

NEAPOLIS

Neapolis was an ancient port city located on the northern shores of the Aegean Sea at the site of modern Kavala. It was built below Mount Simvolo, on a rocky promontory that extended out into the Aegean. Numerous cities in Greece, Italy, Turkey, and Palestine were called “Neapolis” in the ancient world. These were typically founded on or near more ancient settlements. The name Neapolis—which can be written in Greek as *Nea Polis* or *Neapolis*—joins the words “new” (*nea*) and “city” (*polis*) to mean “new city.” This particular Neapolis was located in the territory that had once belonged to Thrace (see Pliny *Natural History* 4.18 [11]) but later came under the control of Macedonia. It is called “Neapolis in Thrace” or “Neapolis by Antisara” in the Athenian Tribute Lists in order to distinguish it from other cities that shared the same name. Antisara was located just west of Neapolis; perhaps it was the old settlement that stood in contrast to the “new city.”



Modern Kavala and Its Harbor

Neapolis was founded as a colony of the nearby island of Thasos, likely in the seventh century B.C. Dio Cassius explained geographically that Neapolis was “near the sea, opposite

Thasos" (*Roman History* 47.35.3). Neapolis served as a port for Thasos' military and commercial interests on the mainland of Thrace. It provided access to the gold and silver mines located there. Herodotus stated that Thasos extracted an average of 80 talents of gold annually from the mines of a particular forest on the Thracian coast (*Histories* 6.46.3).

The most prominent religious cult in Neapolis was that of "The Virgin" (*Parthenos*). While she has been equated with Artemis or some other goddess, her exact identity is uncertain. Her sanctuary, located near the old Ottoman Imaret on Poulidou Street in modern Kavala, was excavated in the early 1930s. Nevertheless, some of the finds were lost during World War II and the years that followed. Later excavations took place in that area during the 1950s and 1960s. In more recent years, the pottery from those efforts has been carefully studied. While not much remains of the Virgin's temple (fifth century B.C.), a few of its Ionic capitals are on display in the Archaeological Museum of Kavala.

Neapolis' relationship with its founder, the island of Thasos, was not one of continual subservience. This is evident from observing three facts of history. (1) By the end of the sixth century B.C., Neapolis exercised partial autonomy by minting its own silver coins. Some of these had the face of a frightening Gorgon; others also included the head of a beautiful woman, who has been variously interpreted as the Virgin goddess of Neapolis, Nike, or a nymph. (2) In time, Neapolis collected its own customs on merchandise moving through its harbor, which demonstrates additional economic independence from Thasos. (3) Ultimately, Neapolis stood against Thasos in regard to military alliances and conflicts. This last point is worthy of further consideration.

For a time, Neapolis and Thasos were both members of the Delian League, which was formed as a Greek military alliance in 478 B.C. Following war with the Persians, the purpose of the league—led by Athens and its powerful navy—was to protect its members from their enemies. Conflict arose when Athens took control of markets and mines in Thrace, an area that had historically been controlled by Thasos, and attempted to colonize Amphipolis (Thucydides *Peloponnesian War* 1.100.2-3). In 465 B.C., when Thasos revolted against Athens and renounced its membership in the Delian League, Neapolis remained loyal to Athens.

Near the end of the fifth century B.C., Athens had more than one conflict with Thasos (Thucydides *Peloponnesian War* 8.64.1-5; Diodorus Siculus *Library* 13.72.1). A marble stele from the Acropolis contains two decrees (410/9 and 407 B.C.) commending Neapolis for its loyalty to Athens. Neapolis had endured a siege by Thasos, given financial aid to Athens, and assisted Athens in fighting against Thasos on land and sea. The Neapolitans requested to have their identity as "colonists of the Thasians" erased from the first inscription, formally renouncing their origins. The damaged image that accompanies the decrees shows Athena, the patron goddess of Athens, apparently giving her blessing to the Virgin, the patron goddess of Neapolis (Acropolis Museum, Athens, no. EM 6598). The Decree of Elpinos from 356/5 B.C., which honors Neapolis for assisting Athens against Philip II, has a complete image of the larger Athena blessing the smaller Virgin (National Archaeological Museum, Athens, no. NM 1480).

Philip II of Macedon took control of Krenides in 356 B.C. and renamed it Philippi after himself. He also took possession of Neapolis and began using it as his harbor. Neapolis was located nearly ten miles southeast of Philippi. Philip also gained control of the gold and silver mines at Mount Pangaion, which enabled him to establish a mint and finance additional military exploits (Strabo *Geography* 7, fragment 41; Diodorus Siculus *Library* 16.3.7; 16.8.6-7).

Following Rome's victories over the Greeks, Macedonia was made into a Roman province in 146 B.C. The Egnatian Way spanning Macedonia was built between 146 and 120 B.C., connecting the Adriatic coast with the Aegean coast as far east as Cypsela (Ipsala). Later, it was expanded to Byzantium. This major highway linked Neapolis and Philippi. In 42 B.C., the port of Neapolis was used by the Republican generals Brutus and Cassius, the assassins of Julius Caesar, in the Battle of Philippi (Appian *Civil Wars* 4.13 [106]). They were defeated by Octavian and Mark Antony, bringing an end to the Roman Republic. Octavian later defeated Mark Antony at the Battle of Actium in 31 B.C. and eventually became the Roman emperor.

Neapolis is mentioned only once in the Bible, when on the second missionary journey Paul first stepped foot on the European continent (c. A.D. 49). After receiving the Macedonian call, he and his companions had sailed from Troas to Samothrace; and the next day they sailed on to Neapolis. From there, they traveled overland to Philippi (Acts 16:11, 12a). Paul may have passed through Neapolis again on the third missionary journey, after leaving Ephesus and traveling to Macedonia (Acts 20:1). However, the text does not name the specific places he visited at that time. Certainly, the port city of Neapolis is implied in Luke's later abbreviated statement: "But we sailed from Philippi . . . and five days later joined the others at Troas, where we stayed seven days" (Acts 20:6). The Church of St. Paul at Kavala commemorates the apostle's coming to Neapolis in Acts 16:11, as does the monument at the Church of St. Nicholas.

Other than the excavations surrounding the temple of the Virgin, few of the ruins of Neapolis are visible today because the modern city of Kavala rests on top of it. Nevertheless, artifacts from the ancient city and the broader region of Macedonia and Thrace can be found in the Archaeological Museum of Kavala. Beyond the column capitals from the Virgin's temple previously mentioned, the museum features coins of Macedonian kings, a Cycladic amphora, black-figure wares, sarcophagi, stelae, Hellenistic and Roman sculptures, and Roman milestones from the Egnatian Way.

During the Byzantine period, Neapolis was renamed Christoupolis ("City of Christ") in order to commemorate Paul's visit there. Later, during the Ottoman period, the city's name was changed to Kavala. One explanation is that this name derives from *cavalla*, which is Latin for "horse." The city was an important postal station during the Ottoman Empire, where couriers changed their horses before riding on to the next destination.

Tourists are often impressed by the Aqueduct of Kavala, popularly known in Greek as *Kamares* ("Arches"). While initially constructed in Roman times, the aqueduct was rebuilt by Sultan Suleiman the Magnificent in the sixteenth century A.D. The aqueduct reportedly still brought water to Kavalla in the early 1900s.



Aqueduct of Kavala