



# POLIS PROFILE: MEGARA - 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.

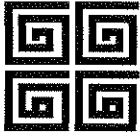
## About your polis

Your loyalty in GREEKS is to the polis of Megara; therefore, you are known as Megarians. Be proud that you are a Greek and that you come from such a respected city-state. In many way, your history and affairs of state are similar to neighboring Corinth. Megara, like Corinth, was a commercial trade center at the entrance to the Peloponnesus Peninsula with a port on either side of the isthmus on which it is located. Megarians could bargain with armies and levy tolls upon trade ships. Because of this geographical setting, its thriving textile industry, and its citizens' love of drachmae (money), Megara prospered and reached greatness in the seventh and sixth centuries before Christ. During this time, Megara colonized all over the eastern Mediterranean and even founded Byzantium on the Bosphorus entrance to the Black Sea. Later in the medieval era this city would be called Constantinople. Today it is called Istanbul.

Although wealth poured into Megara, it never was properly distributed. In 630 B.C., one powerful aristocrat, Theagenes, appeared to denounce the rich and lead the many poor. When he finally overthrew the government to become a tyrant, he freed the serfs, humbled the rich, and, as usual for his type, patronized the arts and letters of his polis. As so often happens, however, he was deposed by the unhappy rich. A revolution renewed the democratic spirit of Theagenes; property of the rich was confiscated and reforms instituted.

The Megarian poet Theognis was spectator to most of these changes and reflected what he witnessed in his better poems. When the revolution came, Theognis was exiled, since he was one of the rich under attack who lost his property. For the next several decades,





## POLIS PROFILE: MEGARA - 2

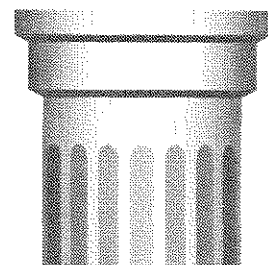
Megara maintained its position as one of Hellas' main trade centers, and, while the greatness of the sixth century was never repeated, Megara was destined to play a leading role in upcoming Greek history.

As relations between Athens and Sparta soured in the 430s B.C., Megara refused to support Athens as that powerful polis aggressively pursued an imperial policy of expansion. When Megarians did take sides, Athenian leader Pericles ordered all Megarian products excluded from the wharves and markets of Attica. When Sparta was called in to get Athens to rescind the boycott, Athens refused and Sparta promptly declared war. What followed for the next 30 years was the disastrous Peloponnesian War. At this war's end Megara received a 10-year visit from Athens' premier philosopher, Plato. Megara apparently offered more freedom for an individual than Athens did.

### **Megarian goals in this simulation**

1. Since you have pride in Megara's past achievements, continue this tradition. Therefore, make it a goal to win GREEKS, that is, work very hard to capture as many events as you can and do all the tasks you are asked to do. The result will be more HELLASPOINTS for your city-state and a new vigorous respect for Megara from the other poleis.
2. Megarians in the sixth century were boastful of their textile industry, which was the envy of Greeks all over the eastern Mediterranean. In keeping this tradition, make it a Megarian goal to have the sharpest, most tasteful costumes of all the city-states. Get together to plan and make them. Zero in on the fact that only Megarians will look like *real* Greeks.
3. A goal, too, should be to beat both Athens and Sparta, the dominant poleis in your time. Concentrate on who their "star" citizens are in specific events, and then work—*really work*—to beat them. Since Corinth and Argos will have similar goals to surpass the "Big 2," you might cooperate with both these city-states in this particular objective.

Show your pride  
in being  
Megarians!





## POLIS PROFILE: MEGARA - 3

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4. Try to have perfect attendance. Avoid flimsy reasons for being absent or being late to class. Get a list of telephone numbers of Megarians in your group and call them at home if they are absent or need inspiration to complete individual tasks.
5. Keep very accurate records of Hellaspoinst earned. Megarians are looked up to as the accountant of the Hellenic world, so no mistakes!

### **How Megarians should act**

1. Always show pride and loyalty toward Megara. Uniformed outfits will help, but try to fabricate a clever logo which depicts Megarian life. Create at the same time a Megarian chant, poem, or song to use at appropriate times. Develop a secret salute—a handshake known only to Megarians.
2. Be courteous to all Hellenes throughout the simulation. Be especially supportive and helpful to the teacher, your archon (leader) and strategoi for the day, and other Megarians who might be uninspired or confused.
3. Cheer heartily for Megarians in the throes of stiff competition. Acknowledge individual accomplishments by Megarians with some sort of hurrah!