



## Summary :

Mythological hero, son of king Nisos of Megara. According to the oral tradition, he was the founder of Byzantium, on the mouth of the Bosporos. The foundation of the city by the Megarians was part of the general framework of the Second Greek colonization, which took place between the 8th and the 6th century B.C.

## Date and Place of Birth

7th century BC, Megara (?)

## Main Role

Mythological hero and oikistes

## 1. Origin and mythology

Byzas was a mythological hero. According to one tradition, he was son of king Nisos of Megara.<sup>1</sup> According to another tradition, however, he was son of [Poseidon](#) and Keroessa, daughter of Io and [Zeus](#), born by her mother at the Keras, i.e. the Golden Horn. Some versions of this second mythological tradition relate that Byzas was not brought up by his mother, but by a naiad, called Byzia.<sup>2</sup> A third tradition, finally, mentions Byzas as son of the nymph Semystra.<sup>3</sup>

More than one versions relate that Byzas married Phidaleia, daughter of king Barbyzos or Barbysios. Several others also mention that Byzas and Phidaleia had to fight hard against [Thracian](#) and [Scythian tribes](#). They also fought against Byzas' brother, Stoibos. Modern readers and scholars, however, should always bear in mind that mythological traditions often constitute attempts to offer etymological explanations of place names.

## 2. Byzas as founder of Byzantium

In the 7th century B.C., Greek cities were competing against each other in order to spread the network of their colonies. As a Doric colony, Megara was also involved in such an effort.

According to the most prevalent mythological version, king Nisos had sent an embassy to the oracle at Delphi, in order to ask where his son and future founder of the colony, Byzas, should head to. The oracle advised Byzas to settle "opposite to the city of the blind". When Byzas reached the spot where the Bosporus meets the Propontis (Sea of Marmara), he immediately realized what the oracle meant. The site opposite Chalcedon combined unique topographical features: at that point the Bosporus, which connected the Black Sea with the Propontis, and finally with the Aegean Sea and the Mediterranean, formed an extremely deep and well-protected bay, the Golden Horn. The site was also protected from the inland by a series of hills, whereas a number of torrents and small rivers provided ample quantities of water for irrigation and drinking purposes. Furthermore, there was rich vegetation, particularly tall trees which offered timber, valuable for building houses and ships alike. Byzas thought that the inhabitants of Chalcedon must have been the "blind ones", who disregarded the advantages of this site, and he thus went on to found the city to which he gave his name, Byzantium. As foundation date of the city was considered the year 667 B.C.

The inhabitants of [Byzantium](#) adopted this foundation myth and considered Byzas as their founder. In the Roman period [coins](#) were issued which bore his image.<sup>4</sup> Hesychios also mentions that a statue of Byzas and Phidaleia, dating from the Late Classical or Early Hellenistic period, was situated at a prominent position within the city.<sup>5</sup>

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1. Hesych. 5; Steph.Byz. s.v. "Byzantion".



2. Hesych. 8.9; Procopius, *De Aedif.* I.5.
3. Hesych., *Mil.Patr.*C5 (FGH IV 147).
4. Σβορώνος, Ιω., «Κερόεσσα, η μυθική του Βύζαντος μήτηρ», *Εφημερίς Αρχαιολογική* 1889, 79.115.
5. Hesych. 34. See also Nic.Gregoras I. 305.

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#### Bibliography :

	<b>Miller J.</b> , "Byzas", <i>RE II</i> , Stuttgart, 1.157-1.158
	<b>Firath N.</b> , <i>Les stèles funéraires de Byzance Gréco-romaine</i> , Paris 1964

#### Sources

Stephanus Byzantinus, *Ethnica*, s.v "Byzantion".

Procopius, *De Aedificiis* I.5.

Hesychius, *Lexicon*.