

Polis in the ancient greek history essay



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If we look ancient times according to the historical period, we all can see easily peoples life standards and styles change depending on the geographical, economical and governmental features of the zone that ancient people live because all kind of features are basically related to the human life. At the very beginning of the human history we can see that the ancient people lived in caves because of the conditions of their living areas such as dangerous animals or weathers. Over the time people started to live together because feeding styles and the needs of people were changed. Basically people create cities which include a lot people who are willing to live like a society. All city types show strict differences both in today's and ancient's world owing to geographical, economic and social differences and also people can called cities by using difference words like how Ä±t did in the ancient Greece. Because Greek people have different living type rather that how others live. They lived like a city which can be called as city-state because features of these cities are also different than other types of cities and we call all Greek city states as a " Polis" or plurals " Poleis". I think that the most valuable definition was created by Aristotle. According to Greek philosopher Aristotle; " Polis is the human being and a political creature". He explains " poleis" clearly because poleis have links with people who live in these cities. If we want to concentrate on the polis which means city-state, we have to know that what polis is literally. Polis literally means city in the Greek or citizenship and body of citizens. As we can see from this definition " Polis" comes from Greek language and generally academicians use " polis" to indicate the ancient Greek city-states. They are not large as today's metropolis but according to Chambers; " The Greek city, as its largest, had about 40, 000 adult citizens" (Mortimer Chambers, Barbara

Hanawalt, Theodore Rabb, Isser Woloch, Lisa Tiersten 47). These cities could not be big, because geographical features of Greek sets unbroken barriers between them. If we look the geographical map of the Greek land, we can easily see that there are a lot of mountains which force poleis to be small city states. I will explain little bit more how geographical features play important role in ancient Greek in my essay but I briefly want to say that basically all kind of polis show both differences and similarities in the ancient Greek.

Organizationally and governmentally poleis play important role in the period of Greek Renaissance because poleis create both new culture which is called as Hellenistic and system of government which includes a lot of differences from other countries in the ancient world. Because of this, I want to give brief information about polis's features. Lacking large distinctions between the rich and the poor people, kings and priests could not rise to power, and Greek people were encouraged to develop different, more democratic systems of government in the ancient times. And also we can say that all poleis were the center of artistic, commercial and political activities. In order to learn the differences of poleis, we have to know what the basic characteristics of cities in the Greek are. According to Chambers; " Greek cities usually had a large open space, the agora that served as a main public square and civic center. Although used as a public market ... "(Chambers at al. 47). As we can see from this point of Chambers in the ancient poleis, we have agoras like a center of the small cities that we have in today's world, and we have walls around the city in order to protect against the inventers and enemies. Basically all polies have templates which present their goods

such as Zeus or Poseidon etc. And also each poleis have their own symbols which can be called as coins. If we want to focus on politically poleis, we can see firstly only male citizens could vote in the decision making in each poleis. Females did not vote like man however they were protected against violence and seizure from the city state. And we have minorities in city states; there were slaves and resident aliens without any human rights. These kinds of people were seen secondary people in the ancient poleis. Because these people do not have any rights like other citizens of polis. Beside this, we have one different case which is also related to citizenships in poleis. According to Chambers; " No citizen of a polis had rights in any other polis, thus poleis were both cities and small states" (Chambers et al. 48). We can understand that if we are citizens of polis X, we do not have any rights like slaves or aliens in polis Y, and we cannot vote. These are the general structures of the poleis. We have to point out that armies have important role in each poleis because city states try to protect their own land against the enemies. According to Chambers; " Greek soldiers used war formation which can be called as phalanx, and they carried a shield on his left arm and protected his right side by standing close to his neighbor's shield" (Chambers et al. 49). It shows us how the Greek soldiers used their weapons and shields and what kind of war strategy was used in the Greek city states to for protection. I want to give information about the economies of polis in the ancient Greek in order to clearly understand what kind of features they had. Because as we know that economy plays crucial role in today's world like how it played in the ancient Greece. According to Chambers; " The basic activity was agriculture" (Chambers et al. 49). As we know that the geographical features of Greek land are not suitable to grow

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something which is about agriculture. According to Spielvogel; " Many areas in the ancient Greek, the soil is thin and rocky, basically not suitable to grow something" (Spielvogel 67). It shows us how raising agriculturally something was hard in the Greek city states. Because of this, fishing started to play major role in Greek city states and at the same time natural olive oil had undeniable place in all livelihoods, and because there were a lot of olive trees. By the way, if we want to focus on the governmental systems in the all poleis, we can see one common development which can be called as some kind of self - government by the male citizen's domination. We can see as kind of monarch in the ancient Greek city states because each Greek city states have their own governors who have hugest power in the polis because there were social classes in the ancient Greek Poleis. Firstly, we have wealthier classes who can be called as aristocrats. They had undeniable role in the system of government in Greek city states. However we had other social classes, according to Chambers; " The upper classes could no longer ignore the wishes of others" (Chambers et al. 48). Because other peoples such as Greek infantry soldiers who is called as hoplites started to have an impetus toward in self - government, because population of armed citizens could more effectively demand in order to say something in the decision making. It is so important because I think that this was the first time we can see how poorer classes start to play important role in the governments of city or country. At this point we have to point out that there were slavery classes in each Greek city states. However we have also strict differences from other part of the world in the ancient times. According to Chambers; " Greeks commonly obtained slaves through conquest of other territory, though kidnapping and even the sale of children added to recruitment"

(Chambers et al. 49). It clearly show us how the Greeks find their own slaves in the ancient Greek, and generally one ordinary slave can cost about 150 drachmas, which was the smallest coin in the ancient Greek, four month's pay for slavery according to Chambers. He asserts that at the same time more and highly skilled slaves can earn much more. Industry is also more different than other countries in the ancient world because slaves can be used differently than how other countries used in ancient times. According to Chambers; " Greece, unlike Rome, did not use gangs of slaves in agriculture, and industry was rarely more than household craft" (Chambers et al. 50). He argues that Greek slaves worked more in houses rather than how others worked outside. We can say that the only area in which slaves worked in large numbers were mining and stone carrying in the ancient Greek. In brief, these are the general features of city states which can be called as Polis or plurals Poleis. To easily understand these kinds of features of poleis, I think and believe that we have to compare two city states which were undeniably most famous two ones which are called as Sparta and Athens. Both Sparta and Athens show some similarities and differences at the same time, and we can say that these two cities were the most powerful and important ones in the ancient Greek.

First of all, in order to clearly understand the differences and similarities between Sparta and Athens, we have to know governmental differences which play important role in the ancient times. Because if we want to study on these two cities, firstly we can see very different features which is related to system of government about how Sparta was governed differently that how Athens was. According to Chambers; " In the Spartan regime, oligarchy,

or rule by small number, was tempered with some measure of democracy” (Chambers et al. 50). We can see that from this information clearly, there was oligarchy which includes kind of governing by small group of people who was called their selves as aristocrats, and we can find some basic and primitive features of democracy. We also had kings in the Sparta, but at the same time we had a council which includes only males over the age of thirty, who selected by people of city. The council had not huge power like how the kings had, but the council can criticize decision that the king of Sparta made, and they only check the power of the king. It creates political balance in the ancient Sparta. Basically I want to say that council cannot affect the final decisions which are strictly under control of kings, however they have major role in the political life of Sparta. If we want to give brief information about the system of Sparta, firstly we can say that council have people who can be called as delegates, and according to Chambers this different system works in this way; “ The public assembly included all males over the age of thirty, who elected a council of twenty-eight elders over age sixty to serve for life and to plan business for the assembly” (Chambers et al. 50). It shows us that how the delegates were selected for a kind reasons. As we argue that there was a democracy but it is limited because of the undeniable king’s power. According to Greek political philosophers; “ The Sparta was superb example of a mixed constitution, in which the kings represented the element of monarchy, the council, oligarchy, and the assembly, a kind of democracy” (Chamber et al. 50). As we can see from these features of Sparta which is politically more different than both Athens and other Greek city states have more complicated and developed system to use in case of government because Athens show a lot of similarities between other Greek city states

unlike Sparta. Secondly we have to point out that the social life and society show also a lot of differences which is unsurprisingly create very interesting life style of Spartans, and as a word of Spartan comes from group of people who live in Sparta. Socially city of Sparta shows differences like how Spartan's males live. According to Chambers; " The Spartan male dedicated most of his life, from age seven through age sixty, to soldiering" (Chambers et al. 50). Basically Spartan males live together like soldier or warriors. Because it their own culture and they believe that in the ancient Greek, there are no other groups of people who fight like a Spartans. At the same time this case generally can be subject to films like 300 Spartans, as we can know from this film which includes the war between Spartans and Persians, warriors of Sparta were both great soldiers and great family members. These Spartan's warriors love their city very deeply ant they can fight and dead in order to protect Sparta. We can say that the main educational aim was to grow physically strong children. However we cannot see similar features in Athens; they also have soldiers to protect their city however culturally they are different. The Athens can live like a soldier only when the protection time of city comes but Spartans live like soldier for their whole life. If we want to focus on females in both Athens and Sparta, we can again see a lot of differences. Basically Spartan women were more different than others. According to Chambers; " Spartan women also had life style that other Greeks found extraordinary" (Chambers et al. 50). We can see some women warriors in a given society, females were trained in some gladiator games in order to become physically strong mothers because they believe that if mothers are strong both physically and mentally, they can born very clever and strength sons. In Sparta's society, marriage also depended on women,

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previous research show that very clearly in this way; " Spartan men, living with one another, seldom visited their wives, and if a marriage was childless, a women could bear a child by a man other than her husband" (Chambers et al. 50). This culture shows us that having a strong men generation were meant to provide manpower for their army which means life style for males in the ancient Sparta. And we had war which can be called as Peloponnesian War between two important city states which are Sparta and Athens, and at the end of the this war Athens were lost. After this event in the ancient Athens, some political changes occurred, which shows that the Athens was ruled by small group of people. However it affects their governmental systems very surprisingly because a kind of democracy started to use after this period of time. As we can see that these two crucial cities can affect each other in some ways undeniably. However we can say there were some barriers between Sparta and other city - states. According to Chambers ; " Spartans were cut off from the other Greek by two mountain ranges, and they traded little with other people, even adopting an intrinsically worthless iron currency to maintain their isolation" (Chambers et al. 51). As we can see from writer's claim, we had geographical barriers which make Sparta more different than other city - states, because there was little interaction both socially and economically. And Spartan's life styles make it definitely correct because they did not say welcome all new things which can be foreigners, new styles, systems or ideas. However we cannot see like how Spartans looked for new things in Athens. We can say that they were more open minded people because they were interested in sociology, psychology, math and geometry which make them more culturally multi and developed people. Because nobody can see in Sparta like how the Athens gave importance for

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sciences to broaden their horizons, because Spartans were always interested in wars and this is how they would be more strong warriors in the ancient Greek. Briefly we have a lot of differences between Sparta and Athens, which makes this issue more attractive than other historical topics, and I believe that these all kind of differences make Greek history more detailed and enjoyable for making research.

If I take all these points into consideration I can say that without any doubt, city-states which is called as polis or plurals poleis are the most important characteristics of both Greek and the ancient world history. We can see some similarities and differences at the same time in the ancient Greek because culture was common in Greek land, and their goods were similar. Most importantly the language was one of the most important key which makes Greek people like a society. Because I believe that if there is common language in a given society, there can be great harmony like how real societies have in today's world. As we can see from all these features that I mentioned, poleis were the home of cultural, economic, social and military activities which make the civilization of Greece very interesting and successful, and nobody can deny that all poleis were importantly on the middle of the Greek civilization which includes a lot of important keys like poleis. Briefly if we want to make a research about poleis in the ancient Greek, we can see a lot of important features which include at the same time differences and similarities.

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Note: I only read articles from these websites in order to gain my knowledge about both Greece and ancient Greece and to be able to write something. I did not take any part of articles from these websites to use in my essay. I only interpret and combine my knowledge. I used only two books which are under the Works Cited title in order to make in-text citation.