



Summary :

Ancient Abydus was a city of Troad that due to its strategic position played an important role in the history of the area until Late Antiquity. It was a wealthy city, especially during the Classical Period.

Other Names

Nağara (mod.)

Geographical Location

NW Turkey

Historical Region

Troad

Administrative Dependence

Troad

1. Geographical position - Identification

Ancient Abydus (Nağara) is located in the [Troad](#), on a cape in the Dardanelles straits, 5km north from modern Çanakkale. In Antiquity, it adjoined Arisbe to the northeast and [Dardanus](#) to the southwest. South and east of the city lie mountain ranges. Opposite Abydus, on the Thracian Chersonesos, was Sistus. The two cities often appear together in literary sources, as troop landings between Europe and Asia used to take place there.

The strategic importance of Abydus' location at the [Hellespont](#) was noticed early in Antiquity. As a result, the city became base of operations and control of marine communications in the Hellespont until the Ottoman period, but it was also engaged in many conflicts over the control of the area.

2. History

The information we have on Abydus' history as it is presented here, is extracted almost exclusively from literal sources. It remains unknown when the initial establishment was founded.

2.1. Homeric mentions – Archaic period

Abydus was known to [Homer](#) as a city of Troad (he mentions it three times).¹ Sistus, opposite to Abydus on the Thracian Chersonesos, and Arisbe on its northeast, were also known to Homer. According to [Strabo](#), after the Trojan War, Abydus was inhabited by Thracians.²

Strabo also informs us that with the permission of [Gyges](#), king of the [Lydians](#), [Miletus](#) colonized Abydus.³ If this is true, we have to assume that during the first half of the 7th c. BC this area either belonged to the kingdom of [Lydia](#) or was controlled by it. The colonization of Abydus was part of Miletus' plan to expand its commerce to the Black Sea by founding a number of colonies. Miletians also founded [Parion](#) and [Cyzicus](#) in Propontis.

The city's history during the 7th and 6th c. BC remains practically unknown. After the Persians conquered the kingdom of Lydia in the middle of the 6th c. BC, a period of instability began, due to Persian expansionism. Abydus probably came under Persian control at about 515 BC. According to Strabo, [Darius I](#) destroyed it, along with other cities of the Propontis, when he was informed that the Skythians were preparing an expedition against him, out of fear that they would use these cities to get to Asia.⁴



Abydus participated in the [Ionian Revolt](#) against the Persians at the end of the 6th c. and the beginning of the 5th c. BC. After the Greeks were defeated, it came under the control of the Persians, along with Dardanus, Percotes, [Lampsacus](#) and Paisos.⁵ The Persians took advantage of its strategic position to try and conquer main Greece. In 480 BC, Xerxes built a bridge and got from Abydus to Sistus, on the opposite coast of Thracian Chersonesos, to conquer Greece.⁶

2.2. Classical Period

In 479/478 BC, Abydus joined the Delian League. During the Athenian hegemony its economy was fairly advanced. In the annual tribute lists, Abydus appeared to contribute 4-6 **talents**, a large amount that shows the city's wealth.

During the Peloponnesian War, which broke out in 431 BC between Athens and Sparta, Abydus sided with Athens. The last part of the war, also known as the [Ionian war](#), took place in Asia Minor, in the Hellespont. Aided by the Persians, the Spartans tried to keep the Athenians away from the Hellespont and to cut the corn supply from the Black Sea to Athens. Abydus' strategic position in the Propontis caused its engagement to this conflict. In 411 BC, supported by the Spartans and [Pharnabazus](#), the Persian satrap of Hellespont, Abydus and Lampsacus revolted against the Athenians and sided with the Spartans and the Persians.⁷ We can see the importance of Abydus for Hellespont's control in Thucydides' words. As he writes, the Athenians, unable to regain the city from the Spartans, got to the opposite coast and made Sistus their base of control of the entire Hellespont.⁸ In the [battle of Abydus](#) that took place in the same year, the Athenians defeated the Spartans, who only avoided total catastrophe thanks to Pharnabazus' intervention.⁹

In the late 5th c. BC, Athens was defeated in the [battle of Aegospotami](#) (405 BC) and lost the Peloponnesian war, while the Spartans gradually took over almost every city of the Troad. Abydus was Spartans' most important base of operations in the Hellespont during their domination of the area. But soon a conflict broke out between them, the Persians and the Athenians over the Greek cities of Asia Minor. This conflict ended with the [Spartan defeat at Cnidus](#) in 392 BC by the Persians.¹⁰

After the Spartans were defeated, Abydus was the only city of the Troad that remained under their control until 387/386 BC. Then, in order to prevent Athens from reassembling naval forces, they signed the [Antalcidas' peace](#) treaty, also known as King's peace. With this treaty, Abydus, as well as every Greek city in Asia Minor, came under Persian control.

Since that period, our information on Abydus are very limited. We know that in the fifty years between the Antalcidas' Peace and the city's conquest by [Alexander the Great](#), Abydus was under tyranny, and that one of its tyrants' name was Iphiades. It seems Abydus was engaged during that period in the conflicts between local **satraps** and conquered Sistus and Parion.¹¹

2.3. Hellenistic Period

In 334 BC, Alexander the Great made his way to Asia Minor through Abydus, and the Troad came under the control of the Macedonian state. After his death, a war broke out between his successors over his dominions. In 319 BC, [Antigonus I Monophthalmus](#), one of Alexander's generals, became governor of Asia Minor and later proclaimed himself a king. In the same period, Abydus joined a league, probably founded by Antigonus, which was located in Athena's sanctuary in [Ilium](#).

In 301 BC, the death of Antigonus at the [battle of Ipsus](#) gave [Lysimachus](#) the opportunity to rule over the area, but not for long. In 281 BC, after the battle of Corupedium, Abydus, like most of Asia Minor, came under the control of the [Seleucids](#), and remained so for most of the 3rd c. BC. During this century, the Seleucids fought for domination against the [Attalids](#) of [Pergamon](#), who, since the mid 3rd c. BC became a serious threat to them. In 227/226 BC, [Attalus I](#) defeated [Antiochus Hierax](#) and ended the Seleucids' domination over the Troad. At that time, Abydus probably became an independent city under the Attalids' influence or control. The Seleucids, as well as the Ptolemies, conquered the city for short periods, but finally lost all control over it in 188 BC.



According to Polybius,¹² Phillip V, king of Macedonia, destroyed Abydus in 200 BC. It was during that year that Phillip attacked the cities of the Hellespont, aiming to cut the corn trade with the Black Sea. Wanting to get to Asia through Sistus and Abydus, he destroyed the latter. Abydus citizens killed themselves to avoid being captured by his troops. The pleads of the Romans failed to stop the attacks.

With the [peace treaty of Apamea](#) (188 BC) the state of the Seleucids was limited to Asia Minor's inland and Abydus entered Pergamon's sphere of influence. After the treaty, the city, as well as other cities of the Troad, experienced a period of advance. It was during that time Abydus managed to bring its neighboring Arisbe under its sphere of influence and, thus, gained more economic strength.

2.4. Roman Period

In 129 BC, the [Roman province of Asia](#), which Abydus came under, was founded. The Roman period was a period of prosperity for the city, mainly due to its important geographical position, although there is very little information available. Mints operated in the city during the days of [Augustus](#) and of [Nero](#).

2.5. Byzantine – Modern Period

According to literary sources, Abydus was constantly inhabited until the 17th c. AD. During the Byzantine period it was part of the Byzantine empire, an important fortress and station controlling the traffic to and from the Hellespont. It appears that the city used to house a big Christian community and in the early Byzantine period used to have its own bishop, while there are mentions of at least one monastery in the area in the 8th century. Because of the city's strategic importance, Arabs, Venetians and Ottoman Turks fought over its control over time, turning it into a theater of many wars throughout the Byzantine period. Literary sources speak of a cosmopolitan fortress with important transit trade. The Ottoman Turks appear to claim Abydus since the 10th c. In the middle of the 14th c., Abydus came under the control of the Ottoman emir Orhan. In the 16th century the city's fortress still existed. European travelers mention that the city also had a mosque. Until the early 19th c., travelers describe ruins that were still visible.

3. Economy

Abydus owes its economic prosperity to its location and its protected port. The toll levied at the straits of the Hellespont, as well as fishery, were the city's main sources of income. We also know that the city was rich in mineral resources and also had goldmines.¹³ During Antiquity it was famous for its shellfish.¹⁴ In the 18th and 19th c. the region was famous for its pottery, cotton, shipbuilding, sailcloth manufacture and Moroccan leather processing.

1. Hom., *Il.* 2.837, 4.500, 17.584.

2. Strab. 13.1.22.

3. Strab. 13.1.22· Thuc. 8.61.1.

4. Strab. 13.1.22.

5. Hdt. 5.117.

6. Hdt.7.34-36, 43-56.

7. Thuc. 8.61-62.



8. Thuc. 8.62.3.
9. Xen., *Hell.* 1.1.4-7· Diod. S. 13.45-47· Plut., *Alc.* 27.2-6.
10. Xen., *Hell.* 5.1.31.
11. Aen. Tact. 28.6-7· Polyaeus, *Strat.* 1.37· Dem. 23.158.
12. Polyb. 16.23, 16.29-35, 18.54.8.
13. Strab. 14.5.28.
14. Ath. 3.44.

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	Xerxes in Abydos http://www.livius.org/he-hg/herodotus/hist12.html

Glossary :

	satrap, the The title designated a representative of the Persian king, and was widely used in the Persian language. In ancient writers the term usually designates an official of the Persian empire who assumes highest political and military power within the limits of his <i>satrapia</i> , the division under his command. Alexander the Great introduced the institution to the administrative organisation of his empire in the East. In the Roman empire, the office of the satrap was hereditary for Armenian nobles who administered an Armenian klima (=canton, a historic-geographical unit); in the case of the Armenian territories inside the Roman Empire, the satrap yielded limited power under the suzerainty of the Roman emperor.
	talent, the Numismatic weight unit. The silver talent equaled 60 mnai or 6000 silver drachmas.