

# Polis

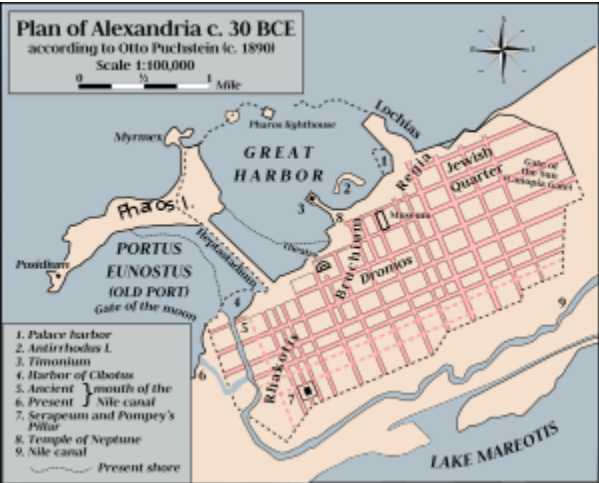
**Polis** (/ˈpɒlɪs/; Greek: πόλις pronounced [pólis]), plural **poleis** (/ˈpɒleɪz/, πόλεις [póleːs]) literally means "city" in Greek. It defined the administrative and religious city center, as distinct from the rest of the city.<sup>[1]</sup> It can also signify a body of citizens. In modern historiography, *polis* is normally used to indicate the ancient Greek city-states, such as Classical Athens and its contemporaries, and thus is often translated as "city-state". These cities consisted of a fortified city centre (*asty*) built on an acropolis or harbor and controlled surrounding territories of land (*khôra*).

The Ancient Greek city-state developed during the Archaic period as the ancestor of city, state, and citizenship and persisted (though with decreasing influence) well into Roman times, when the equivalent Latin word was *civitas*, also meaning "citizenhood", while *municipium* applied to a non-sovereign local entity. The term "city-state", which originated in English (alongside the German *Stadtstaat*), does not fully translate the Greek term. The *poleis* were not like other primordial ancient city-states like Tyre or Sidon, which were ruled by a king or a small oligarchy, but rather political entities ruled by their bodies of citizens. The traditional view of archaeologists—that the appearance of urbanization at excavation sites could be read as a sufficient index for the development of a *polis*—was criticised by François Polignac in 1984<sup>[2][a]</sup> and has not been taken for granted in recent decades: the *polis* of Sparta, for example, was established in a network of villages. The term *polis*, which in archaic Greece meant "city", changed with the development of the governance center in the city to signify "state" (which included its surrounding villages). Finally, with the emergence of a notion of citizenship among landowners, it came to describe the entire body of citizens. The ancient Greeks did not always refer to Athens, Sparta, Thebes, and other *poleis* as such; they often spoke instead of the Athenians, Lacedaemonians, Thebans and so on. The body of citizens came to be the most important meaning of the term *polis* in ancient Greece.

The Greek term that specifically meant the totality of urban buildings and spaces is *asty* (ἄστυ).



Acropolis of Athens, a noted *polis* of classical Greece



Ancient Alexandria in c. 30 BC, a *polis* of Hellenistic Egypt



Theatre of ancient Syracuse, a classical *polis*

## Contents

<b>The <i>polis</i> in Ancient Greek philosophy</b>
<b>Archaic and classical <i>poleis</i></b>
<b>Hellenistic and Roman</b>
<b>Derived words</b>
Names
Polis, Cyprus

Other cities

See also

Notes

References

Further reading

External links

## The *polis* in Ancient Greek philosophy

Plato analyzes the *polis* in *The Republic*, whose Greek title, Πολιτεία (Politeia), itself derives from the word *polis*. The best form of government of the *polis* for Plato is the one that leads to the common good. The philosopher king is the best ruler because, as a philosopher, he is acquainted with the Form of the Good. In Plato's analogy of the ship of state, the philosopher king steers the *polis*, as if it were a ship, in the best direction.

Books II–IV of *The Republic* are concerned with Plato addressing the makeup of an ideal *polis*. In *The Republic*, Socrates is concerned with the two underlying principles of any society: mutual needs and differences in aptitude. Starting from these two principles, Socrates deals with the economic structure of an ideal *polis*. According to Plato, there are five main economic classes of any *polis*: producers, merchants, sailors/shipowners, retail traders, and wage earners. Along with the two principles and five economic classes, there are four virtues. The four virtues of a "just city" include wisdom, courage, moderation, and justice. With all of these principles, classes, and virtues, it was believed that a "just city" (*polis*) would exist.

## Archaic and classical *poleis*

The basic and indicating elements of a *polis* are:

- Self-governance, autonomy, and independence (city-state)
- Agora: the social hub and financial marketplace, on and around a centrally located, large open space
- Acropolis: the citadel, inside which a temple had replaced the erstwhile Mycenaean *anáktoron* (palace) or *mégaron* (hall)
- Greek urban planning and architecture, public, religious, and private (see Hippodamian plan)
- Temples, altars, and sacred precincts: one or more are dedicated to the *poliouchos*, the patron deity of the city; each *polis* kept its own particular festivals and customs (*Political religion*, as opposed to the individualized religion of later antiquity). Priests and priestesses, although often drawn from certain families by tradition, did not form a separate collegiality or class; they were ordinary citizens who on certain occasions were called to perform certain functions.
- Gymnasia
- Theatres
- Walls: used for protection from invaders
- Coins: minted by the city, and bearing its symbols
- Colonies being founded by the oikistes of the metropolis
- Political life: it revolved around the sovereign Ekklesia (the assembly of all adult male citizens for deliberation and voting), the standing boule and other civic or judicial councils, the archons and other officials or magistrates elected either by vote or by lot, clubs, etc., and sometimes punctuated by stasis (civil strife between parties, factions or socioeconomic classes, e.g., aristocrats, oligarchs, democrats, tyrants, the wealthy, the poor, large, or small landowners, etc.). They practised direct democracy.
- Publication of state functions: laws, decrees, and major fiscal accounts were published, and criminal and civil trials were also held in public.

- **Synoecism, conurbation:** Absorption of nearby villages and countryside, and the incorporation of their tribes into the substructure of the *polis*. Many of a *polis*' citizens lived in the suburbs or countryside. The Greeks regarded the *polis* less as a territorial grouping than as a religious and political association: while the *polis* would control territory and colonies beyond the city itself, the *polis* would not simply consist of a geographical area. Most cities were composed of several tribes or *phylai*, which were in turn composed of *phratries* (common-ancestry lineages), and finally *géneai* (extended families).
- **Social classes and citizenship:** Dwellers of the *polis* were generally divided into four types of inhabitants, with status typically determined by birth:
  - Citizens with full legal and political rights: that is, free adult men born legitimately of citizen parents. They had the right to vote, be elected into office, and bear arms, and the obligation to serve when at war.
  - Citizens without formal political rights but with full legal rights: the citizens' female relatives and underage children, whose political rights and interests were meant to be represented by their adult male relatives.
  - Citizens of other *poleis* who chose to reside elsewhere (the metics, μέτοικοι, *métōikoi*, literally "transdwellers"): though free-born and possessing full rights in their place of origin, they had full legal rights but no political rights in their place of residence. Metics could not vote or be elected to office. A liberated slave was likewise given a metic's status if he chose to remain in the polis, at least that was the case in Athens.<sup>[3]</sup> They otherwise had full personal and property rights, albeit subject to taxation.
  - **Slaves:** chattel in full possession of their owner, and with no privileges other than those that their owner would grant (or revoke) at will.

## Hellenistic and Roman

During the Hellenistic period, which marks the decline of the classical *polis*, the following cities remained independent: Sparta until 195 BC after the War against Nabis. Achaean League is the last example of original Greek city-state federations (dissolved after the Battle of Corinth (146 BC)). The Cretan city-states continued to be independent (except Itanus and Arsinoe, which lay under Ptolemaic influence) until the conquest of Crete in 69 BC by Rome. The cities of Magna Graecia, with the notable examples of Syracuse and Tarentum, were conquered by Rome in the late 3rd century BC. There are also some cities with recurring independence like Samos, Priene, Miletus, and Athens.<sup>[4]</sup> A remarkable example of a city-state that flourished during this era is Rhodes, through its merchant navy,<sup>[5]</sup> until 43 BC and the Roman conquest.

The Hellenistic colonies and cities of the era retain some basic characteristics of a *polis*, except the status of independence (city-state) and the political life. There is self-governance (like the new Macedonian title politarch), but under a ruler and king. The political life of the classical era was transformed into an individualized religious and philosophical view of life (see Hellenistic philosophy and religion). Demographic decline forced the cities to abolish the status of metic and bestow citizenship; in 228 BC, Miletus enfranchised over 1,000 Cretans.<sup>[6]</sup> Dyme sold its citizenship for one talent, payable in two installments. The foreign residents in a city are now called paroikoi. In an age when most political establishments in Asia are kingdoms, the Chrysaorian League in Caria was a Hellenistic federation of *poleis*.

During the Roman era, some cities were granted the status of a *polis*, or free city, self-governed under the Roman Empire.<sup>[7]</sup> The last institution commemorating the old Greek *poleis* was the Panhellenion, established by Hadrian.

## Derived words

Derivatives of *polis* are common in many modern European languages. This is indicative of the influence of the *polis*-centred Hellenic world view. Derivative words in English include **policy**, **polity**, **police**, and **politics**. In Greek, words deriving from *polis* include *politēs* and *politismos*, whose exact equivalents in Latin, Romance, and other European languages, respectively *civis* ("citizen"), *civilisatio* ("civilization"), etc., are similarly derived.

A number of words end in *-polis*. Most refer to a special kind of city or state. Examples include:

- Astropolis – a star-scaled city/industry area; a complex space station; a European star-related festival
- Cosmopolis – a large urban centre with a population of many different cultural backgrounds; a novel written by Don DeLillo
- Ecumenopolis – a city that covers an entire planet, usually seen in science fiction
- Megalopolis – created by the merging of several cities and their suburbs
- Metropolis – the mother city of a colony; the see of a metropolitan archbishop; a metropolitan area (major urban population centre)
- Necropolis ("city of the dead") – a graveyard
- Technopolis – a city with high-tech industry; a room of computers; the Internet

Others refer to part of a city or a group of cities, such as:

- Acropolis ("high city") – the upper part of a *polis*, often a citadel or the site of major temples
- Decapolis – a group of ten cities
- Dodecapolis – a group of twelve cities
- Pentapolis – a group of five cities
- Tripolis – a group of three cities, retained in the names of Tripoli in Libya, in Greece, and a namesake in Lebanon

## Names

### Polis, Cyprus

Located on the northwest coast of Cyprus is the town of **Polis**, or **Polis Chrysochous** (Greek: Πόλις Χρυσοχούς), situated within the Paphos District and on the edge of the Akamas peninsula. During the Cypro-Classical period, Polis became one of the most important ancient Cypriot city-kingdoms on the island, with important commercial relations with the eastern Aegean Islands, Attica, and Corinth. The town is also well known due to its mythological history, including the site of the Baths of Aphrodite.

### Other cities

The names of several other towns and cities in Europe and the Middle East have contained the suffix *-polis* since antiquity or currently feature modernized spellings, such as *-pol*. Notable examples include:

- **Acropolis** ("high city"), Athens, Greece – although not a city-polis by itself, but a fortified citadel that consisted of functional buildings and the Temple in honor of the city-sponsoring god or goddess. The Athenian acropolis was the most famous of all acropoleis in the ancient Greek World and its main temple was the Parthenon, in honor of Athena Parthenos (Athena the Virgin).
- **Adrianopolis** or Adrianople ("Hadrian's city"), present-day Edirne, Turkey
- **Alexandroupolis** ("Alexander's city"), Greece
- **Alexandropol** ("Alexandra's city"), currently Gyumri, Armenia
- **Antipolis** ("the city across"), the former name for Antibes, France
- **Constantinopolis** or **Constantinople** ("Constantine's city"), the former name for Istanbul, Turkey.
- **Istanbul** (derived from the Greek phrase "εἰς τὴν Πόλιν" meaning "to the city"), Turkey.
- **Istropolis**, currently Bratislava, Slovakia.
- **Helipolis** ("Sun city") in ancient and modern Egypt, Lebanon, and Greece
- **Heracleopolis** ("Hercules' city"), Egypt
- **Hermopolis** ("Hermes' city"), several cities in Egypt and on Siros Island

- **Hierakonpolis** ("Hawk city"), Egypt
- **Hieropolis** ("Sacred city"), several cities in the Hellenistic world, in particular Hierapolis in southwestern Turkey
- **Megalopolis** ("Great city"), Greece
- **Mariupol** ("Marios' City"), Ukraine (Greek: Μαριούπολης, *Marioupolis*)
- **Neapolis** ("New city"), several, including the modern cities of Nablus and Naples (Italian: *Napoli*), and the adjective Neapolitan
- **Nicopolis** ("Victory city"), Emmaus in Israel
- **Lithopolis** ("Stone city"), Latin name for Kamnik, Slovenia
- **Persepolis** ("city of the Persians"), Iran
- **Sevastopol** ("Venerable city"), Crimea, Ukraine
- **Seuthopolis** ("Seuthes' city"), Bulgaria
- **Simferopol** ("city of common good"), Crimea, Ukraine
- **Sozopol** ("Salvaged city"), Bulgaria
- **Stavropol** ("city of the cross"), Russia
- **Tiraspol** ("Tiras' city"), Moldova

The names of other cities were also given the suffix *-polis* after antiquity, either referring to ancient names or unrelated:

- **Anápolis**, Goiás, Brazil
- **Annapolis**, Maryland, United States
- **Biopolis**, Singapore
- **Cambysopolis**, Turkey
- **Christianopel**, Sweden
- **Cassopolis**, Michigan, United States
- **Copperopolis**, California, United States
- **Coraopolis**, Pennsylvania, United States
- **Demopolis**, Alabama, United States
- **Florianópolis** ("Floriano's city"), Santa Catarina, Brazil
- **Gallipolis**, Ohio, United States
- **Indianapolis**, Indiana, United States
- **Kannapolis**, North Carolina, United States
- **Lithopolis**, Ohio, United States
- **Marijampolė**, Lithuania
- **Metropolis**, Illinois, United States
- **Minneapolis**, Minnesota, United States
- **Opolis**, Kansas, United States
- **Petrópolis** ("Pedro's city"), Rio de Janeiro, Brazil
- **Penápolis**, São Paulo, Brazil
- **Piopolis**, Quebec, Canada
- **Quirinópolis**, Goiás, Brazil
- **Sebastopol**, California, United States
- **Sophia-Antipolis**, France
- **Teresópolis** ("Teresa's city"), Rio de Janeiro, Brazil
- **Teutopolis**, Illinois, United States
- **Uniopolis**, Ohio, United States
- **Thermopolis**, Wyoming, United States

- **Borrazópolis**, Parana, Brazil

Some cities have also been given nicknames ending with the suffix *-polis*, usually referring to their characteristics: Cardiff, Wales, United Kingdom, once dubbed *Terracottaopolis* due to its fame for buildings faced in terracotta, local red brickwork and ceramics;

- **Swansea**, Wales, UK, once dubbed *Copperopolis* due to its vast production of the metal;
- **Manchester**, UK, nicknamed *Cottonopolis* during the 19th century due to its status as an industrial centre for cotton spinning;
- **Middlesbrough**, UK, known as *Ironopolis* during Victorian times because of the area's production of pig iron;
- **Puebla City**, Mexico, known as *Angelópolis* due to its founding legend and profusion of Baroque architecture
- Gallipoli, city in Apulia, Italy. It probably means "Beautiful City" (from Greek "Καλλίπολις").

## See also

- Synoecism
- *The Other Greeks*
- List of ancient Greek cities

## Notes

- An attempt to dissociate urbanization from state formation was undertaken by Morris, I (1991), "The early polis as city and state", in Rich, J; Wallace-Hadrill, A (eds.), *City and Country in the Ancient World*, London, pp. 27–40

## References


- Caves, R.W. (2004). *Encyclopedia of the City*. Routledge. p. 520. ISBN 9780415252256.
- Polignac, François (1984), *La naissance de la cité grecque* (in French), Paris.
- MacDowell, Douglas Maurice (1986). *The Law in Classical Athens* ([https://books.google.com/books?id=92\\_Nz8jjrSUC&pg=PA82](https://books.google.com/books?id=92_Nz8jjrSUC&pg=PA82)). Cornell University Press. p. 82. ISBN 9780801493652.
- Dmitriev, Sviatoslav (2005), *City government in Hellenistic and Roman Asia minor*, p. 68, ISBN 0-19-517042-3.
- Wilson, Nigel Guy (2006), *Encyclopedia of Ancient Greece* (<https://books.google.com/books?id=-aFtPdh6-2QC&pg=PA627&dq=Rhodes+Hellenistic+city+navy#v=onepage&q=Rhodes%20Hellenistic%20city%20navy&f=false>), p. 627, ISBN 978-0-415-97334-2, archived (<https://web.archive.org/web/20150317061354/http://books.google.com/books?id=-aFtPdh6-2QC&pg=PA627&dq=Rhodes+Hellenistic+city+navy#v=onepage&q=Rhodes%20Hellenistic%20city%20navy&f=false>) from the original on 2015-03-17.
- Milet I*, 3, pp. 33–38.
- Howgego, Christopher; Heuchert, Volhker; Burnett, Andrew (2007), *Coinage and Identity in the Roman Provinces* (<https://books.google.com/?id=66HWcKwrOmEC&pg=PA158&dq=Polis+Roman#v=onepage&q=Polis%20Roman&f=false>), p. 158, ISBN 0-19-923784-0.

## Further reading

- Ando, Clifford. 1999. "Was Rome a Polis?". *Classical Antiquity* 18.1: 5–34.
- Brock, R., and S. Hodkinson, eds. 2000. *Alternatives to Athens: Varieties of Political Organisation and Community in Ancient Greece*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Davies, J. K. 1977–1978. "Athenian Citizenship: The Descent Group and the Alternatives." *Classical Journal* 73.2: 105–121.

- Hall, J. M. 2007. "Polis, Community and Ethnic Identity." In *The Cambridge companion to Archaic Greece*. Edited by H. A. Shapiro, 40–60. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Hansen, M. H., and T. H. Nielsen, eds. 2004. *An Inventory of Archaic and Classical Poleis*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Hansen, M. H. 2006. *Polis: An Introduction to the Ancient Greek City-State*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Hansen, M. H., ed. 1993. *The Ancient Greek City-State: Symposium on the Occasion of the 250th Anniversary of the Royal Danish Academy of Sciences and Letters, July 1–4, 1992*. Copenhagen: Royal Danish Academy.
- Hansen, M. H. 1999. *The Athenian Democracy in the age of Demosthenes: Structure, Principles and Ideology*. 2nd ed. London: Bristol Classical Press.
- Hansen, M. H., ed. 1997. *The Polis as an Urban Centre and Political Community*. Copenhagen: Royal Danish Academy.
- Jones, N. F. 1987. *Public Organization in Ancient Greece: A Documentary Study*. Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society.
- Kraay, C. M. 1976. *Archaic and Classical Greek Coins*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Osborne, R. 2009. *Greece in the Making*. 2nd ed. London: Routledge.
- Millar, F. G. B. 1993. "The Greek City in the Roman Period". In *The Ancient Greek City-State: Symposium on the Occasion of the 250th Anniversary of the Royal Danish Academy of Sciences and Letters, July 1–4, 1992*. Edited by M. H. Hansen, 232–260. Copenhagen: Royal Danish Academy.
- Polignac, F. de. 1995. *Cults, Territory, and the Origins of the Greek City-State*. Translated by J. Lloyd. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- van der Vliet, E. 2012. "The Durability and Decline of Democracy in Hellenistic Poleis". *Mnemosyne* 65.4–5: 771–786.

## External links

-  The dictionary definition of *polis* at Wiktionary
- The Copenhagen Polis Center (<http://www.teachtext.net/bn/cpc/>)

Retrieved from "<https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Polis&oldid=978652221>"

**This page was last edited on 16 September 2020, at 05:23 (UTC).**

Text is available under the Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike License; additional terms may apply. By using this site, you agree to the Terms of Use and Privacy Policy. Wikipedia® is a registered trademark of the Wikimedia Foundation, Inc., a non-profit organization.