

## **Discussion Questions- Session 4 - 2nd February, 2023**

Group 4- Describe the city-states of Sumer. Comment on some distinct features of Sumerian City-states based on your readings (Page 31 and 32). In the text, on page 33, it is written that there was a contrast between periods of civic political culture and those in which tribal warrior aristocracies predominated. Give examples of civic political culture and tribal warrior aristocracies, and what, according to your reading, are the contrasts between these two forms of polity? (Page 33)- particularly focus on how these two types of political systems had two different perceptions of the notion of kingship. On page 40 the text claims that in ancient Mesopotamia there might have been a presence of 'primitive democracy' which is disputed by some historians. Read pages 40 and 41 selectively and comment on the reasons behind why some historians believe that in ancient Mesopotamian cities and kingdoms, absolute sovereignty prevailed over 'primitive democracy'.

**(Nishat Subha) 21301684:**

**[1]** From Sumerian period, Mesopotamian civilization was based on city-states

- 1) Developed as focal points of trade and craft production (good variety of trade and craft production)
- 2) Merchants and craftsmen merged and played significant role in jurisdiction and civic life.
- 3) City-states were ruled by kings, alongside a civic assembly
- 4) Role of city was as a cult center
- 5) Cities were where kings lived and justice administered and identified by particular Gods

**[2]**

Two distinct forms of governance were there.

Civic political culture: power is centralized and rests in the hands of governing body (consisting of kings)

Tribal warrior aristocracies: Dominated by a warrior class or aristocracy which emphasizes on personal loyalty. Ex: ancient Mesopotamia

**[3]**

Centralization of power made easier to maintain order and stability, lack of democratic institutions, social hierarchy, emphasis on law and order.

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- 1) The merchants and craftsmen managed their own affairs and played a vital role in jurisdiction and in civic life. Towards the end of the fourth millennium, writings were used to record the weights, measures, and receipts as the manufactured artifacts were exchanged for raw materials.

**(Asif Hossain) 22241039:**

1. Ans: The city-states of Sumer were a group of independent city-states. Each city-state was centered on a city and its surrounding countryside, and each was governed by its own ruler and had its own religious, economic, and political systems. The city-states of Sumer were known for their innovative developments, such as the development of writing, the wheel, and the use of irrigation systems.

2. Ans: The Sumerian city-states were characterized by several distinct features, including:

- a. City-Centered: Each city-state was centered on a city and its surrounding countryside, with the city serving as the political, economic, and religious center of the state.
- b. Independence: Each city-state was independent and had its own ruler, government, and laws.
- c. Writing System: The Sumerians developed a writing system called cuneiform, which allowed for the recording of history, laws, and economic transactions.
- d. Advanced Irrigation: The Sumerians built complex irrigation systems to irrigate their crops and increase agricultural productivity.
- e. Polytheistic Religion: The Sumerians had a polytheistic religion that worshipped multiple gods, each associated with specific natural forces or aspects of life.
- f. The Sumerians had a polytheistic religion that worshipped multiple gods, each associated with specific natural forces or aspects of life.

**(Tashfiq Ahsan) 21101309:**

3. Ans: The contrast between periods of civic political culture and those dominated by tribal warrior aristocracies in Mesopotamia can be seen in terms of political power, social organization, and government structure. During periods of civic political culture, power was decentralized and centered in cities where citizens participated in governance through institutions like city councils. In contrast, during periods dominated by tribal warrior aristocracies, power was centralized in the hands of a small ruling class of military leaders who maintained

control through force. This resulted in a hierarchical social structure with limited opportunities for political participation for the general population. Additionally, the focus of government shifted from addressing the needs and concerns of the citizens to maintaining the power and wealth of the ruling class.

5. Ans: The supreme god Anu was described in political language. It was widely accepted that royal commands could not be questioned: 'The command of the palace, like the command of Anu, cannot be altered. The king's word is right'. The view of primitive democracy in ancient Mesopotamia has been disputed. They became more self-governing and obtained more privileges.

### **Discussion Questions - Egypt + Israel- Session 4, 4th February, 2023**

**(Asif Hossain) 22241039:**

1. Ans: The political phases of ancient Egypt can be divided into the Old Kingdom (2686-2181 BC), the First Intermediate Period (2181-2055 BC), the Middle Kingdom (2055-1650 BC), the Second Intermediate Period (1650-1550 BC), and the New Kingdom (1550-1069 BC).

The Old Kingdom was a time of great stability and prosperity, characterized by the construction of the pyramids and a strong central government. The centralization of power began to break down in the First Intermediate Period, from the ruins two regional power emerged one in Heracleopolis that was in lower Egypt and other was at upper Egypt in Thebes which was a time of political fragmentation and invasions by foreign peoples, such as the Hyksos.

The Middle Kingdom saw the restoration of centralized government and a resurgence of cultural and economic activity. The Second Intermediate Period was another period of political fragmentation and conflict, including the invasion of Egypt by the Hyksos and the rise of the Nubian kingdom of Kush.

The New Kingdom was a time of military expansion and cultural creativity, marked by powerful pharaohs such as Hatshepsut, Thutmose III, and Ramses II, as well as the construction of monumental temples and the rise of the cult of the sun god, Amun.

The changes in the political phases of ancient Egypt were caused by a combination of factors, including the decline of central authority, invasions by foreign peoples, and the rise of regional powers. The intermediate periods were characterized by political instability, weakened central authority, and increased conflict, but also saw the emergence of new cultural and political trends

**(Tashfiq Ahsan) 21101309:**

2. Ans: In ancient Egyptian culture, the Pharaoh was considered a divine figure, chosen by the gods to rule over the people. As a result, the Pharaoh was exempt from the laws that governed the rest of society and was believed to have a direct connection to the divine. This divine perception was believed to give the Pharaoh a unique insight into the workings of the universe and the will of the gods. However, the idea of equality before the law was an important principle in ancient Egyptian society. This is evident in the Instruction of Ptahhotep, a collection of moral and ethical teachings written during the Old Kingdom period. The text emphasizes the importance of fairness, justice, and equality, and encourages people to treat each other with respect and kindness.

3. Ans: In the Instruction of Ptahhotep, the importance of equality is emphasized by the repeated use of the phrase "Ma'at" which was the ancient Egyptian concept of truth, balance, and order in the universe. The text stresses the importance of upholding Ma'at by maintaining the balance of justice, ensuring that the strong do not oppress the weak, and that everyone is treated equally under the law. The Instruction of Ptahhotep provides valuable insight into the values and beliefs of ancient Egyptian culture and reveals the importance placed on equality and justice. Despite the special status of the Pharaoh, the idea of equality before the law was an important principle that was emphasized in Egyptian society and upheld through the teachings of moral and ethical texts like the Instruction of Ptahhotep.

**(Nishat Subha) 21301684:**

4. Ans: Writing in ancient Egypt was used as a powerful tool of political propaganda. Pharaohs and their administration utilized writing in a variety of ways to promote their power and control over the kingdom, to reinforce their rule, and to present themselves in a favorable light. One way in which writing was used for political propaganda was through the use of monumental inscriptions and images. Large inscriptions were placed in prominent locations, such as temples and palaces, to communicate the pharaoh's achievements, power, and divine right to rule. These inscriptions were often accompanied by images of the pharaoh making offerings to the gods, engaged in battle, or performing other acts of strength and power, reinforcing the idea of the pharaoh's divinity and authority. Another way that writing was used as political propaganda was through the creation of biographical inscriptions, which portrayed the pharaoh as a wise and just ruler, who was beloved by the gods and the people. Writing was also used to reinforce the social order and Pharaoh's authority over people.

## **First Empires- Discussion questions - 9th February, 2023.**

**(Tashfiq Ahsan) 21101309:**

1. Ans: The "Universal Empire" refers to a type of political entity in which one ruler or ruling body claims sovereignty over the entire world or at least a significant portion of it, often seen as having universal or global influence and dominance.

The "Gate of All Nations" refers to the monumental entrance to the ancient Persian city of Persepolis (located in present-day Iran), which was once the capital of the Achaemenid Empire. The entrance, known as the Apadana Palace, symbolizes the empire's status as a center of the world, a hub for trade and diplomacy, and a hub for the exchange of ideas and cultures. The "Gate of All Nations" symbolizes the empire's openness to all peoples and nations, and the idea that the empire was the center of the world, a gateway to all other nations.

**(Asif Hossain) 22241039:**

2. Ans: The Persian Empire promoted a sense of universality by embracing and encouraging cultural diversity among its subjects. This was achieved through a policy of religious tolerance and the appointment of local governors and administrators from diverse ethnic and cultural backgrounds. This created a melting pot of cultures and allowed for the exchange of goods, ideas, and technologies between various regions within the empire. This exchange helped to establish interconnectivity between the different cultures and contributed to the growth and prosperity of the empire. The establishment of a widespread system of roads and communication networks, as well as the use of a common language (Aramaic) for administration, further facilitated this cultural exchange and interconnectivity.

**(Nishat Subha) 21301684:**

3. Ans: The Persian Empire, like other pre-modern imperial states, had a highly centralized and hierarchical administrative structure that allowed for efficient control and management of its vast territories and diverse population. This structure was key to the stability and longevity of the empire, as it facilitated the effective extraction of wealth and resources and ensured the security of the empire's frontiers. The author's claim that the development of the administrative structure was more important than military force or imperial ideology in securing the empire's frontiers and extracting resources is based on the fact that while military force and ideology could conquer and hold territories, they did not provide a sustainable means of governing and managing these territories. An effective administrative structure, on the other hand, allowed the empire to efficiently extract resources, maintain order, and ensure the loyalty of the conquered populations, thereby ensuring the long-term stability of the empire.

## **Greece- Discussion questions - 16th February, 2023.**

**(Asif Hossain) 22241039:**

a. Ans: In Plato's "The Republic," the three groups of classes are known as the "guardians" or "rulers," the "auxiliaries," and the "producers."

1. The guardians or rulers are the philosopher-kings. They are the most virtuous and intelligent members of society and are responsible for governing and making decisions for the community as a whole. They are the ruling class and are responsible for ensuring that the society functions justly and harmoniously.

2. The auxiliaries are the warriors or soldiers. They are responsible for protecting the society from external threats and maintaining internal order. They are trained in the art of war and are responsible for enforcing the laws established by the rulers.

3. The producers are the merchants and manufacturers. They are responsible for providing the necessary goods and services for the society. They are not involved in governance or military activities and are expected to focus on their respective trades and professions.

According to Plato, the three groups work together to create a harmonious and just society.

**(Asif Hossain) 22241039:**

b. Ans: In Plato's opinion on his writings "The Republic" justice can be ensured by establishing a just society, which he refers to as the "ideal state." In this ideal state, each individual would perform the role that is best suited to their nature and abilities. Plato argues that there are three parts of the soul: reason, spirit, and appetite. Similarly, there are three classes in society, each with its own part to play. Plato also tells that justice is achieved when each individual performs their assigned role to the best of their ability and does not interfere with the functions of others. Each class should stick to their assigned role and not attempt to move into another class. The rulers should use reason to govern justly, the warriors should use their spirit to maintain order, and the producers should fulfill their economic role. In addition, justice can be ensured by having a well-ordered soul. Plato believed that the soul has three parts, and just as a just society requires each class to perform its assigned role, a just individual requires the three parts of their soul to work in harmony.

Therefore, according to Plato, justice is ensured when each individual performs their assigned role in society and maintains a well-ordered soul.

**(Nishat Subha) 21301684:**

c. Ans: Plato criticized democracy for several reasons. He believed that democracy was prone to instability and was susceptible to the influence of demagogues, who could manipulate the passions and emotions of the people to gain power. He also believed that democracy was characterized by a lack of discipline and order, as it allowed the desires of the majority to override the needs of the minority. Furthermore, Plato argued that democracy tended to promote mediocrity and failed to recognize true excellence or wisdom. In a democratic system, leaders are chosen based on popularity and charisma, rather than their intellectual or moral qualities. This, in turn, can lead to a society that is ruled by those who are not truly qualified to govern, and where decisions are made based on short-term interests rather than long-term considerations.

For these reasons, Plato argued that the best form of government is one that is led by a philosopher-king or monarch who possesses both wisdom and virtue. According to Plato, only a philosopher-king is capable of governing with justice and ensuring the stability and prosperity of the society. At the end it can be understood that, Plato believed that democracy was an imperfect form of government that was vulnerable to corruption and instability

**(Tashfiq Ahsan) 21101309:**

d. Ans: Plato's view on governance is that the primary duty of the ruling class is to ensure the well-being and flourishing of the society they govern. In his view, the rulers have a moral obligation to act in the best interests of the community as a whole, rather than pursuing their own interests or those of a particular group. According to Plato, the ruling class should be composed of philosopher-kings who possess both wisdom and virtue. These individuals have been trained in philosophy and possess a deep understanding of the nature of reality and the human condition. They are able to govern with wisdom and impartiality, making decisions based on reason and justice rather than personal interests or passions.

Plato believed that the ruling class has a responsibility to create a just society in which every individual is able to fulfill their potential and contribute to the common good. This involves ensuring that each individual is able to perform their proper function in society and that resources are distributed fairly and equitably. Plato argued that a just society can only be achieved if there is a balance between the different classes of society, each performing its proper function and contributing to the overall well-being of the community.

Overall, Plato's view on governance emphasizes the importance of wise and virtuous leadership that is committed to the welfare of the society.

**(Tashfiq Ahsan & Nishat Subha):**

e. Ans: Plato's views on gender equality were complex and somewhat mixed. While he believed that women were capable of performing many of the same tasks as men, he also believed that there were inherent differences between men and women that made them better suited for certain roles in society. In his book "The Republic," Plato argued that men and women should receive the same education and be allowed to participate in the same occupations. He believed that women were just as capable as men in terms of intelligence and reasoning and that they should be allowed to pursue education and training in fields such as philosophy, mathematics, and medicine.

At the same time, Plato believed that women were better suited to certain roles, such as childbearing and nurturing, and that they should be responsible for managing the household and raising children. He argued that men and women had different roles to play in society and that these roles were complementary, rather than in competition with each other.

Overall, Plato believed that men and women had different strengths and weaknesses and that they should be assigned roles in society based on these differences. His ideas about education and the capabilities of women were progressive for his time and have influenced later discussions on gender equality.

**Research article summary about Plato's political and social philosophy and why he supported monarchy over democracy :**

Plato believed that a monarch, who possessed the virtues of wisdom, courage, and moderation, would be better able to govern justly and effectively than a group of elected officials. In his view, a monarchy would be better able to ensure that society was guided by reason, virtue, and the common good, and avoid the problems of instability, injustice, and tyranny that he saw as inherent in democracy. According to Plato, a monarch would be more capable of promoting the common good, avoiding factionalism, and ensuring that justice was done, because he would not be beholden to the interests of specific groups or individuals, and would be able to act with greater authority and decisiveness.

(John P. Anton, 11.4 The Criticism of Democracy, pg.192-195)



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## **Cicero's Political Theory - Summary - 18th February, 2023.**

**Tashfiq Ahsan(21101309), Nishat Subha(21301684) & Asif Hossain(22241039)**

Cicero's political theory, as expressed in his works, emphasizes the importance of natural law, justice, and the common good in a well-ordered society. He believed that a just society must be based on the rule of law and the principles of fairness and equity. He also advocated for a mixed government, with a balance of power between the different branches of government, as well as the participation of the people in the political process. Cicero believed that the ultimate goal of political life was to promote the common good and to serve the interests of all citizens, rather than the interests of a few individuals or groups. He also believed that a virtuous and educated citizenry was essential to the success of any political system. In his writings, Cicero also emphasized the importance of individual liberty and the protection of basic rights. He argued that individuals have certain natural rights that are not granted by the state, but rather are inherent in their humanity. These rights include the right to life, liberty, and property, and should be protected by the government. Overall, Cicero's political theory emphasizes the importance of justice, the rule of law, the common good, and individual liberty. It has had a significant influence on Western political thought and has been studied and debated for centuries.

### **Questions regarding Cicero's Political Theory:**

- 1) How did Cicero believe a virtuous and educated citizenry was essential to the success of a political system?
- 2) How did Cicero's political theory influence later thinkers and political systems?

## **China - Session 9, 23rd February, 2023**

**Group 4-Q.6-** Read pages 113 to 117 from the book *World History of Ancient Political Thought* and comment on the Qin and the Han empire and their governing policies. How did their governing strategies pacify the political climate of China as it moved out of the Warring State phase toward political stability? Why do you think the Qin Empire followed Legalism and the Han Empire followed a mixed policy of Legalism and Confucianism?

**(Asif Hossain-2241039, Tashfiq Ahsan-21101309, Nishat Subha-21301684)**

Ans: The Qin dynasty (221-206 BCE) and the Han dynasty (206 BCE-220 CE) were two of the most influential dynasties in Chinese history.

The Qin dynasty was known for its Legalist approach to governance. Legalism emphasized strict adherence to the law and punishment for even minor offenses. The Qin emperor, Shi Huangdi, centralized power and abolished feudalism, standardizing weights and measures, and building the Great Wall of China. His policies were aimed at creating a strong central government and a sense of unity among the diverse peoples of China. The Han dynasty, on the other hand, followed a mixed policy of Legalism and Confucianism. The Han emperor, Liu Bang, sought to balance the strict legalism of the Qin dynasty with the humanistic values of Confucianism. Confucianism emphasized the importance of education, morality, and social harmony. The Han dynasty also established a civil service system based on meritocracy, which allowed talented individuals from all social classes to serve in the government.

The governing strategies of both the Qin and Han empires were aimed at pacifying the political climate of China as it moved out of the Warring State phase toward political stability. The Qin dynasty's focus on centralization and uniformity helped to establish a sense of unity and reduce internal conflict. The Han dynasty's focus on Confucianism and meritocracy helped to create a stable and efficient government that was responsive to the needs of the people.

The Qin Empire followed Legalism because it was believed that strict adherence to the law and punishment for even minor offenses was necessary to maintain social order and stability.

Legalism emphasized the power of the state and the need for a strong central government to maintain order. The Qin emperor, Shi Huangdi, believed that only through strong leadership and strict laws could he unify the diverse peoples of China.

The Han Empire followed a mixed policy of Legalism and Confucianism because it was believed that a balance was necessary between strict legalism and humanistic values. The Han emperor, Liu Bang, recognized the need for a strong central government, but he also understood the importance of education, morality, and social harmony. Confucianism provided a moral and ethical framework for the government, while Legalism provided a means of enforcing the law.

In summary, the Qin and Han empires were two of the most influential dynasties in Chinese history. The Qin dynasty's Legalist approach emphasized strict adherence to the law and punishment for even minor offenses, while the Han dynasty's mixed policy of Legalism and Confucianism sought to balance strict legalism with humanistic values. Both strategies were aimed at pacifying the political climate of China and establishing political stability as the country moved out of the Warring State phase.