

Notes on Quiz #5: Success of the Persian Empire

1. Factors that helped make the Persian Empire more successful than the Assyrians included all of the following EXCEPT:
 - a. The Persians were more successful in convincing subject peoples they shared in the benefits of empire
 - b. The Persians earned a reputation for leniency and toleration toward peoples they ruled over and respect for native customs
 - c. The empire was organized loosely, with strong local imperial officials and a system of spies watching for corruption and oppression
 - d. Cyrus declared himself to be a god, standardizing all pagan religions throughout the empire

Possible factors include the following: The Persians lowered the chance of rebellion by ruling with as little oppression as was feasible, and by tolerating local religion and culture rather than forcefully imposing theirs. — The Persian king was explicitly not a god, but through ritual, trappings, and seclusion was converted into an abstract symbol that served as a focus of identity for all the diverse and unconnected peoples of the Empire. — The Persians did not keep standing armies, which tend to exploit and oppress local populations, and did not often go to war, having extended their frontiers to natural geographic barriers, so that the Empire's subjects enjoyed a sense of peace and protectedness. — The system of satrapies was designed to ensure a sense of benevolent and protective rule in each region and culture. — The Great King had a system of spies whose role was to ensure the satraps were not corrupt or abusive. — Finally, the positive encouragement of local economies and vibrant trade within the empire brought about general prosperity, a higher standard of living, and improvements in the birth and death rates.

2. Efforts at unifying the Persian empire included
 - a. the first large-scale road system in antiquity
 - b. adoption of Egyptian hieroglyphs as a common writing system
 - c. brutal wars against distant enemies to distract people from political controversies
 - d. a new monetary standard based on lead instead of gold and silver

The Persian empire established an extensive road system that connected Susa, the Persian capital, with Sardis, an ancient city in western Anatolia. — The Persians also established a common writing system, based on the version of cuneiform used in Babylon and a standardized currency based on gold and silver. After its initial establishment under Cyrus and the annexation of Egypt under Cambyses, the Persian empire was primarily focused on strong frontiers to protect Persian dominion, rather than aggressive expansionist wars.

3. Darius invaded central Asia in order to stop destructive raiding by
 - a. the Scythians
 - b. the Hindus
 - c. the Viet Minh
 - d. a colony of angry megalizards

Persia was raided by bands of Scythians, forcing Darius to take action against them.

4. Persia conquered Egypt under the leadership of which king?
- a. Cyrus
 - b. Cambyses
 - c. Darius
 - d. Louis XIV

Though the groundwork was laid by the first king, Cyrus, Egypt was conquered under the second Great King, Cambyses.

5. The native Persian religion, Zoroastrianism, was
- a. forcibly imposed on conquered territories
 - b. known for transparency of thought and permitting no secret knowledge
 - c. dualistic, expecting Persian nobles to engage in constant ritual swordfights with each other
 - d. dualistic, viewing the universe as being in perpetual conflict and balance between two opposing gods

Zoroastrianism is a dualist religion, describing the world as the domain of two gods, one of order and light (Ahuramazda) and of disorder and darkness (Ahriman). Both gods are needed, and are set in a complementary and balanced dynamic. — The Persian state's perspective is that it stands with the side of order. Mortals choose either side; those who choose disorder and darkness (criminals, traitors, and rebels) are natural antagonists of the state.

Optional Extra Credit

EC. What reasons might the Persian king have had for releasing the Judeans to return home and rebuild in Jerusalem?

At the times, the Jews were in exile in Babylon, confined there by the Babylonians that Persia had conquered. By allowing the Jews to return to Judea, Cyrus gained a new province inhabited by loyal and grateful subjects. — In addition, Judea was in a strategic location vital to the Persian empire, on the western frontier against the Persians' rival in that area and its next target, Egypt. This helped make it possible for Cyrus's successor to conquer Egypt.