - (C) were ambivalent toward merchants despite their vital roles in commerce.
 - (D) rewarded merchant success through upward social mobility.
 - (E) made them state bureaucrats.

Free-Response Question

Compare and contrast the Greek, Confucian, and Hindu ethical systems.

ANSWERS AND EXPLANATIONS

Multiple-Choice Questions

- **1. (D) is correct.** The Greeks and Romans did not establish a major religion, and they did not establish theocracies. The most common form of government in the classical Mediterranean was aristocracy, but societies also practiced monarchy, tyranny, and democracy.
- **2. (D) is correct.** Though Alexander's empire was short lived, it allowed Hellenism to spread throughout the classical Mediterranean world.
- **3. (B) is correct.** Greco-Roman religions did not outlast their founding culture. Christianity originated under Roman rule but cannot be credited to Roman culture.
- **4. (E) is correct.** Greek and Roman thinkers emphasized reason and logic in their attempts to find answers to central philosophical questions.
- **5. (C) is correct.** Because of soil conditions, the Greeks and Romans relied heavily on imported grains. They exported olives, wines, and other commodities to colonies in return for grain.
- **6. (C) is correct.** Roman religion, architecture, political systems, and art all derived from Greek antecedents.
- **7. (E) is correct.** Much of Greco-Roman art highlighted religious themes.
- **8. (E) is correct.** Carthage, for example, provided a major organized challenge to Roman expansion.
- **9. (B) is correct.** For example, Greek and Roman women were active in business and controlled some property.
- **10. (C) is correct.** All three classical societies had lukewarm opinions of merchants. In India, merchants enjoyed relatively high caste status.

Free-Response Essay Sample Response

Compare and contrast the Greek, Confucian, and Hindu ethical systems.

Greek philosophers, like Confucian thinkers, concentrated on the secular world, rather than the spiritual realm, and both groups developed a complex system of ethics. However, the Greeks placed more value on skeptical questioning and abstract speculations. Unlike Greek philosophy, Hinduism is spiritual and emphasizes the sensual. Hinduism's concept of *dharma* is much less defined than the moral systems of Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle.