

POLIS PROFILE: CORINTH - 1

The Greek polis

Most Greeks in the classical era of their history (700-300 B.C.) lived in a city-state called a *polis*. A polis was a city with a fortified region in which several thousand Greeks lived and to which they paid allegiance. Most of these city-states were fiercely independent and offered their citizens a full and abundant life. To most Greeks banishment from their polis was worse than death. (Socrates had the choice!) A strategic hill called an *acropolis* ("above the city") was the focal point for Greek life. It was a defensive position when the city was under attack; it was a place to discuss affairs of state; and it served as a shrine to honor and worship Greece's many gods and goddesses.



About your polis

Your allegiance is to the polis of Corinth; therefore, you are called a Corinthian. Be proud of your city-state, for over the years Corinth had a glorious history, even though it never reached the power and prestige of Athens or Sparta. From the beginning, however, Corinth was an important polis in Hellas. Geography made your location near-perfect and enviable, for it lies on the western part of the isthmus which separates the Peloponnesus (Sparta) and the Attica peninsula (Athens), ensuring its preeminence as a trade and cultural center. Moreover, it had large navigable harbors in two gulfs, and the best natural acropolis in all of Greece, the Acrocorinthus, a 2,000-foot fortress with inexhaustible springs.

Though Corinth's long history doesn't have a long list of famous history makers, it nonetheless has men who deserve a special place for advancing the glory of Corinth. In 655 B.C. a good tyrant named Cypselus took control of the government and brought prosperity and order to the polis. His son, the ruthless and erratic Periander, became dictator for 40 years as he brought more changes. Periander established more law and order, encouraged Corinth business, patronized literature and art, and made Corinth one of Greece's foremost city-states. He further lowered taxes, set up a coinage, and solved the city's unemployment problems with huge public work programs. Such bold experimentation produced critics and enemies, however, and Periander soon chose a life of seclusion surrounding himself with bodyguards. He fell into madness, killed one of his mistresses, and banished his son. Yet, his overall legacy was not forgotten after his death. Greeks considered him one of the "Seven Wise Men of Ancient Greece."



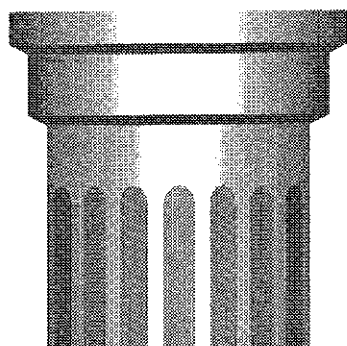
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If geography favored Corinth in so many ways by blessing it with a great seaport and commercial center, it plagued the city in the same way. Sailors from all over the Mediterranean came to Corinth on trading ships. Before long the city-state gained an unsavory reputation from its legions of prostitutes who roamed the city. Aphrodite, the love goddess, became an important deity to honor. In 480 B.C. Corinth had a population of 50,000 free citizens and 60,000 slaves. All of them seemed to be absorbed in pleasure-seeking, whether it was for flesh or for gold. Because of this fact, Corinth produced very few cultural leaders, with the exception of Eumelus, an eighth-century poet. However, Corinth did earn accolades for its pottery, bronze statues, and vase painters.

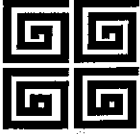
Compared to the heavyweights, Athens and Sparta, Corinth was clearly of lesser importance. While it had a glorious past, it just wasn't blessed by the gods to be the "alpha" of Greek poleis. But here's your chance, as Corinthians, to even the score and beat both Athens, Sparta, and two other city-states in head-to-head competition.

Corinthian goals in this simulation

1. Try your best to win as many contests, events, and festival categories as you can. It is not written anywhere that you Corinthians have to come up short to Athens and Sparta, as did your predecessors. It will, however, take a supreme effort to beat the best of Greece. Arete!
2. Create a clever logo for Corinth and try to have all your citizens dress alike. Encourage each other to be in class each day on time. Compose a chant or song to perform each day.



Show your pride
in being
Corinthians!



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3. Do your best, too, to ensure that Athens and Sparta, perennial winners, don't win in this simulation. Either Corinth, Argos, or Megara can win, but never those effeminate Athenians or animalistic Spartans. Do what it takes—but be honest about it—to win and prevent Athens or Sparta from claiming their supremacy. Get an edge on upcoming events. Practice at home, at lunch, before and after school. Be the best at your events and tasks. Corinth needs to regain a glorious past.
4. Try to win the Acropolis-building activity. Since Corinth had the best natural hill-fortress, try to duplicate it in the contest.

How Corinthians should act

1. Show unity with your logo, chant, and outfits. Try to come to class together. Nametags might show your bonding. Use the letter C (Gamma) to your advantage.
2. Be cooperative at all times, especially to those in charge, including your teacher.
3. Don't get rattled by Athenian productivity or Spartan aggressiveness. Just be Corinthians who work efficiently and consistently.