

h: The History and Legacy of the Ancient Greek City

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Synopsis

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Modern perceptions of Classical Greece are almost invariably based on Athens and Sparta, but Corinth was also a key city-state in antiquity. When St. Paul visited in 51 CE, the Corinth he saw was actually a relatively new city, having been built a little over 100 years previously, but he found a city five times larger than Athens at that time and one which was the capital of a prosperous province. However, ancient Corinth had actually been founded in the 10th century BCE and was, for most of its history, the richest port and the largest city in all of Greece. Corinth had a population in excess of 90,000 in 400 BCE, but the Romans leveled this original city in 146 BCE, killing all the male inhabitants and selling the women and children into slavery. The few that survived fled to Delos, and for the next 100 years the site was deserted until Julius Caesar rebuilt it in 44 BCE.

The story of the rise and fall of this powerful polis is intriguing, as are the reasons for ancient Corinth's reputation throughout the Greek world for its licentiousness. One of the Greek words for fornication was korinthiazomai, and while the city's association with sacred prostitutes scandalized contemporary Athenians in particular, it also made the city a favorite destination for many Greeks. Corinth was also where so much of what became recognized as Greek art and architecture was first developed, and it was here that Eastern influence on Greece can first and most obviously be detected.

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