



Summary :

Sanctuary and oracle of Apollo along the Ionian-Carian borderline, connected with its mother city Miletus by road probably since Archaic times. During the late 7th and the 6th century BC it reached its apex of prominence and influence on Aegean politics. Among its three successive temples of Apollo the second was one of the largest marble temples of its age.

Other Names

Didymoi (Δίδυμοι), Branchidai (Βραγχίδαι), Hieronda, Jeronda, Yoran, Yenihisar, Didim

Geographical Location

West Turkey

Historical Region

Ionian

Administrative Dependence

Persian Kingdom, Empire of Alexander, Attalid Kingdom, Roman province of Asia

1. Location

Didyma/Branchidai is situated on the west coast of modern Turkey within the present-day town of Didim, a rapidly developing tourist resort on the Milesian peninsula. The sanctuary and oracle of Apollo lies upon a plateau of limestone formation in the southern part of the peninsula. The sanctuary was originally connected with its mother city [Miletus](#) some 24 km to the north by an unpaved road leading over hill and valley. In ancient times the border between [Ionia](#) and [Caria](#) ran just south of Didyma. Today the site is easily accessible over good roads from Izmir (130 km to the north) or from Aydin (80 km to the east).

2. Name

The name Didyma (τα Δίδυμα [neuter plural] or οί Δίδυμοι) would appear to be a term of Carian origin used to refer to a location or settlement.¹ It antedates the [Ionian colonization](#) of the region, which lasted until ca. 1000 BC.² A possible reading of δίδυμος as the Greek word for “double,” as had been suggested even in ancient times, represents a secondary interpretation. Besides Didyma, used exclusively in the epigraphic testimony, a somewhat later appellation appears in [Herodotus](#), who seems to have used it principally as a topographical reference: Βραγχίδαι.³ This recognition of Branchidai as a place-name would belie an earlier thesis of Tuchelt,⁴ who interpreted it as the name for a nobility of priests and aristocrats. Over the centuries the Greek word for sanctuary, το ἱερόν, was incorporated into more recent names that have been used for the settlement: Hieronda, Jeronda and Yoran. From the establishment of the Turkish Republic until 1996 the village was called Yenihisar; in that year its name was changed to Didim in honor of the ancient city.

3. Significance and chronology

The eminence of Didyma, probably the largest of the extramural sanctuaries in Asia Minor, was founded not only upon the Temple of Apollo, one of the greatest buildings of antiquity, but upon numerous other sanctuaries and secular structures as well. Although the ancient historians inform us only of the Sanctuary of Apollo, inscriptions and works of art from Hellenistic and Roman Imperial times indicate that there existed cults of other deities, including [Artemis](#), Zeus, Leto, Hecate, Aphrodite, and Tyche.⁵ The importance of the oracle at Didyma should also be emphasized; dozens of answers given by the oracle have been precisely inscribed on stone.⁶ A chronological framework for the activity in Didyma is also illustrated by the great number and variety of art and artifacts recovered; these provide a nearly continuous record from the mid-second millennium BC through the end of the first century AD. Investigations at



Didyma therefore represent a rare opportunity; we can follow the historical development of a site from its beginnings as a tiny self-sufficient germ of a rural cult through its fame as a huge sanctuary of the *polis* Miletus. The small settlement it incorporated eventually grew into a bishop's seat, and was finally transformed into a medieval castle.

4. Ancient sources

In addition to detailed notes on the Sanctuary of Apollo and its history in Herodotus, [Strabo](#) and [Pausanias](#)⁷ there are numerous shorter comments providing useful information in the works of other writers.⁸

5. History

5.1. Prehistoric Period

Whether or not the natural spring incorporated at the center of the later Temple of Apollo was actually used for cult ritual before the end of the second millennium BC, there is evidence of settlement in southern Miletia and the Didym area from late Neolithic times onward. Sherds from this period have been found on Tavşan Island just off the coast to the northwest of Didim.⁹ Obsidian artifacts dated ca. 5000 BC have been recovered at two findspots within a 4-km radius of the Temple of Apollo, one to the north and one to the south.¹⁰ Just two kilometers south of the temple, bronze weapons (including swords and axes, today on display at the Ephesus Museum in Selçuk) accompanied by pottery came to light during construction work in 1994. These finds indicate one or more tombs from the mid-second millennium BC. Within area of the temple itself, only one small sherd represents evidence definitely pre-dating 1000 BC; this fragment, found in 1964, is from a Mycenaean kylix.¹¹

5.2. Archaic period

Without doubt Didyma reached its apex of prominence and influence on Aegean politics in the late seventh and the sixth century BC. The Egyptian pharaoh Necho and King Croesus of [Lydia](#) sent gifts to the god Apollo from their far-off realms.¹² The first of the some five strata that eventually comprised the Sacred Way linking Miletus to Didyma was laid through countryside in this period.¹³ Just before the approach to Didyma the road passed through a small valley. Here to the west of the road was a second spring; from Archaic times onward, basins cut into the soft conglomerate here channeled the water for use in sacrifices to an unknown deity.¹⁴

5.3. Classical and Hellenistic periods

In 494 BC, when Miletus was destroyed by the Persians under King [Darius I](#), Herodotus reports plundering in Didyma as well.¹⁵ Strabo and Pausanias, on the other hand, first note destruction in Didyma at the hands of the Persians some years later in 479 BC, when King [Xerxes I](#) set the sanctuary on fire.¹⁶ Although scholars formerly favored the annals of Strabo and Pausanias,¹⁷ recent investigations tend to support the earlier date of destruction.¹⁸ Ceremonial processions from Miletus to Didyma, relinquished during strife with the Persians, were resumed in 479 BC.¹⁹ Construction of the Temple of Apollo remained at a halt, however; few architectural fragments can be dated to the Classical period.²⁰ New building activity began around 330 B.C., when the city of Miletus initiated work on a new Temple of Apollo, now planned on an even larger scale than that of the archaic temple. At the beginning of the third century BC, the Seleucid king [Seleucus I](#) not only offered financial support, but also returned the Archaic cult-statue of Apollo Philesios (a work of the sculptor Kanachos) that had earlier been carried off to the east by the Persians.²¹ The mother city began to appoint an eponymous priest each year, the Prophetes (Προφήτης). In 277/76 BC there was an [invasion of Galatians](#), who plundered the sanctuary, apparently robbing it of most of its treasures.²² At the end of the third century BC Miletus – following a custom typical of sanctuaries of the Hellenic world – established a Panhellenic athletic and music festival at Didyma. In spring of 44 BC the dictator [Julius Caesar](#) decreed an enlargement in the territory of the sanctuary that enjoyed the privilege of asylum.²³

5.4. Roman imperial times



Although the cults and the oracle at Didyma now demanded less attention and retained only local significance in imperial times, the great respect felt by the Romans towards Didyma continued. Although a note by Cassius Dio reports that Caligula coveted a dedication of the temple of Apollo to his own name, this would appear to be no more than a supposition.²⁴ Trajan counts as one of the important imperial sponsors of the sanctuary, most probably because the oracle once foretold his reign.²⁵ In AD 101/102 the Sacred Way inside the border of the sanctuary was paved area with large marble plaques.²⁶ Like Trajan and Hadrian before him, Julian as well was granted the official position of *prophetes* (προφήτης).²⁷ The pagan cults in the Temple of Apollo continued only a few years longer during the reign of Julian (AD 361-363). The Theodosian edict of AD 391 efficiently put an end to all non-Christian worship.²⁸

5.5. Byzantine and later periods

In the fifth century AD a basilica was installed in the *adyton* (ἄδυτον) of the temple of Apollo. The other Byzantine structures we know²⁹ include residences for the bishops (5th-6th and 10th-12th centuries AD).³⁰ Then in the Dark Ages a fortification was constructed in the eastern part of the temple.³¹ In the early 14th century AD, the Seljuks – whose inheritance passed to the Ottomans – established themselves as the masters of the region.³² By the end of the 18th century inhabitants new to southern Miletia, mostly Greek in origin, using the temple as a quarry, began to build houses upon it and in the surroundings.

6. Economy

6.1. The immediate area of the sanctuary

The finances of the sanctuary of Apollo, which benefited from Miletus and the gifts of the pious, were managed by a committee of treasurers (ταμίαι).³³ Because Didyma was an extramural sanctuary, there were most probably hostels, restaurants and local markets for the visitors from abroad; we know there were artisans producing votive offerings.³⁴

6.2. The settlement and surroundings

At least from the Hellenistic period onward, we are dealing with a residential neighborhood as well as the sanctuary itself.³⁵ The region of southern Miletia is a relatively dry landscape with limited areas of marly soil where only olive trees flourish. The area supported habitation from Archaic times onward, but the production of olive oil seems to have first been capitalized upon only in the early Byzantine period.³⁶ Much of the surface consists of limestone outcroppings, which consequently served as a quarry for the foundations of the third temple to Apollo.³⁷

7. Priests and other inhabitants

The population of Didyma can be divided into three groups: the religious dignities in charge of the cults and the oracle (*οἱ περί το μαντεῖον πάντες*; (*prophetes, hydrophoros, (syn-)tamias, hypochrestes, grammateis, paraphylax, and neokoroi*), others residing within the sanctuary (*οἱ το ιερόν κατοικούντες*), and those of the neighborhood (*οἱ πρόσχωροι*).³⁸ The highest priest was the *prophetes* (ο προφήτης), who was responsible for sacrifices and the revelation of the oracle. There was a female shearer, the *prophetes* (ἡ προφήτις) who sat in the naiskos by the spring within the *adyton* (ἄδυτον) of the temple. The *hydrophoros* (υδροφόρος) was also a woman – a Milesian as the priestess of Artemis. The *tamiai* (ταμίαι) were responsible for the finances of the sanctuary, the *hypochrestes* (υποχρήστης) probably assisted the *prophetes* (προφήτης) and the *grammateis* (γραμματεῖς) served as scribes who recorded the responses of the oracle and presented them to the public afterwards.³⁹

8. Cult

8.1. Deities



Various finds mirror cult activities; these include epigraphical evidence as well as sculptures, terra-cottas, altars, bases and architectural fragments. Most important are the inscriptions which mention sanctuaries. Besides the cult for Apollo,⁴⁰ a cult for his sister Artemis had been established in archaic times; there was then another cult for an otherwise unknown Heros Aristodemus, as well as those for Zeus, Aphrodite, Angelos, and one in honor of Hecate (Phosphorion).⁴¹ Altars – small in comparison to those set up to Apollo – were dedicated to Artemis, Leto, Zeus, Poseidon, Asklepios, Hermes, Demeter, Kore, Tyche and the Kuretes.⁴² Others known to have been worshipped (either in an official cult or privately) include [Cybele](#), Dionysos, Pan, the nymphs and the muses, Serapis, Isis, Osiris, Telesphorion, Leukotheia, and [Heracles](#),⁴³ not to mention other hero cults.⁴⁴ The deities most important to Didyma were doubtless the gods and goddesses depicted in the sculptured column capitals along the east side of the temple of Apollo; at the north were Artemis and Leto (still in Didim), and at the south Apollo and Zeus (today in the Istanbul Archaeological Museum).

8.2. Procession

The so-called Molpen-inscription⁴⁵ of Hellenistic date provides detailed information on the annual ceremonial procession from Miletus to Didyma. This epigraphic text is understood to be the transcription of a cult-law that can be traced to 479 BC.⁴⁶ The high officials and the collegium of the *Molpoi* had probably been established by the *polis* Miletus as early as the first half of the seventh century BC. In the inscription six stations for prayers and hymns during the day-long procession from the Delphinium in Miletus to the temple in Didyma are specified. Even today a long stretch of the Sacred Way and some of these stations (the Archaic *temenos* with sphinxes, and the sanctuary of the Nymphs) are still visible today.⁴⁷

8.3. Festival (Didymeia)

The earliest reference mentioning the athletic and choral contests in honor of Apollo dates to the year 299/98 BC. In this inscription a benefactor is honored by being granted a seat at the festival ([proedria](#)).⁴⁸ There is no evidence for earlier games. The Panhellenic (or “Great”) *Didymeia* then became institutionalized somewhere between 210 and 200 BC, after which it was held every four years. Athletic disciplines included contests for boys (boxing, wrestling, a stadium race, a double-course race, a pankration, and a pentathlon), young men (boxing) and men (boxing and wrestling), as well as long distance running and perhaps a torch race.⁴⁹ Competition in tragedy, lyre-singing, choral song and other musical arts completed the celebration.⁵⁰ From 177 AD onwards the festival was known as the *Didymeia Kommodeia*.⁵¹

9. Monuments

9.1. The Temple of Apollo

The remains of the first building erected above the sacred spring (one of the rare water sources in southern Miletia), the so-called *Sekos* (Σηκός, Cella) I, date to ca. 700 BC.⁵² In the mid-sixth century, then, the construction of a monumental temple was begun. Around 530 BC the plan of the edifice was altered, and the structure was transformed into one of the largest marble temples of its age.⁵³ Inside the open court, or the adyton(ἄδυτον), the sacred spring was roofed over by a small temple (*naiskos*) known as the *Manteion*, the seat of the oracle.⁵⁴ Whether the [Persians](#) really destroyed the temple in 494 BC or not still remains unclear, but there ensued a distinct lapse in activity over the next one and a half centuries. It was not until the mid-fourth century B.C. that a third temple was begun on the site, this time destined not only to be one of the grandest buildings of its time, but one recognized throughout the ancient world.⁵⁵ The progress of its construction is well documented in a series of building inscriptions including not only certain details of costs, workmen and materials⁵⁶ but also markings inscribed on the walls.⁵⁷ On the walls of the adyton (ἄδυτον) 200 m² of sketches at a scale of 1:1 can be seen; these must have served as building plans.⁵⁸ The adyton (ἄδυτον) with walls 25 m in height, and the eastern pronaos (πρόδομος, pronaos) with its so-called “two- and twelve-column” court had reached completion by 170 BC, after which construction seems to have been interrupted for some decades. Whereas some columns in the [peristasis](#) were erected as early as the Hellenistic period, others date to Roman imperial times.⁵⁹ The ceiling and roofing above the columns was never



completed. The latest progress on the original temple plan can be dated to ca. 200 AD. In an alteration (shortly before 260 AD) the space between the columns on the eastern façade blocked up, forming a massive stone wall. In the Christian era, a basilica was erected inside the adyton, and in the seventh century AD the massive prodromos was transformed into a fortification. In 1493 an earthquake then destroyed both the walls and the colonnades.⁶⁰ Restoration was begun in 1906 with a rebuilding of the adyton walls to some five meters in height. Since 1992 the German Archaeological Institute has been working on a plan for a safe and lasting reconstruction; stone-masons are now at work stabilizing the columns and walls.

9.2. Other buildings

Many various buildings, large and small, were constructed for purposes of administration, storage, cult, or simply as ornamentation of the sanctuary. Some of these were established as early as seventh century BC and remained continuously in use until the fourth century AD.⁶¹

9.3. Monuments on the Sacred Way

To the west of the Sacred Way as one approaches Didyma lies an outcropping of conglomerate. Here, around 700 BC basins for fountains fed by a natural spring were cut into the rock. The pottery found in and near these basins give a clear indication that the area was used for cult ritual. One hypothesis speculates that this was a sanctuary of Artemis,⁶² but in the absence of definitive proof, we should work from the premise that the cult honored a goddess still unidentified. In the Hellenistic period wells were dug and buildings erected: the so-called "*Temenos A*," a temple-like structure of monumental blocks, the *Hanggebäude* and the *Nordgebäude*. A small portico, or stoa, ran along the Sacred Way in front of these buildings. Then in the second century AD a most unusual 'L'-shaped complex was built, containing 17 rooms. Although some rooms had as many as four doors or windows, none featured a paved floor; there was only the natural conglomerate surface.⁶³ Slightly to the west, a bath was constructed as well during the second century.⁶⁴

10. History of investigation at the site

Members of the English Society of Dilettanti were the first to measure and sketch the ruins of the temple. The first excavation took place under the direction of Charles-Thomas Newton in 1857-58, and unearthed marble statues, the so-called "Branchidai," in the north of the temple.⁶⁵ French archaeologists twice resumed excavation at the temple site, Olivier Rayet and Albert Thomas in 1873 and Bernard Haussollier and Emmanuel Pontremoli in 1895-96; although they cleared large areas, the entire temple was by no means exposed. Theodor Wiegand, under the auspices of the Preußische Museen in Berlin, then continued excavation of the huge temple with an army of workmen and machines. Working from 1905 to 1913, and again after WW I in 1924-26, it was he and his chief architect Hubert Knackfuss who had the honor to "finish" the great mission. The three-volume publication of their investigations did not appear, however, until 1941. Recent investigations at Didyma, initiated by the German Archaeological Institute, have been continuing since 1962.⁶⁶

10.1. Current state of the investigations

After some years of work devoted mainly to the finds collected in the storerooms, new investigations have been initiated in the ancient topography of Didyma. Because earlier excavation had concentrated only within a limited area, little was known about ancient settlement or sanctuaries in the areas outside the temple of Apollo and the complex at the end of the Sacred Way. The new research therefore began by exploring wider areas to the northwest of Didyma with the aid of geophysics. Actual excavation then started in small trenches situated to expose structures visible on the geophysical map. Thus the palaestra and portico north of the bath has come to light, as well as another building (ca. 30 x 15 m) from Hellenistic or early Roman times at its northern end. The latter, the function of which is not yet clear, is constructed of massive limestone masonry. To the east of the Sacred Way on the hill called Taxiarchis (Ταξιάρχης), strata of severely burnt earth yielded bronze plaques, finely decorated pottery from various regions throughout the Mediterranean, ivories, and terra-cottas, all from the late seventh and the sixth centuries BC. These artifacts were doubtlessly offerings to a god or – more likely – a goddess. Unfortunately, save for some 50 fragments of painted tiles and eaves, no architectural



remains have survived.⁶⁷

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3. Hdt. 1.46.2; 1.92.2; 2.159.3. Ehrhardt, N., "Didyma und Milet in archaischer Zeit", *Chiron* 28 (1998) pp. 15 n. 17; 16. 19.
4. Tuchelt, K., "Die Perserzerstörung – archäologisch betrachtet", *AA* 1988, p. 433; Tuchelt, K., et al., *Didyma III 1: Ein Kultbezirk an der Heiligen Straße von Milet nach Didyma* (Mainz 1996) pp. 238 f.; *NPauly* 3 (1997) col. 544 s.v. Didyma (K. Tuchelt).
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6. Fontenrose, J., *Didyma: Apollo's Oracle, Cult, and Companions* (Berkeley– Los Angeles – London 1988) pp. 77-105; Günther, W., "Rez. Fontenrose", *Gnomon* 63 (1991) p. 607; Rosenberger, V., *Griechische Orakel. Eine Kulturgeschichte* (Darmstadt 2001) pp. 9. 22. 58. Stone inscriptions are also to be found in the standard opus by Rehm, A., in: Th. Wiegand (Ed.), *Didyma. Zweiter Teil: Die Inschriften* (ed. by R. Harder) (Berlin 1958). More recently recovered sources (1962 onward) in Günther, W., "Eine neue didymäische Bauinschrift", *IstMitt* 19/20 (1969/70) pp. 237-247; Günther, W., "Inschriften", *IstMitt* 21 (1971) pp. 97-108; Günther, W., "Inschriftenfunde", *IstMitt* 23/24 (1973/74) p. 168; Günther, W., "Siegerinschrift eines Pankrationkämpfers in Didyma", *IstMitt* 27/28 (1977/78) pp. 297-300; Günther, W., "Inschriftenfunde 1978 und 1979", *IstMitt* 30 (1980) pp. 164-176; Günther, W., "Inschriften von Didyma", *IstMitt* 35 (1985) pp. 181-193; Günther, W., "Didyma Reperta: Zu zwei wiedergefundenen Inschriften", *IstMitt* 46 (1996) pp. 245-250.
7. Hdt. 1.46.2; 1.92.2; 1.157.3; 1.158; 1.159-160.1; 2.159.3; 5.36.2; 6.19.2-3. Strab. 9.3.9 p. 421; 11.11.4 p. 518; 14.1.5 p. 634; 17.1.43 p. 814. Paus. 1.16.3; 7.2.6; 7.5.4; 8.46.3.
8. Clem. Al. Protr. 3.45 Scholion; Curt. 7.5.28-35; Etym. m. 272.44 f.; Georgius Pachymeres Historicus Andr. Pal. 3.9 p. 144 b; Kall. fr. 194.28 Pfeiffer, fr. 229 Pfeiffer; Kallisthenes FGrH 124 F 14; Lukian. Astr. 23; Plin. n. h. 34.75; Steph. Byz. s.v. Δίδυμα; Suda s.v. Βοαρχίδαι; Suet. Cal. 21; Tac. ann. 3.63; Ulp. (reg.) Tit. 22.6; Vitruv. 7 praef. 16.
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14. *Ibid.* p. 25 f. fig. 42.
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16. Strab. 14.1.5. Paus. 8.46.3
17. Tuchelt, K., "Die Perserzerstörung von Didyma – archäologisch betrachtet", *AA* 1988, p. 427; *EAA Suppl. III* (1995) col. 661 s. v. Mileto (P. Schneider).



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Glossary :

	adyton or avaton The most sacred area of a temple where only the priests were allowed to enter.
	peristasis



The collonade surrounding a building.



proedria

It was the right to sit in the front, especially made, seats of the theatre and it was applied to priests and magistrates of a city as well as to official envoys of other cities. In addition, this right was bestowed to people honoured by a city.

Chronological Table

10.000-7000 BC.: Late Neolithic pottery found on an islet to the north of Didyma.

5000 BC.: Tools made of obsidian found a few kilometres north and south from Didyma.

1500 BC.: Bronze weapons from a grave (or graves), 2 km. south from Didyma.

Late 2nd millennium BC.: Mycenaean kylix fragment near to the temple of Apollo.

700 BC.: Construction of the cella I round the sacred well.

600/550 BC.: Construction of the first small temple.

7th cent. BC.: Processions from Miletus to Didyma.

after 608 BC.: The Pharaoh Necho dedicated clothing or weapons to Apollo.

6th cent. BC.: King Croesus sent votives to Didyma. Marble statues of the so-called "Branchidai".

560/530 BC.: The construction of temple II began (later the plan was changed).

494 BC: King Darius besieged Miletus - Didyma as well ?

479 BC.: The procession from Miletus to Didyma was re-institutionalized.

330 BC.: The construction of temple III began.

ca. 300 BC.: The construction of the small temple IV was completed. The athletic and music competitions in honour to Apollo were mentioned for the first time.

277/276 BC.: The Gauls raided the sanctuary's treasures.

Late 3rd cent. BC.: The Great "Didymeia".

219-217 BC.: The walls of the adyton were completed by half.

ca. 160 BC.: The walls of the adyton were almost completed.

44 BC.: Caesar extended the privilege of asylum to the sanctuary of Apollo.

AD 101/102: The end of the Sacred way was laid by marble slabs (in Trajan's time).

AD 120-170: The construction works on the temple were intensified.

AD 391-400: Pagan worship was ended.



5th /6th cent. AD: A Christian basilica existed inside the sanctuary.

after 6th cent. AD: Oliculture in the area around Didyma.

AD ca. 700: Construction of a fort inside the temple of Apollo.

14th cent. AD: The Seljucs captured the fort-temple.

AD 1493: The temple was destroyed by an earthquake.