

## **Strabo, Geography 8.6.20-23**

Strabo lived ca. 63 BC to AD 24. He was a historian, geographer and philosopher. He travelled around the ancient world and described what he saw in addition to borrowing from others. His Geography contains 17 books. The following excerpts are from his Geography book 8.

### **The Wealth of Corinth**

[8.6.20] Corinth is called "wealthy" because of its commerce, since it is situated on the Isthmus and is master of two harbors, of which the one leads straight to Asia, and the other to Italy; and it makes easy the exchange of merchandise from both countries that are so far distant from each other. And just as in early times the Strait of Sicily was not easy to navigate, so also the high seas, and particularly the sea beyond Maleae, were not, on account of the contrary winds; and hence the proverb, "But when you double Maleae, forget your home." At any rate, it was a welcome alternative, for the merchants both from Italy and from Asia, to avoid the voyage to Maleae and to land their cargoes here. And also the duties on what by land was exported from the Peloponnesus and what was imported to it fell to those who held the keys. And to later times this remained ever so. But to the Corinthians of later times still greater advantages were added, for also the Isthmian Games, which were celebrated there, were wont to draw crowds of people.

### **The Early History of Corinth**

And the Bacchiadae, a rich and numerous and illustrious family, became tyrants of Corinth, and held their empire for nearly two hundred years, and without disturbance reaped the fruits of the commerce; and when Cypselus overthrew these, he himself became tyrant, and his house endured for three generations; and an evidence of the wealth of this house is the offering which Cypselus dedicated at Olympia, a huge statue of beaten gold. Again, Demaratus, one of the men who had been in power at Corinth, fleeing from the seditions there, carried with him so much wealth from his home to Tyrrhenia that not only he himself became the ruler of the city that admitted him, but his son was made king of the Romans.

### **The Cult of Aphrodite**

And the temple of Aphrodite was so rich that it owned more than a thousand temple slaves, courtesans, whom both men and women had dedicated to the goddess. And therefore it was also on account of these women that the city was crowded with people and grew rich; for instance, the ship captains freely squandered their money, and hence the proverb, "Not for every man is the voyage to Corinth." Moreover, it is recorded that a certain courtesan said to the woman who reproached her with the charge that she did not like to work or touch wool: "Yet, such as I am, in this short time I have taken down three webs."

### **Description of Corinth**

[8.6.21] The situation of the city, as described by Hieronymus and Eudoxus and others, and from what I myself saw after the recent restoration of the city by the Romans, is about as follows: A lofty mountain with a perpendicular height of three stadia and one half, and an ascent of as much as thirty stadia, ends in a sharp peak; it is called Acrocorinthus, and its northern side is the steepest; and beneath it lies the city in a level, trapezium-shaped place close to the very base of the Acrocorinthus. Now the circuit of the city itself used to be as much as forty stadia, and all of it that was unprotected by the mountain was enclosed by a wall; and even the mountain itself, the Acrocorinthus, used to be comprehended within the circuit of this wall wherever wall-building was possible, and when I went up the mountain the ruins of the encircling wall were plainly visible. And so the whole perimeter amounted to about eighty-five stadia. On its other sides the mountain is less steep, though here too it rises to a considerable height and is conspicuous all round.

### **The Summit of the Acrocorinth**

Now the summit has a small temple of Aphrodite; and below the summit is the spring Peirene, which, although it has no overflow, is always full of transparent, potable water. And they say that the spring at the base of the mountain is the joint result of pressure from this and other subterranean veins of water--a spring which flows out into the city in such quantity that it affords a fairly large supply of water. And there is a good supply of wells throughout the city, as also, they say, on the Acrocorinthus; but I myself did not see the latter wells. At any rate, when Euripides says, "I am come, having left Acrocorinthus that is washed on all sides, the sacred hill-city of Aphrodite," one should take "washed on all sides" as meaning in the depths of the mountain, since wells and subterranean pools extend through it, or else should assume that in early times Peirene was wont to rise over the surface and flow down the sides of the mountain. And here, they say, Pegasus, a winged horse which sprang from the neck of the Gorgon Medusa when her head was cut off, was caught while drinking by Bellerophon. And the same horse, it is said, caused Hippucrene to spring up on Helicon when he struck with his hoof the rock that lay below that mountain. And at the foot of Peirene is the Sisypheium, which preserves no inconsiderable ruins of a certain temple, or royal palace, made of white marble.

### **View from the Acrocorinth**

And from the summit, looking towards the north, one can view Parnassus and Helicon--lofty, snow-clad mountains--and the Crisaeon Gulf, which lies at the foot of the two mountains and is surrounded by Phocis, Boeotia, and Megaris, and by the parts of Corinthia and Sicyonia which lie across the gulf opposite to Phocis, that is, towards the west. And above all these countries lie the Oneian Mountains, as they are called, which extend as far as Boeotia and Cithaeron from the Sceironian Rocks, that is, from the road that leads along these rocks towards Attica.

### **The Harbors of Corinth**

[8.6.22] The beginning of the seaboard on the two sides is, on the one side, Lechaem, and, on the other, Cenchreae, a village and a harbor distant about seventy stadia from Corinth. Now this latter they use for the trade from Asia, but Lechaem for that from Italy. Lechaem lies beneath the city, and does not contain many residences; but long walls about twelve stadia in length have been built on both sides of the road that leads to Lechaem.

### **Description of the Isthmus**

The shore that extends from here to Pagae in Megaris is washed by the Corinthian Gulf; it is concave, and with the shore on the other side, at Schoenus, which is near Cenchreae, it forms the "Diolcus." In the interval between Lechaem and Pagae there used to be, in early times, the oracle of the Acraean Hera; and here, too, is Olmiae, the promontory that forms the gulf in which are situated Oenoe and Pagae, the latter a stronghold of the Megarians and Oenoe of the Corinthians. From Cenchreae one comes to Schoenus, where is the narrow part of the isthmus, I mean the "Diolcus"; and then one comes to Crommyonia. Off this shore lie the Saronic and Eleusinian Gulfs, which in a way are the same, and border on the Hermionic Gulf. On the Isthmus is also the temple of the Isthmian Poseidon, in the shade of a grove of pinetrees, where the Corinthians used to celebrate the Isthmian Games. Crommyon is a village in Corinthia, though in earlier times it was in Megaris; and in it is laid the scene of the myth of the Crommyonian sow, which, it is said, was the mother of the Caledonian boar; and, according to tradition, the destruction of this sow was one of the labors of Theseus.

### **The City of Tenea**

Tenea, also, is in Corinthia, and in it is a temple of the Teneatan Apollo; and it is said that most of the colonists who accompanied Archias, the leader of the colonists to Syracuse, set out from there, and that afterwards Tenea prospered more than the other settlements, and finally even had a government of its own, and, revolting from the Corinthians, joined the Romans, and endured after the destruction of Corinth. And mention is also made of an oracle that was given to a certain man from Asia, who enquired whether it was better to change his home to Corinth: "Blest is Corinth, but Tenea for me." But in ignorance some pervert this as follows: "but Tegea for me!" And it is said that Polybus reared Oedipus here. And it seems, also, that there is a kinship between the peoples of Tenedos and Tenea, through Tennes the son of Cycnus, as Aristotle says; and the similarity in the worship of Apollo among the two peoples affords strong indications of such kinship.

### **The Fall of Corinth**

[8.6.23] The Corinthians, when they were subject to Philip, not only sided with him in his quarrel with the Romans, but individually behaved so contemptuously towards the Romans that certain persons ventured to pour down filth upon the Roman ambassadors when passing by their house. For this and other offences, however, they soon paid the penalty, for a considerable army was

sent thither, and the city itself was razed to the ground by Leucius Mummius; and the other countries as far as Macedonia became subject to the Romans, different commanders being sent into different countries; but the Sicyonians obtained most of the Corinthian country.

### **The Plundering of Corinth**

Polybius, who speaks in a tone of pity of the events connected with the capture of Corinth, goes on to speak of the disregard shown by the army for the works of art and votive offerings; for he says that he was present and saw paintings that had been flung to the ground and saw the soldiers playing dice on these. Among the paintings he names that of Dionysus by Aristeides, to which, according to some writers, the saying, "Nothing in comparison with the Dionysus," referred; and also the painting of Heracles in torture in the robe of Deianeira. Now I have not seen the latter, but I saw the Dionysus, a most beautiful work, on the walls of the temple of Ceres in Rome; but when recently the temple was burned, the painting perished with it. And I may almost say that the most and best of the other dedicatory offerings at Rome came from there; and the cities in the neighborhood of Rome also obtained some; for Mummius, being magnanimous rather than fond of art, as they say, readily shared with those who asked. And when Leucullus built the Temple of Good Fortune and a portico, he asked Mummius for the use of the statues which he had, saying that he would adorn the temple with them until the dedication and then give them back. However, he did not give them back, but dedicated them to the goddess, and then bade Mummius to take them away if he wished. But Mummius took it lightly, for he cared nothing about them, so that he gained more repute than the man who dedicated them.

### **The Refounding of Corinth**

Now after Corinth had remained deserted for a long time, it was restored again, because of its favorable position, by the deified Caesar, who colonized it with people that belonged for the most part to the freedmen class. And when these were removing the ruins and at the same time digging open the graves, they found numbers of terra-cotta reliefs, and also many bronze vessels. And since they admired the workmanship they left no grave unransacked; so that, well supplied with such things and disposing of them at a high price, they filled Rome with Corinthian "mortuaries," for thus they called the things taken from the graves, and in particular the earthenware. Now at the outset the earthenware was very highly prized, like the bronzes of Corinthian workmanship, but later they ceased to care much for them, since the supply of earthen vessels failed and most of them were not even well executed.

### **Conclusion**

The city of the Corinthians, then, was always great and wealthy, and it was well equipped with men skilled both in the affairs of state and in the craftsman's arts; for both here and in Sicyon the arts of painting and modeling and all such arts of the craftsman flourished most. The city had territory, however, that was not very fertile, but rifted and rough; and from this fact all have

called Corinth "beetling," and use the proverb, "Corinth is both beetle-browed and full of hollows."