



Summary :

Apollo was the most important patron god of colonisation and the Greek colonists always asked for the god's blessing before attempting a new migration expedition. The oracles dedicated to Apollo were sufficient to meet the needs of Greek metropolises. The cult of Apollo is believed to have originated from Northern Greece or Asia Minor. Some of the common epithets of Apollo in the Black Sea are Delphinios, Iatros and Hyperborean.

Date

Mid-7th century BC-Late Antiquity

Geographical Location

Black Sea

1. Origins of cult

The cult of [Apollo](#) in the Black Sea starts with the arrival of the first [Greek settlers](#) from the [Ionian shores](#) of Asia Minor in the mid-7th century BC.¹ Although ancient oracles of the God referring to the foundation of the Greek settlements on the Black Sea there have not been preserved (with the exception of Propontis, according to a Hellenistic inscription),² it is believed that such oracles must have been given by the [sanctuary at Didyma](#)³ in [Miletus](#), the metropolis of Ionia.⁴ There is an ancient written testimony associated with the founding of [Sinope](#) by Koos and Kretines,⁵ who have apparently been exiled (and becoming fugitives) out of Miletus and they subsequently asked for a prophecy from the oracle at Delphi, the rival of Didyma.

Apollo was the son of Zeus and Leto and twin ('didymos' in Greek) brother of Artemis (hence the name Didyma to the oracle of Miletus). Although the origin of the worship of the God is uncertain, it is possible to have derived from Northern Greece or Asia Minor. Apollo was definitely not a Greek god originally,⁶ and this is reflected by the fact that in [Homer's Iliad](#) he is the enemy of the Greeks and an ally of the Trojans. In the Iliad the name of the god is Lycius and this correlates him with the region of [Lycia](#). Nevertheless, his Asian origin has not been testified yet. How and why this particular god was connected with the prophecies in Ancient Greece is unclear; however, he is described by early Greek tradition as such.⁷ In the Black Sea region, Apollo was called Hyperborean, an epithet rendered to the homonymous people who lived at the edge of the known world (according to the ancient tradition), in the Northern Black Sea, near the Ripaia Mountains (modern Ural Mountains?).⁸ According to ancient tradition, the god resided in the country of the Hyperboreans for more than 6 months per year (other sources mention 9 or 19 months). [Herodotus](#) mentions that he acquired most information on the Hyperborean⁹ by the inhabitants of [Delos](#), with whom they communicated.¹⁰

2. Dissemination of the cult

The worship of Apollo was widespread across the entire Black Sea area. This is expected, considering that most of the Greek Black Sea settlements were Ionian (with only few Megarean), primarily at the initiative of Miletus, the city which controlled the oracle at Didyma. Consequently, all the colonists from the metropolis¹¹ knew and worshipped Apollo and therefore asked for his consent and blessing before departing for the long and difficult journey with no return. Moreover, a city bore the name of the God, [Apollonia Pontica](#), which seems to have been built in 610 BC. The remains are preserved in modern Sozopolis in Bulgaria.¹²

A temple dedicated to Apollo was apparently erected in the Milesian colony of Apollonia immediately after its founding.¹³ The ancient writers refer to that temple and add that it housed a large bronze statue of Apollo, which was allegedly sculpted by the Athenian sculptor Kalamis. The statue not only impressed the visitors, but also the Roman general [Marcus Lucullus](#) carried it as booty to Rome (in the year 72/71 BC) and placed in the Capitol. The Roman writer [Pliny the Elder](#) preserves some details concerning the



size and the construction of the statue.¹⁴ It is impossible to determine the exact location of the ancient temple of Apollo at Apollonia Pontica. The matter is debatable among archaeologists and there are controversies mainly due to the presence of epigraphic texts from various locations in the city, as well as from its periphery.¹⁵

The issue of which cult of Apollo was the most widespread in Apollonia also causes great confusion among scholars. It has been suggested long ago that the cult of Apollo Iatros played an important role in all Greek colonies of the Black Sea.¹⁶ But in the case of Apollonia¹⁷ (and neighbouring [Odessos](#))¹⁸ this particular cult should not be taken for granted.

The city more similar to Apollonia, as far as the close relations with the metropolis and the culture are concerned, was [Histria](#) (or Histros). It was built by Milesians colonists in the 7th century BC¹⁹ and its remains have been discovered at the estuary of Histros River (modern Danube), which also gave its name to the city. As it is verified by the archaeological evidence, the city (or possibly the adjacent settlement of [Orgame](#)²⁰) is the first Greek settlement in the entire Black Sea area. Here as well the cult of Apollo prevailed, at least during the first centuries of the foundation of the settlement. The cult of Apollo Iatros is more acceptable²¹ and there is some evidence which proves it in Histria.

Firstly, an epigram with the god-bearing name of Iatrodoros,²² dating to the first half of the 6th century BC, is indirect evidence for the cult of Apollo Iatros. According to inscriptions found in the settlement of Histria, dating to the 4th century BC, the eponymous hero of the city was also a priest of Apollo Iatros.²³ This is verified by other epigraphic monuments of later date, starting from the 1st century BC.²⁴ Other inscriptions (decrees) inform us about the existence of a temple dedicated to Apollo Iatros but it has not been discovered by archaeologists so far.²⁵ The cult of Apollo remained popular in later years as well. Thus, during the Hellenistic period, when the city flourished and developed, a temple in honor of the god Apollo was probably erected.²⁶ This proves that there were at least two temples dedicated to the worship of the god in the city.²⁷

In other cities on the west coast of the Black Sea, the cult of Apollo was equally popular, although the evidence is scanty. In the Milesian colonies, such as [Tomis](#)²⁸ and [Odessos](#),²⁹ the worship of the god was decreed since their foundation. In the Megarian settlements, such as [Mesembria](#), [Callatis](#)³⁰, [Chalcedon](#)³¹ and [Byzantium](#),³² the available evidence is also scarce. However, it is understood that the cult of Apollo held a significant position in the religion of their citizens too.

On the north coast of the Black Sea, the cult of Apollo was widespread, since the Milesians had began building their settlements as early as the second half of the 7th century BC. The main Milesian cities were [Olbia](#), [Panticapaeum](#), [Theodosia](#)³³ and [Kepoi](#),³⁴ in most of which the cult of Apollo seems to have been decreed from the outset. In addition, Apollo was worshipped in other cities of the northern Black Sea, for example in [Hermonassa](#) (apparently a colony of Mytilene), where, according to epigraphic evidence,³⁵ the cults of Apollo Iatros and Apollo Delphinios were established.³⁶

In the city of Olbia, in particular, the cult of Apollo coincides with the foundation of the settlement (circa 590-570 BC), when the first **temenos** was constructed (known as the West temenos),³⁷ in which archaeological excavations have reveal two temples, one dedicated to Apollo Iatros and another to the Mother of Gods.³⁸ The identification of that temple with the cult of Apollo was based on the discovery of an inscription (graffito) on the roof, reading IETROON (IHTPOON).³⁹ Nearly 50 years later than the establishment of Olbia, around the third quarter of the 6th century BC, a new temenos (called the East temenos) was build right next to the preexisting one, dedicated to Apollo Delphinios.⁴⁰

In the capital of the kingdom of Cimmerian Bosphorus, Panticapaeum (which according to recent archaeological discoveries was founded at the same time as Olbia), a wonderful peripteral **Ionic** temple was built in the acropolis during the fourth building period of the settlement (around the mid-5th century BC). It was dedicated to Apollo Iatros and guaranteed the alliance (perhaps an Amphictyony) between the Ionian cities of the Cimmerian Bosphorus which were allied under the auspices of the dynasty of [Archaeanactid](#) of Panticapaeum in 480 BC⁴¹ thus creating the kingdom of Cimmerian Bosphorus.



A [coin](#) bearing the inscription ΑΠΟΛ was apparently cut at the same time, confirming the establishment of the alliance of the Bosporan cities.⁴² Unfortunately, there is not sufficient evidence about the cult of Apollo in the other cities of the east and south shores of the Black Sea. However, we could claim that at least in [Phasis](#) and Sinope, two other Milesian colonies, the remains of temples dedicated to Apollo might be discovered by archaeologists in the future.

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4. More details on the oracle at Didyma in Greaves, A.M., *Miletus: A History* (London – New York 2002), pp. 109-129.
5. *Periplous of Euxeinus Pontus* 986-997.
6. Lazova, T., "The Hyperborean Apollo. Palaeobalkan Realia in the Ancient Cultural tradition", in Lazarov, M. – Angelova, C. (eds.), *Thracia Pontica V. Les ports dans la vie de la Thrace ancienne, 7-12 Octobre 1991* (Varna 1994), p. 195.
7. Howatson, M.C., *The Oxford Companion to Classical Literature*, Φόρη, Β.Δ. (Greek translation) (Thessaloniki 1996), p. 92.
8. Hdt. 4.33.
9. The Greek myth about the Hyperboreans is believed by some scholars to be a reminiscence of an older myth about the creation of the world of Indo-Persian origin, cf. Селиванова, Л.Л., "Индо-иранские мотивы Дельфийской легенды об Аполлоне Гиперборейском", *Journal of Historical, Philological and Cultural Studies* (1998), pp. 101-110.
10. Hdt. 4.33-36. Cf. also Lazova, T., "The Hyperborean Apollo. Palaeobalkan Realia in the Ancient Cultural Tradition", in Lazarov, M. – Angelova, C. (eds.), *Thracia Pontica V. Les ports dans la vie de la Thrace ancienne, 7-12 Octobre 1991* (Varna 1994), pp. 195-208.
11. Greaves, A.M., *Miletus: A History* (London – New York 2002), pp. 123, 127.
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14. Plin., *H.N.* 34.7, 39.
15. For more information and comments cf. Nedev, D. – Panayotova, K., "Apollonia Pontica (end of the 7th-1st centuries BC)", in Grammenos, D.V. – Petropoulos, E.K. (eds.), *Ancient Greek Colonies in the Black Sea 1* ((Thessaloniki 2003), p. 97. Also cf. Gotcheva, Z., "La Thrace Pontique et la mythologie Grecque", in Grammenos, D.V. – Petropoulos, E.K. (eds.), *Ancient Greek Colonies in the Black Sea 2* (Oxford 2007), pp. 54-62.
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36. Finogenova, S.I., "Hermonassa", in Grammenos, D.V. – Petropoulos, E.K. (eds.), *Ancient Greek Colonies in the Black Sea 1* (Oxford 2007), p. 1.021.



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Glossary :

	ionic order, the
An architectural order devised in Ionia and developed in Asia Minor and the Greek islands in the 6th century BC. Its columns have elaborately moulded bases, fluted shafts (with fillets, ending in fillets), and volute capitals. The entablature consists of an three-fasciae architrave, a continuous frieze, usually richly decorated with reliefs, and a cornice. The Ionic order was more elaborate in dimentions, comparing with the Doric.	
	temenos
The enclosed area in which a temple stands; a sacred precinct	