



Περίληψη :

A city in Bithynia (modern Iznik). It was founded by Antigonus I (315 BC).

Άλλες Ονομασίες

Helicore, Antigoneia, Iznik

Γεωγραφική Θέση

NE Turkey

Ιστορική Περιοχή

Bithynia

Διοικητική Υπαγωγή

Bithynia

1. Geography - demography

Nicaea (modern Iznik) was one of the most important cities of [Bithynia](#). It was located at the eastern shores of the lake Ascanius (modern Iznik Golu), in a fertile basin. The Roman poet Catullus writes that the nature of the region is inexhaustible and offers in abundance the best fruits if the land is cultivated. Between May and October the climate is particularly warm and the temperature rises, especially in the mountainous regions. In the Roman period, the outskirts of the city extended up to Sangarius River.

The inhabitants of Nicaea were probably of Greek (Macedonian) origin. A continuously increasing number of natives pervaded into the city after Nicaea had been incorporated in the kingdom of Bithynia. A funerary inscription which was found in the modern city of Bazarkoy, located opposite Nicaea on the west shore of lake Ascanius, praises a soldier from Bithynia who died fighting for the “land of his ancestors”.¹

2. Foundation, other names

There are many traditions about the foundation and the first settlers of Nicaea. The city claimed to have been founded by either the god [Dionysus](#) on his way back from India or by [Heracles](#). It was probably named after the nymph Nicaea. On coins dated to the 1st and 2nd centuries AD, Dionysus and Heracles are called “founders”, whereas either Heracles and the nymph Nicaea or Dionysus and the goddess Nicaea appear as co-founders. An inscription preserved on one of the gates of the city, the White Gate, the hero Heracles is cited as the founder of the city, while his representations on the coins of [Domitian](#) (81-96 AD), [Antoninus Pius](#) (138-161 AD), [Valerian](#) (253-260 AD) and [Gallienus](#) (253-268 AD) testify the constant popularity of Heracles in Nicaea. The first settlers in the city may probably have come from an homonym small town near Thermopylae in Greece.

According to a local tradition the first residents were of Macedonian origin, coming from Bottiaia of Macedonia and they had named the city Helicore or Angore. The early name Olbia, which is cited by [Pliny the Younger](#), is not correct. In a short distance from Nicaea there was a camp with soldiers from Bottiaia, most likely veterans who had served in the army of [Antigonus I](#). This supports the aforementioned version. According to another account, the city was founded by soldiers of [Alexander III](#), who came from Greece and in particular from Locris in Phocis. However, this particular tradition was not so widespread and Alexander was not depicted on Nicaea’s coins of the Imperial period.

The first colony might have been destroyed by the [Mysians](#). It was rebuilt circa 315 BC by Antigonus I Monophthalmus, who named the city Antigoneia after himself. After [the battle in Ipsus](#) (301 BC), [Lysimachus](#) seized the city and named it Nicaea in honour of his



wife, who had died in 302 BC.²

3. History

It seems that Nicaea came under the control of the local royal dynasty just before 280 BC. That was the starting point for the city's development as well as the beginning of the rivalry with its neighbouring city of [Nicomedia](#), since both cities were chosen as places for royal residence.³

In 72 BC Nicaea became part of the Roman Empire. During the organisation of Asia by [Pompeius](#), a large part of the city's territory was distributed to landowners, whose names are identifiable from inscriptions. The numismatic finds and fortification works reveal the interest of the emperors for the city.⁴ During the Roman period, Nicaea remained one of the most important cities of Asia Minor and competed with Nicomedia on the issue of which one would become the seat of the governor of the province. Under [Claudius](#) (41-54 AD) Nicaea received the title of the "first of the province". The size and the population of the city increased under [Trajan](#) (98-117 AD). When [Hadrian](#) visited Nicaea in 123 AD, he initiated defensive works, which were completed in the 3rd century. Nevertheless, they could not repel the raids of the [Goths](#) in 258 AD. In the civil war with [Septimius Severus](#) (193-212 AD), Nicaea opted for Pescennius Niger and lost favour with the Emperor. [Constantine I](#) was responsible for the city's importance and it continued to flourish in the Byzantine period.

4. Religion

As Nicaea was a Greek colony, Greek religion was practised in the city. On coins of the Marcus Aurelius period, Asclepius, Dionysus, Tyche, the goddess Nicaea and Heracles are portrayed. A sanctuary dedicated to the cult of Rome and Julius Caesar has been discovered in the city. This sanctuary was built under Augustus and implies the existence of a Koinon of Bithynia. A temple of Apollo is also preserved in Nicaea.

The city received the message of Christian religion rather soon. The first known archbishop of Nicaea was Theognis. The emperor Constantine I chose Nicaea for the first ecumenical Church Council (325). After the Council, the city was proclaimed "metropolis".

5. Culture - architecture

Nicaea was the hometown of the astronomer Hipparchus and of the historian Cassius Dio. When it was refounded by Lysimachus, after 301 BC, the conditions were ideal so that it would develop into an important Hellenistic centre. It seems that the size of the city was about 700 sq. km. and it was built according to the [hippodamian](#) system. Two main streets crossed the city, meeting at right angles in the centre of the urban area. The extensions of those streets led to the four gates of the city, which were visible from a specific point in the centre of the [gymnasium](#), which was obviously located at the centre of the city.⁵ The only information available for the Hellenistic walls is that they were about 2,900 m in circumference.

The city was severely destroyed by an earthquake in 123 AD, but it was rebuilt under Emperor Hadrian. Pliny the Younger often cites the city and its public buildings. Historical testimonies and epigraphical finds imply the existence of a theatre, a sanctuary of Rome and Julius Caesar, which was erected in Augustus' time, a temple of Apollo, an agora constructed under Hadrian and an aqueduct.⁶ The excavations revealed the scanty remains of the theatre to the south-west part of the city. A part of the [cavea](#) has been preserved, while the [orchestra](#) and the [scene](#) have been destroyed. It measured 85 by 55 m and belonged to the Hellenistic type, although it had gone under several alterations. Pliny the Younger identified it as an example of bad engineering.⁷ The fortification wall of the Roman period was of a polygonal ground plan and remain intact for a total of 5,000 m in circumference. In addition, there are remains of the aqueduct, as well as two jetties from the ancient harbour.

At a small distance from Nicaea, on the road to Nikomedia, the obelisk of Gaius Cassius Philieus is located. The obelisk is 12 m. in height and it is placed on a rectangular base which measures 2 by 3 m. It is probably a family grave.



1. Str. 2.134; Ptol., *Geog.* 5.1.3; Plin., *HN* 6.34.217; Cohen, G.M., *The Hellenistic Settlements in Europe, the Islands and Asia Minor* (Berkeley - Los Angeles - Oxford 1995), pp. 398-400.
2. Nonn. *D.* 15.170, 16.403-5 ; *D. Chr.* 39.1, 39.8 ; Str. 12.4.7; Eust. 2.863; Memn., *FHG* 434 F 28.9-10; Plin., *HN* 148.
3. App., *Mith.* 6, 77.
4. App., *BC* 5.139.1.
5. Str. 12.4.7.
6. Procop., *Aed.* 5.3.
7. Pl. *Ep.* 10.39, 10.48.

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Δικτυογραφία :

 Nicaea

<http://romeartlover.tripod.com/Nicea.html>

Γλωσσάριο :

 **cavea**

The auditorium or audience sitting of a theater.

 **gymnasium**

The gymnasium was one of the most important centres of public life in Greek cities. The institution of the gymnasium, directly connected with the development of the Greek city, aimed to create virtuous citizens and gallant warriors. As educational institutions of public character, the gymnasia were intended for the physical and theoretical education of the young and consisted of separate spaces for special purposes.

 **hippodamian plan**

A town-planning system, developed by architect Hippodamus from Miletus. It was based on a grid-shaped plan which laid out roads and streets intersecting each other in opposite directions.

 **orchestra**

The performance space of the ancient Greek and Roman theatre, placed between the scene building and the cavea. It was usually semi-circular in shape and rarely circular.

 **scene (lat. scaena -ae)**

The stage building of the ancient theaters originally used for storage but provided a convenient backing for performances.