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**Economic Development in Archaic Greece - Challenges and Strategies in
an Age of Revolutionary Change:
The Case of Corinth**

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Corinth presents an appropriate vantage point for the thorough study of the evolution of ancient Greece from the Geometric era beginnings to the classical age. This evolution constitutes the making of a miracle. The dynamic principle behind it all was the Revolution of Logos, the discovery of a potent rationality reflecting the order of things itself, the structure of reality and the law of its development, the pattern and rhythm of its variation in space and time. To adjust in broader lines and to fine tune the mind in thought and action to that objective rationality freedom was essentially required. For it is under freedom and in the spirit of antagonism that the necessary but spontaneous self-adjustment of any human system can take place, an arrangement which may safeguard its adequate correlation to hard reality. Freedom makes reason pragmatic. And it was in the city of maximal freedom individual and political that the highest success of the rational revolution occurred, in Athens that the miracle of classicalness was defined in universal history.

Some cities started earlier along the road to the highest achievements to which the Greek Revolution paved the way, and some moved further. Their differential response to the same set of challenges is extremely instructive, and its investigation pregnant with mighty practical lessons.

Corinth was among the earliest. Her geographical position destined her for major affairs. She controlled the land entrance to Peloponnesus. With two ports, one in the Corinthian and the other in the Saronic gulf, she was looking simultaneously to the Aegean Sea and the East on the one hand, to the Ionian Sea and the West on the other. Already in the second half of the 8th century B.C. she founded two important colonies, Syracuse in Sicily and Corcyra in Corfu.

Whether or not the main reason behind this early colonization was to relieve social pressures generated by a deteriorating land to people coefficient and increased differentials in land owning, already these colonies were designed with trade interests in mind as well. They lied on the route from Greece to Italy and beyond. Very early evidence of significant Corinthian presence in Pithicussae (off Napoli) bespeaks of commercial ties with Etruria in Western Italy, which are also independently evidenced. And in fact a second series of foundations some one hundred plus years later fits well with the existence of some such trade oriented master plan. The series starts from the narrowest straits of the Corinthian Gulf at Antirrio and goes upwards to Corfu and even further to the North. Molykreion, Chalcis, Leucas, Anaktorion, Ambracia, Apollonia, Epidamnus. That was the standard route to Italy with two important offshoots. Ambracia, at the innermost niche of the Ambracian Gulf, and Epidamnus in Illyria were clearly destined to secure the Italian route from threats coming from the less civilized tribes to the NorthWest of Greece and to promote inland communications and trade, too. In the Eastern Waters of the Aegean Archipelago, Corinth planted Poteidea on the neck of the Pallene chersonesus in Chalcidice, providing access to the rough materials of the interior of Macedonia and Thrace (timber, gold, silver, pitch, leather). Similarly Corinthian export and import trade was not restricted to the areas where she planted full colonies. She had trading posts to many more places in a very widespread area around the Mediterranean Sea. And archaeological evidence confirms that her ware was to be found in large quantities at significant sites all over the coastal line of the all but closed sea.

Quite apart from strong export and import trade, Corinth projected herself as a major commercial hub by utilizing the advantages of her position at the Isthmus. A brisk carrying trade was early developed. Already at the beginning of the 6th century B.C. Periander constructed the Diolkos to facilitate and promote it. The construction itself, its functional details and carrying capacity, is an important object of investigation.

Corinth shared with a number of other city-states (Chalcis and Eretria in Euboea, Aegina, Megara) the early diversification of her economy, from its originally exclusive agricultural basis to manufacture and commerce. Diversification has occurred also within the agricultural sector, with the development of systematic arboriculture, horticulture, viniculture, apiculture. As a result, Corinth needed to import staple provisions like corn, despite her possession of a renownedly fertile plain (which she shared on the other hand with Sicyon).

Furthermore, tourist industry contributed considerably to Corinth's economy. In fact, Corinth cultivated a particular aspect of her tourist economy, by capitalizing on a peculiar religious aspect of her societal life, namely the cult of Aphrodite which postulated the existence of hundreds, perhaps thousands, of hierodules (sacred prostitutes). Thus Corinth made use of that feature as a comparative advantage in offering pleasure tourism on a large scale. We can imagine that she must have also been a gambling resort. She was in any case the destination par excellence of sailors, skippers and merchants, who flooded there for business and pleasure.

Corinth maintained a strong naval force all along as a prerequisite for the freedom of trade. She destroyed piracy and secured the safety of the sea (primarily) and land commercial routes. An active foreign policy in the crucial years of the Cypselid tyranny (from say 657/6 to 583/2 B.C.) supported the positive role of Corinth towards the establishment of a stable international system

economically moderately progressive but politically restrained, a balance of power basically system dexterously tilted to the satisfaction of Corinth's special interests.

Despite all these remarkable and early advantages, Corinth did not evolve to be what Athens became. This is an important object of inquiry. It turns out to be a question of the degree of freedom (or, in other words, of the level of constraints, i.e. of the heaviness and artificiality of its regulatory framework) under which human systems operate. Although the oligarchic and tyrannical systems in Corinth must have allowed considerable degree of freedom to individual action, still, we may gauge from the level, character and history of the political freedom in Corinth how burdensome in effect the regulatory framework for human activity was. For if the enterprising segments of society do not definitively participate in the control of the legal and administrative framework, they will not exercise their entrepreneurial spirit to the utmost of their power of rational calculation of risks and profits, with the inevitable result that overall efficiency will be correspondingly reduced. Corinthian society, for all its cosmopolitan characteristics, seems to have been a fundamentally conservative one. The early feudal oligarchy was less antagonistic than in other Greek city-states by being wielded by one family or clan, the Bacchiadae. The following tyranny was enlightened enough, although there are some worrying signs, esp. if one compares it with the Peisistratid one in Athens. In any case, and probably as a result of its relatively unprogressive character, its fall did not ushered the great age of liberty as it happened with the Athenian democracy, but only provided a reactionary relapse into a (probably moderate or mild) oligarchy once more. The Peisistratid age was precisely the time when Athens started to decisively overstep Corinth in the economic sphere. A comparative study of the two (and other) cases (Athens and Corinth) with regard to the inner connection between economic development, economic freedom and political liberty, will be revealing.

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