



Summary :

Lampsacus, the powerful city on the eastern shore of the Hellespont, in the region of Troy, was founded in 654/653 BC by colonists from the Ionian city of Phokea. It took part in the Ionian Revolt and later joined the Delian League. Upon the end of the Peloponnesian War it came under Persian control until it was occupied by the Macedonians. After Alexander the Great died, the city was successively occupied by different successors and became the bone of contention among the Hellenistic kingdoms. From 129 BC on the city was included in the Roman province of Asia. Lampsacus was a culturally developed city and an important economic centre thanks to local gold mines. The significant gold findings from its necropolis date back to the second half of the 4th century BC.

Other Names

Pityoussa, Pityeia, Lapseki

Geographical Location

Hellespont

Historical Region

Troas

Administrative Dependence

Lydian Kingdom, Seleucid Kingdom, Kingdom of Pergamon, Province of Asia

1. Mythology – Foundation and Territory

Lampsacus, the powerful city on the eastern shore of the Hellespont, in the region of [Troy](#), prospered over the longest part of the 1st millennium BC. It was built opposite Callipolis (now Gelibolu) of the Thracian Chersonese (now Gallipoli Peninsula), on a site where the Hellespont opens into the Propontis, and thanks to its key harbour it became an important commercial centre in Antiquity. The most famous neighbouring cities were [Abydus](#) to the west and [Parion](#) to the west.

The ancient name was Pityousa ('pine-clad') or Pityeia. According to mythology,¹ the Greeks settled in Pityousa, a city with native inhabitants, the Bebrykes, with the consent of the local King Mandron. The Bebrykes, because they envied the new colonists, were planning to attack them, but the latter were on time informed by Lampsace, the king's daughter, and occupied the city. In her honour the city was renamed Lampsacus and she was worshipped as a goddess. According to another less known mythological etymology, the city was named after a flash ('lampse' in Greek) that led the colonists to the new position.

It is known that the Greek colony was founded in 654/653 BC and its inhabitants came from the Ionian city of [Phocaea](#). Only Strabo believed that Lampsacus was a Milesian colony.² However, the fact that Phokea was the metropolis of Lampsacus is evidenced by both epigraphic texts and calendar details common in both cities.³ According to epigraphs, the citizens of Lampsacus considered themselves brothers of the Marseillais, the inhabitants of another Phokean colony. The relations between Lampsacus and Phokea are evidenced by their common calendar month Heraion. Most of students are based on the above and believe that Strabo provides false information. As a result, they accept Phokea as the place where the citizens of Lampsacus came from.

The territory of Lampsacus, the so-called Lampsacene, extended over a wide area that included part of the inland. This is confirmed by ancient sources mentioning the 'middle land of Lampsacene'. The area, particularly famous for its vineyards –'with good vineyards', according to Strabo–,⁴ was originally named Bebrykia after the native Bebrykes.



The territory extended westward to the city of Perkoti (now Umurbey), within approximately 12 km from Lampsacus, while to the northeast it extended as far as the city of Paesos (current position Fanous), incorporated into the territory of Lampsacus after 425/424 BC. In particular, [Strabo](#) says that the 'Paesini emigrated to Lampsacus'.⁵

There is evidence about a number of cities belonging to the 'land of Lampsacus'. The cities of Clonae, Mermessus and Iolcos were near Lampsacus. On the other hand, Abarnos or Abarnis was a settlement built near the namesake cape, about 8 km to the north of Lampsacus.⁶

2. Historical Background

The earliest historical evidence about Lampsacus dates back to the 6th century BC, almost 100 years after the city was founded. Already from the end of the first half of the 6th century BC the city was so powerful that it was able to resist the Athenian colonisation of the Thracian Chersonese, which held up its own expansionary policy.

However, the captivity of Miltiades the Elder, the founder of the colony, brought little benefit to Lampsacus because, according to Herodotus⁷, he was soon set free by order of [Croesus](#), the king of Lydia. This fact proves that Lampsacus at the time (560-546 BC) belonged to the Lydian kingdom, just like all Greek Asia Minor cities. The Lydian domination ended when Sardis was occupied by the Persians in 546 BC. Shortly later, Lampsacus came under Persian control, with a brief interruption during the [Ionian Revolt](#) (499-494 BC), in which the city took part. What is more, the [Koinon of Ionians](#) (Panionium) adopted the winged sea horse, depicted on the front side of some of the staters of Lampsacus. The city was soon reoccupied (498/497 BC) by the Persian army together with other cities of the Hellespont. In 464 BC Artaxerxes ceded Lampsacus, famous for its wine, as well as [Magnesia](#) and [Myus](#) to the exiled Themistocles, the hero of the Battle of Salamis (480 BC) to supply him with 'wine, bread and food'. The city regained its freedom before the mid-5th century BC and joined the [Delian League](#) by paying an annual contribution of 12 talents. The high amount, second only to Byzantium, is indicative of the economic prosperity of the city⁸ at the time.

Until the Expedition against Sicily (415-413 BC) Lampsacus was on the side of Athens. Yet, in the last years of the Peloponnesian War the Spartans claimed control over the city, in an attempt to detach from the Athenians those positions that safeguarded the control of both the Straits and the route used for carrying the wheat of Pontus. In 405 BC the Spartan admiral Lysander occupied Lampsacus, thus securing a great harbour and a well supplied city for his fleet. The advantageous position of the Spartans against the Athenian fleet was decisive in the outcome of the Battle of Aegospotami, which signalled the defeat of the Athenians and the end of the Peloponnesian War. Lampsacus remained under Spartan control until 386 BC. Then it once again came under the domination of the Persian king under the [Peace of Antalcidas](#). There was only a short reversal of the situation during the [Social War](#) (357-355 BC), when the city was captured and plundered by the Athenian general Chares. The Persian occupation lasted until Alexander the Great arrived in 334 BC.

A new era started for the city when Alexander landed at the Asia Minor coast of the Hellespont in 334 BC. Lampsacus submitted to the Macedonian king, who, shortly later, founded a mint there, thus strengthening the important position of the city in the region.

From 310 BC on the city took part in the Koinon of Ilium, based in the [sanctuary of Athena](#) in Ilium and, together with Ilium, formed a confederation. It was among the founder members, while epigraphic texts⁹ verify its participation in the Koinon until the 1st century AD.

The death of Alexander the Great in 323 BC signalled a period of constant turmoil. In the following years Lampsacus came successively and without resistance under the control of different successors: Antigonos I Monophtalmos (One-Eyed), Lycimachus in 302 BC, Demetrios and, finally, Lycimachus again in 295/294 BC.

A new period started for the city in 281 BC after the Battle of Corupedium (Lydia), which signalled the subordination to the Seleucids, who exercised loose control over the city, though. In 227/226 BC the Attalids gained control of Lampsacus and of the rest



of the Asia Minor cities of the region. Even when the Seleucids regained their footholds in Asia Minor under Achaeus (223-220 BC) in the years of Antiochus III the Great, Lampsacus stayed on the side of Pergamon, strongly resisting the demands of the Seleucid king. Under the [peace of Apamea](#) (188 BC), which determined the spheres of influence in Asia Minor, Lampsacus became an autonomous city of the kingdom of Pergamon. It remained autonomous until the establishment of the Roman province of Asia in 129 BC, with the exception of the year 170 BC, when it was occupied by the king of Macedonia Perseus.

Unlike [Cyzicus](#), in the [Mithradatic War III](#) it could not resist [Mithradates VI](#), who captured the city and the neighbouring Parion as well in 73 BC.

As a city of the province of Asia, Lampsacus became a particularly prosperous commercial and handicraft centre, where the Roman merchants permanently settled there played an important role. In 42-41 BC, after Caesar had died, both Lampsacus and the neighbouring Parion received Roman colonists. However, the Roman colony of Lampsacus was soon abandoned, unlike that of Parion, which was populated in [Hadrian](#)'s years (117-138).

Historical evidence verifies that until the years of Augustus the city continued being an important centre of the region with a thriving economy.

Although the mint made coins until the years of Gallienus (253-268), nothing is known about the historical course of the city between the 1st and the 3rd century¹⁰. Towards the end of the imperial years the population of Lampsacus was so much reduced that the once developed city looked like a village. In the 4th century, in the years of Konstantios (337-361), all the ancient temples preserved so far were demolished by order of the Emperor. In 1296 the city came under the Turks, who maintained the ancient place-name (Turkish [Lapseki](#)).

3. Economy

Xenophon¹¹ is the only ancient source considering Lampsacus a wealthy city. However, the prosperity of the city throughout the centuries may be traced in lots of other ways.

The city's emblem, appearing on its coins, is widely interpreted as a winged sea horse, the symbol of navigators from Lampsacus and of their naval activity.

The blooming economy and the resulting spiritual freedom contributed to the cultural development of the city. Therefore, eminent philosophers of Antiquity and Classical years, such as [Anaxagoras](#) (early 5th century BC) and [Epicurus](#) (4th century BC), lived in Lampsacus for several years. The latter founded a school there, which became the hotbed of lots of Epicurus' famous students.

The high taxes the city paid as a member of the Delian League are indicative of its prosperous economy in the 5th century BC. In addition, in antiquity the people of Lampsacus were famous for the life of pleasure they led, as a result of the city's wealth.

According to ancient texts, the city's resources were the gold mines and the closely dependent coinage, sea commerce, viniculture and fishing. Local gold mines, reported by Polyaeus¹², provided the metal needed for the issuance of the gold staters¹³ of Lampsacus in the 4th century BC, a widely spread coin of a generally recognised value. Perhaps Lampsacus had its own deposits of electrum, thus justifying the issuance of coins made of this natural alloy of gold and silver until the 5th century BC, at the moment when in other Asia Minor cities the use of electrum had long ago been abandoned.¹⁴

[Gold mines](#) provided the raw material and Lampsacus became an important centre of sculpture in the early Hellenistic period (4th/3rd century BC). New evidence brought to light after recent excavations fully confirms the existence of developed metalwork in Lampsacus.¹⁵ Ancient writers report that valuable dedications, in particular golden wreaths, were sent from Lampsacus to Rome (179 BC) and Delphi.¹⁶



The artistic importance of Lampsacus is proven by the fact that it was the only city of Asia Minor with a work of art by the famous sculptor Lysippus, carried to Rome by the Roman general Agrippa.¹⁷

The main reason why commerce was developed was the natural harbour of the city –‘a good harbour’, according to Strabo¹⁸–, along the significant, yet difficult, sea route of the Hellespont. Lampsacus was the main rival of neighbouring, economically powerful Kyzicus in commerce and one of the hubs of sea communications between the Aegean and the Black Sea. Lampsacus became a major commercial centre, particularly from the 4th century BC on, as proven by the fact that lots of its citizens had been awarded the title of consul in important Greek cities of the time.¹⁹ Among them was Delos, the most important entrepôt in the Hellenistic period, Athens and Chios one of the wealthiest cities of the Aegean.

The city developed economically thanks to sea commerce and the engagement of its citizens in viniculture. The wine of Lampsacus, produced in large quantities, was particularly famous in Antiquity, which justifies why Lampsacus was the place of worship par excellence of god Priapus, the god of pleasure.

Another source of income, common in all the cities of the Propontis, was fishing. The Macedonian rhetorician and pleader Polyaeus makes particular reference to the rich fish catch of Lampsacus.²⁰ Finally, in the years of Konstantios (337-361), apart from fishing, another resource was the imperial tannery that produced purple colour.

4. System of Government

According to a tradition handed down by Charon of Lampsacus, the system was monarchy in the early years.²¹ Ancient sources record that a tyranny was established after the Persian occupation. In the first period of the Persian domination (around 513 BC), the city was governed by a tyrant named Hippoclus. He was succeeded on the throne by his son Aeantides, who married the daughter of the tyrant of Athens Hippias. There is no other information about the regime of Lampsacus until the 4th century BC, when reference is made to [Astyanax](#), another tyrant who was overthrown and killed. The epigraphic evidence verifying the existence of democratic institutions dates back mainly to the Hellenistic period. The earliest chronology suggested for some of this evidence is the 4th century BC. According to information, the main administrative bodies of the democratic regime of Lampsacus were the Boule and the Ecclesia. Other democratic institutions handed down are the registrar, the treasurer and an economic authority of the city called the *epimenioi* of the Boule. The Demos was divided into tribes and *hekatostyes*, a division also existing in [Chalcedon](#), the Megarian colony on the Straits of the Bosphorus.²²

5. Religion

Lampsacus was the most important place of worship of Priapus, the phallic god of fertility. Mythological tradition –in combination with literary and epigraphic evidence– and coins prove that the god’s cult was widely spread in the city where he had been born. His parents were Dionysus and Aphrodite. Priapus and Aphrodite were worshipped as eponymous prytaneis as well, while the city worshipped Dionysus and Poseidon as well.²³

6. Buildings

The modern settlement of Lapseki is built on the site of ancient Lampsacus. Although the ancient place-name has been preserved, there are no remains of the ancient city because of the large size of the modern settlement. Ramblers of former centuries were luckier, as they report traces of the fortification wall of the city as well as architectural remains of a temple.²⁴

Lampsacus was an open city until 411 BC, when it was captured by the Athenians, in their attempt to gain control over the region and the commercial sea route leading to Pontus. A fortification enclosure was first built a few years later, in 409 BC, on the initiative of the Athenian generals Alcibiades and Thrasyllus, which aimed at consolidating Athenian domination.



Particularly important for its movable findings is the necropolis of Lampsacus dating back to the 4th century BC. However, there have been no systematic excavations that would allow the reconstruction of the city's full picture. Recent rescue excavations have brought to light sarcophagi and significant tomb offerings and gifts, such as golden wreaths, diadems and a ring, all dating back to the second half of the 4th century BC.²⁵

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1. Analytically about the ancient sources of the foundation myth see Frisch, P., *Die Inschriften von Lampsakos* (IK 6, Bonn 1980), pp. 109-111.
 2. Strabo 13.1.19.
 3. See Hansen, M.H. – Nielsen, T.H. (ed.), *An Inventory of Archaic and Classical Poleis* (Oxford 2004), pp. 986-988, see "Lampsakos" (A. Avram).
 4. Strabo 13.1.12.
 5. Strabo 13.1.19.
 6. Hansen, M.H. – Nielsen, T.H. (ed.), *An Inventory of Archaic and Classical Poleis* (Oxford 2004), pp. 986-988, see entry "Lampsakos" (A. Avram), where the relevant information about mythology, the foundation of the city and its territory are mentioned.
 7. Herod. 6.37.
 8. See Leaf, W., *Strabo on the Troad* (Cambridge 1923), p. 95
 9. Frisch, P., *Die Inschriften von Lampsakos* (IK 6, Bonn 1978), p. 130
 10. Regarding the history of the city see RE 12 (1924), columns 590-591, see entry "Lampsakos" (Bürchner). Der Neue Pauly 6 (1999), column 1089-1090, see entry "Lampsakos" (E. Scahwertheim). Lang, G., *Klassische antike Stätten Anatoliens* (Norderstedt 2003), pp. 658-667. Hansen, M.H. – Nielsen, T.H. (ed.), *An Inventory of Archaic and Classical Poleis* (Oxford 2004), pp. 986-988 see entry "Lampsakos" (A. Avram).
 11. Xen., *Hell.* 2.1.19.
 12. Polyaeus, *Strat.* 6.24.
 13. See Baldwin, A., "Lampsakos. The Gold Staters, Silver and Bronze Coinages", *AJN* 53 (1924), pp. 1-76. Healy, J.F., "The gold staters of Lampsakos. A preliminary investigation", in *Proceedings of the 10th International Congress of Numismatics (London, September 1986)* (London 1986), pp. 45-50. [1][1] Brett, A.B, *The Electrum Coinage of Lampsakos* (American Numismatic Society, New York 1914).
 14. Leaf, W., *Strabo on the Troad* (Cambridge 1923), p. 94: for references to relevant travelers' texts.
 15. Körpe, R. – Treister, M., "Rescue Excavations in the Nekropolis of Lampsacus, 1996", *Studia Troica* 12 (2002), pp. 429-450. In addition, many researchers believe that the famous pots of the
 16. See Frisch, P., *Die Inschriften von Lampsakos* (IK 6, Bonn 1980), pp. 144-145
 17. Strabo 13.1.19.
 18. Strabo 13.1.18.



19. For an analytical catalogue of the citizens that had the title of consul see: Frisch, P., *Die Inschriften von Lampsakos* (IK 6, Bonn 1980), p. 146.
20. Polyaeus, *Strateg.* 6.24.
21. Jakoby, F., *FGrHist* 262, excerpt 7ab
22. *RE* 12 (1924), columns 590-591, see entry "Lampsakos" (Bürchner). Hansen, M.H. – Nielsen, T.H. (ed.), *An Inventory of Archaic and Classical Poleis* (Oxford 2004), pp. 986-988, see entry "Lampsakos" (A. Avram).
23. *Der Neue Pauly* 6 (1999), column 1089-1090, see entry "Lampsakos" (E. Schwertheim). Hansen, M.H. – Nielsen, T.H. (ed.), *An Inventory of Archaic and Classical Poleis* (Oxford 2004), p. 988, see entry "Lampsakos" (A. Avram).
24. Leaf, W., *Strabo on the Troad* (Cambridge 1923), p. 94: for references to relevant travelers' texts.
25. Körpe, R. – Treister, M., "Rescue Excavations in the Nekropolis of Lampsacus, 1996", *Studia Troica* 12 (2002), pp. 429-450.

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Chronological Table

654/3 BC: Settlement of colonists from Phocaea of Ionia

6th c. BC: Lampsacus becomes part of the Lydian kingdom. In 546 BC it falls under Persian control



499-4 BC: The city takes part in the Ionian Revolt

453-28 BC: It became a member of the First Athenian League

405-386 BC: Lampsacus under Spartan control

386 BC: Peace of Antalcidas. Re-establishment of the Persian control in the area.

334 BC: Arrival of Alexander. Submission of the city to the Macedonians. Foundation of the mint.

281-227/6 BC: Lampsacus under Seleucid control

227/6-133 BC: The city under Ptolemy control

129 BC: The city part of the Roman province of Asia