Document Based Question: Greek Democracy

Directions: The following question is based on the accompanying Documents 1-10. (The documents have been edited for the purpose of this exercise.) Write your answer on the lined pages of the Section II free-response booklet.

This question is designed to test your ability to work with and understand historical documents. Write an essay that:

- Has a relevant thesis and supports that thesis with evidence from the documents.
- Uses all of the documents.
- Analyzes the documents by grouping them in as many appropriate ways as possible. Does not simply summarize the documents individually.
- Takes into account the sources of the documents and analyzes the authors’ points of view.
- Identifies and explains the need for at least one additional type of document.
- You may refer to relevant historical information not mentioned in the documents.

Historical Background: the classical age of Greek history saw a staggering diversity of political, social, and economic organizations. One polis (city-state) during this time stood at the forefront of political innovation—Athens. During the 6th century BCE the Athenian reformer Cleisthenes created a revolutionary political solution to the cycle of tyranny and political conflict—democracy.

Question: using the following documents, analyze the relationship between Athenians and their democracy during its Golden Age. Identify an additional document and briefly explain how it would help to explain the relationship between Athenians and democracy.

Document 1
Source: Athenian vase from the middle of the 5th century (450’s) BCE done by an anonymous Athenian potter.
Document 2
Source: Cleisthenes 6th century Athenian reformer (532 BCE)

“I take the demos (people) into my party”.

Document 3
Source: Isocrates Athenian political statesmen, orator, and writer. (346 BCE)

“For those who directed the state in the time of Solon and Cleisthenes did not establish a polity (political system) which in name merely was hailed as the most impartial and the mildest of governments, while in practice showing itself the opposite to those who lived under it, nor one which trained the citizens in such fashion that they looked upon insolence as democracy, lawlessness as liberty, impudence of speech as equality, and licence to do what they pleased as happiness, but rather a polity which detested and punished such men and by so doing made all the citizens better and wiser.”

Document 4
Source: Aeschines Athenian political statesmen, orator, and writer (330 BCE)

"It is acknowledged, namely, that there are in the world three forms of government, autocracy, oligarchy, and democracy: autocracies and oligarchies are administered according to the tempers of their lords, but democratic states according to established laws. [5] And be assured, fellow citizens, that in a democracy it is the laws that guard the person of the citizen and the constitution of the state, whereas the despot and the oligarch find their protection in suspicion and in armed guards. Men, therefore, who administer an oligarchy, or any government based on inequality, must be on their guard against those who attempt revolution by the law of force; but you, who have a government based upon equality and law, must guard against those whose words violate the laws or whose lives have defied them; for then only will you be strong, when you cherish the laws, and when the revolutionary attempts of lawless men shall have ceased."

Document 5
Source: Thucydides Athenian warrior, statesmen, and historian. Thucydides was later exiled by the democratic Athens during the Peloponnesian War during which time many of his writings were completed. 410 BCE

“Our constitution does not copy the laws of neighboring states; we are rather a pattern to others than imitators ourselves. Its administration favors the many instead of the few; this is why it is called a democracy. If we look to the laws, they afford equal justice to all in their private differences; if no social standing, advancement in public life falls to reputation for capacity, class considerations not being allowed to interfere with merit; nor again does poverty bar the way, if a man is able to serve the state, he is not hindered by the obscurity of his condition. The freedom which we enjoy in our government extends also to our ordinary life.”
Document 6
Source: Herodotus Greek historian, Athenian citizen 415 BCE

“Nothing could be found better than the one man, the best man in governance”

Document 7
Source: Anonymous treatise from 330 BCE commonly referred to as Psuedo-Xenophon

"Now, as concerning the Polity of the Athenians, and the type or manner of constitution which they have chosen, I praise it not, in so far as the very choice involves the welfare of the baser folk as opposed to that of the better class. I repeat, I withhold my praise so far; but, given the fact that this is the type agreed upon, I propose to show that they set about its preservation in the right way; and that those other transactions in connection with it, which are looked upon as blunders by the rest of the Hellenic world, are the reverse.”

Document 8
Source: Plato’s Republic. Plato was an Athenian philosopher and contemporary of Socrates. (359 BCE)

The truth is that the State in which the rulers are most reluctant to govern is always the best and most quietly governed, and the State in which they are most eager, the worst. Until philosophers are kings, or the kings and princes of this world have the spirit and power of philosophy, and political greatness and wisdom meet in one, . . . cities will never have rest from their evils . . .

Document 9
Source: Aristotle’s Politics. Aristotle was an Athenian philosopher and scientist. Aristotle was a contemporary of Plato’s. (326 BCE)

Tyranny is the reverse of constitutions. Tyranny gives people arbitrary power of an individual . . . responsible to no one, [which] governs . . . with a view to its own advantage, not to that of its subjects, and therefore against their will... No freeman, if he can escape from it, will endure such a government... “true forms of government will of necessity have just laws, and perverted forms of government will have unjust laws.”

Document 10
Source: Aristotle’s Politics. (326 BCE)

If liberty and equality, as is thought by some are chiefly to be found in democracy, they will be best attained when all persons alike share in the government to the utmost.
"To me it seems that in those things which Megabyzos said with regard to the multitude he spoke rightly, but in those which he said with regard to the rule of a few, not rightly: for whereas there are three things set before us, and each is supposed to be the best in its own kind, that is to say a good popular government, and the rule of a few, and thirdly the rule of one, I say that this last is by far superior to the others; for nothing better can be found than the rule of an individual man of the best kind; seeing that using the best judgment he would be guardian of the multitude without reproach; and resolutions directed against enemies would so best be kept secret.