



Apollonia Pontica/ Sozopol

Summary :

The ancient town is situated on the western Black Sea coast, on the present day Skamanij peninsula. The modern city covers entirely the ancient urban structures. The present day Kirik Island, once linked to the continent, was part of Apollonia.

Other Names

Sozopol

Geographical Location

Bulgaria

Historical Region

Thrace

1. Introduction

Apollonia in Thrace, today Sozopol in Bulgaria, is situated on the western Black Sea coast, on the present day Skamanij peninsula. The modern city covers entirely the ancient urban structures. The present day Kirik Island, once linked to the continent, was part of Apollonia.

1.1. Sources

Apollonia is recorded in a fair number of literary sources from [Herodotus](#) to the 8th c. A.D. *Ravennatis Cosmographia*.¹ The inscriptions recording the city are collected in the G. Mihailov's editions of *IGB*.² Coins struck in the Hellenistic and Roman periods mention the town and depict some of its famous monuments.

1.2. Name and position

As many Apollonias in the Greek world, the Pontic Apollonia bears the name of the God-patron of the town, [Apollo](#), to whom the inhabitants dedicated monuments and statues. Among many literary sources which record the town there are some that specify its geographical location and role.

Pomponius Mela places the city "in the gulf where Pontus ends its second bent through an angle" and names it the "big Apollonia" (*magna Apollonia*).³ Strabo records the distance between [Callatis](#) and Apollonia, namely 1300 stadia (240.50 km) and states that "from Apollonia to Cyanaeae there are about 1500 stadia (277.50 km), an interval in which Thynias lies, a land of Apolloniatas, a deserted and rocky sea shore, without ports".⁴

Tabula Peutingeriana records the town at 44.40 km from [Anchialos](#),⁵ while the Antonine Itinerary does not mention it. *Ravennatis Cosmographia* also records the town as having two ports, whence its once flourishing commercial life.⁶

2. History

2.1. Prehistoric period



Apollonia Pontica/ Sozopol

Underwater research in the harbours of Sozopol revealed traces of Chalcolitic and Early Bronze Age settlements. The huge, so-called "Demetrios head", found at the Ropotamo River mouth, dates from the Late Bronze Age.⁷ A Thracian settlement must have been in existence on the promontory in the 10th -7th c. B.C.⁸

2.2. Archaic period

A Rhodian **emporion** seems to have been in existence on the very place of the future colony, as Apollonia was sometimes named Antheia or Anthia.⁹ Officially, the town was founded by colonists from [Miletus](#), possibly in 609 B.C.¹⁰ Occasional excavations in the modern town yielded traces of the Archaic period.¹¹ Herodotus mentions Apollonia in the route of the Persian army during [Darius' expedition against the Scythians](#) (514 B.C.).¹²

2.3. Classical period

In the mid-5th c. B.C., Apollonia joined the Delian league, functioning as an important base for the Athenian fleet in its way to [Taurian Chersonesus](#).¹³ The excavations in the necropolis and town area show that Apollonia reached its momentum in the interval between the Persian wars and the first half of the 4th c.¹⁴ A new defence wall was built. Aineias Taktikos offers interesting details on the 4th c. fortification and alarm system. The number of population reached at that time c. 3,000 free citizens, dependents and free producers.¹⁵ In the second half of the 5th c., Apollonia struck silver coins with the head of Apollo, on the obverse, and the anchor and crab on the reverse, as specific symbols.¹⁶ Trade with Athens and other Ionian and continental Greek centres appears to flourish in the 5th c. B.C.¹⁷ The town maintained good relations with the neighbouring [Thracian](#) Odrysan Kingdom.¹⁸ A Thracian community is well documented at Apollonia.

As a consequence of its economic and demographic development, Apollonia founded [Anchialos](#) (Pomorje), in the 5th c.¹⁹ in a major strategic position. The latter, though, brought it in constant conflict with Messembria, the neighbouring Doric colony.

The demographic boom in Apollonia led to internal political clashes between the Milesian and non-Milesian colonists.²⁰

Apollonia and [Odessos](#) concluded a treaty of alliance with Philip II of Macedonia, both receiving freedom and protection. By 339 B.C., the Scythian king Atheas used Apollonia as an intermediary to ask for military assistance from Philip II in his war against the Getae and a certain rex Histrianorum.²¹

2.4. The Hellenistic period

The freedom of Apollonia was suppressed by [Lysimachus](#). There is no clear indication that Apollonia participated in the revolt of the Pontic towns against the Macedonian king in 313 B.C. By the mid-3rd c.²² Apollonia was in good relations with the Thracian king Cotys, who sent his son as hostage to confirm an alliance treaty.²³

In the first half or in the mid-3rd c. Apollonia was threatened by an important danger, most likely the Tylis-based Celts. In the virtue of the traditional friendship, contractual engagement, and alliance with [Histria](#), the latter sent an



Apollonia Pontica/ Sozopol

expeditionary force led by Callicrates to defend Apollonia against the Celts from Tylis.²⁴ The allied forces won the war.

In the 3rd c. B.C. Apollonia offered help to [Mesembria](#) and played an important role in the liberation of the territory of Callatis from an unspecified enemy intrusion.²⁵ An unknown Apolloniate citizen was honoured at Histria.²⁶ Sometime between 180-150 B.C. another unknown citizen from Apollonia accomplished a mission at Histria, as mediator in the social fights.²⁷

In 179 B.C. Apollonia was endangered by the [Bastarnians](#).²⁸ A 2nd c. B.C. decree found at Histria relates to the war waged by Apollonia against Mesembria for the control of the Anchialos stronghold.²⁹ "It happened that the stronghold from over there [was occupied by enemies?] during an undeclared war started against us by the Messambrians[...]". The decree honoured the people of Histria and its admiral Hegesagoras, Monimos' son, who helped the allied city. The Histrians are called "friends", "relatives", and "allies".³⁰ Apollonia awarded Hegesagoras a golden wreath during the feasts honouring Dionysus, a bronze statue, a prow of a ship to be set in the temple of Apollo Iatros, and a decree carved on marble.

In the first half of the 1st c. B.C. Apollonia required and billeted a garrison of Mithridates VI Eupator, the king of Pontus. It was the headquarters of the Pontic military forces on the western Black Sea shore.³¹

In late 70s of the 1st c. B.C., after a long siege, Apollonia was destroyed by the Roman general Varro Lucullus.³²

Apollonia seems to have entered under the control of Burebista, king of the Getae , as inferred by [Dion Chrysostomos](#).³³ By the late 1st c. B.C. Apollonia was included into the Thracian strategy of Astike.³⁴

2.5. The Early and Late Roman period

The evergrowing importance of Anchialos and Deultum shadowed Apollonia's former prominent position. The city's importance was undermined during the Roman Empire, although it was several times mentioned as a polis/ civitas.³⁵ The defence wall was rebuilt or repaired several times between the 2nd and the late 5th c. The Anonymus "Periplum Ponti Euxini" calls the town Sozopolis,³⁶ a name common in Late Roman and early Byzantine period, whence the modern Sozopol. In the 4th c., Ammianus Marcellinus records the town among the most prominent ones (celebriora) of the province of Thrace.³⁷ In late 5th or early 6th c. the defended area was drastically reduced. A much smaller enclosure wall, on the part of the town called nowadays "Horizont", was built at that date.³⁸ The reconstruction of some parts of this new area occurred during [Justinian's](#) reign. A surface of c. 15 ha remained as an opened, unfortified area. By the early 7th century, the defences were destroyed by the Slavs' invasions, although the habitable area was never abandoned.³⁹

3. Economy

3.1. The town economy

A huge quantity of 6th -2nd c. B. C. pottery of different types (Attic-Beotian red figured, black slipped, and common



Apollonia Pontica/ Sozopol

grey and red ware), [terracotta](#) with human and zoomorphic representations were found in the inhumation burials of the town necropolis. They reveal an intense and steady trade with Attica, the eastern coast of Asia Minor and the Thracian surroundings.⁴⁰

Apollonia struck coins in the late Classical and the Hellenistic period. It struck Tetrobols and Diobols in the second half of the 4th c. B.C. A part of a silver hoard found in the town show intense economic relations with [Parion](#) and Thracian Chersonesus. Coins of Alexander type continued to circulate until the early 2nd century B. C., while those featuring Gods like Dionysus, Herakles, Demeter and Dioscuri were common. Pieces were struck during the period of autonomy (c. 150 B.C.).⁴¹ The town struck coins under [Antoninus Pius](#), [Marcus Aurelius](#), and Lucius Verus. An inscription dated during [Severus'](#) reign mentions Απολλωνιητ[έων?] ἐν Πόν[τω], a sign that the town was still of certain importance.⁴²

3.2. Economy in the chora

Apollonia had an extended [chora](#) towards the south and inland. Of some importance was the harbour installation and settlement identified at the present Chaika Cape at the mouth of the Ropotamo River. Other settlements were identified at Demetrios Cape and at Maslen nos (Cape), where another harbour installation was found.⁴³ Ahtopol, an [emporium](#) of Apollonia was in existence since Archaic times, while at Sinemorec a settlement dominated by Thracian population was investigated.⁴⁴ The strategic point at [Thynias](#) Cape (today Igneada burun) belonged to Apollonia in the 1st c. B.C., as Strabo informs us,⁴⁵ although in the 2nd c. B.C. the area was dominated by the powerful [Thracian tribe](#) of Asti. In the 5th c. B.C. the Apollonians founded Anchialos, a key strategically and economically position, close to the saline and salty lakes which it defended.

4. Burials and cults

4.1. Necropolis

Partial excavations were carried out in the necropolis (at a site called "Calphata"), and within the town area (St. George church, Morski skali and Vjatarna melnica Streets).

The necropolis appeared in the mid -6th century B.C. Three types of inhumation have been identified: 1) simple rectangular, 2) hatched tiles and roof pits with stone plaques on lateral sides (4th c. B.C) and 3) pits entirely riveted in stone, occasionally with wooden coffins (6th -5th c). The cremation burials attributed to the Thracian population clarify the [ethnic relations](#) with the Greek colonists.⁴⁶

4.2. Deities

A 6th c. B. C. votive relief of Cybele represented in a seated position and sided by two lying lions, her companions, is a unique piece in the Pontic basin. A famous representation found at Apollonia is a 3rd c. B.C. fragmentary terracotta showing the Goddess Cybele riding a lion.⁴⁷ The Cybele cult was very popular at Apollonia, from the very beginning, as it was in the entire Pontic basin where representations of the Goddess are significant in number.

In the mid 5th c., the famous Boeotian sculptor, Kalamis, moulded a bronze statue of Apollo Iatros, 13. 20m high, estimated to ca. 500 [talents](#).⁴⁸ The deity was venerated also at Histria, [Olbia](#) and [Pantikapaion](#). A representation of the statue appears on the reverse of a 3rd century silver tetradrachm.⁴⁹ The statue was sent to Rome in 71. B. C., after the town was destroyed by Varus Lucullus, and set on the Capitol.⁵⁰



Apollonia Pontica/ Sozopol

5. Monuments and finds

A late 6th c. B.C. tomb and a head of a young boy were found on the present-day Kirik island.⁵¹ The stele of Deines, Anaximander's son (490 B.C.),⁵² and early 6th c. pottery imports from Attica and Asia Minor are outstanding finds of the archaic period. Famous is also a mid 5th century wooden small statue of a young boy.

A 2nd c. B.C. gravestone is a unique representation. It features a personage holding two lances in the left and reaching his right hand to a young boy head, set on the top of an altar, who seems to point to the deceased. A young slave appears in the right corner of the stone. The deceased must have fallen in battle for the defence of the town or other reasons. This is substantiated by the fragmentary inscription beneath containing the formula "the People", which is likely to have thanked him for his services.

Artefacts of Thracian inspiration were also found. A late 5th c. B.C. clay drinking horn, reproduces the pieces of the same type found in Thrace proper.

6. History of archaeological investigation

Partial excavations were carried out occasionally on some streets areas overlapping ancient structures. The necropolis was excavated between 1946 and 1949. In the territory of the ancient town, places like the Ropotamo River mouth, the Demetrios, Chaika, Maslen Capes, or settlements from Ahtopol, Kiten, Malko kale or Meden rid yielded important archaeological evidence for the economy of the town's chora.

Beside Anchialos, Malko kale was a fortress in the territory of Apollonia which held a key strategic position.⁵³ Its partial investigation shows traces of occupation since late 4th c. B.C. The general opinion is that the fort played an important role during the Varro Lucullus long siege of Apollonia, being one of the places which put a firm stand to the Roman army in 72-71 B.C. A place of economic importance in the territory of the town was the area north of Apollonia, between the Atija Cape and the site called Rosen, where the surveys and archaeological excavations identified a handicraft complex with workshops for metal processing, dated in the 2nd to 1st c. B.C.⁵⁴

Recent investigations established that to the north and west the territory of Apollonia in the Roman period neighboured the Deultum administrative boundary, while to the south the Veleka River described the frontier line with the chora of the town of Bizye.⁵⁵ Investigations in the Ahtopol area revealed that some of the old Apollonia's harbours continued to function in the Roman period.

Occasional archaeological excavations were carried out at the late Roman and early Byzantine defence wall and at two late 5th –early 6th c. churches, found on the Ribarska and another tracked down on the Sveti Kiril i Metodij Streets, where parts of the late defence wall are visible. Excavations identified remains of the early Byzantine fortifications in the present day Kirik island,⁵⁶ once linked to the continent through a narrow strip of land.

1. Her. 4. 93; Arist. *Polit.* 8(5) 2. 11; 5-7; Scyl. Kar. *Peripl.* 67; Ps. Scymn. *Perieg.* 728-731; Aen. *Tact. Poliorcet.* 20. 4; Diod. *Sic. Bibl. Hist.* 20. 112. 2; Strab. *Geogr.* 7. 6. 1; XII 3. 3; Trog. *Pomp. Hist. Philip.* 9. 2. 1; Pomp. *Mela* 2. 22; Plin. *N.H.* 4. 11. 45; 12. 78; 24. 7. 39; Dion Chrysost. *Or.* 36. 4; Ptol. *Geogr.* 3.11. 10; App. *Illyr.* 30. 85; Arr. *Peripl. Pont. Eux.* 36; Anonym. *Peripl. Pont. Eux.* (GGM I 421. 85); Ael. *Varia Hist.* 3. 17; Diog. Laert. 2. 2; Tab. *Peut.* 8. 4; Rav. *Cosmogr.* 4. 6. 4-6; Eutrop. *Brev.* 6. 10; Ruf. *Fest. Brev.* 9; Amm. Marc. 22. 8. 43; *Chron. Pasch.* 2. 64. 3-6; Iord. *Rom.* 221; Steph. Byz. s. v. Apollonia nr. 2.



Apollonia Pontica/ Sozopol

2. *IGBR* I2, 387bis- 473; *ISM* I, 23, 30, 64, 112.
3. Pomp. Mela 2. 22.
4. Strab. *Geogr.* 7. 6. 1.
5. *Tab. Peut.* 8. 4.
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13. *IG* I2, 63, 261-262: [Ἡρ]ακλειῶ τα[ι] Ἀ[πολ.]λωνία.
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15. Aen. Tact. *Polioret.* 20. 4.
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19. *LGRC* 4 (1998) col. 485-487, s.v. Anchialos (M. Zahariade); M. Lazarov, V. Giuzelev, E. Grozdanova, V. Tonev (eds) *Istoria na Pomorie I. Anhialo ot drevnostta do ozvobozhdenie* (Burgas 2000).
20. Arist. *Polit.* 8(5) 2. 11; 5-7.
21. Trog. Pomp. *Hist. Philip* 9. 2. 1.



Apollonia Pontica/ Sozopol

22. Diod. Sic. 19. 73. 2 speaks vaguely enough about an alliance between Callatis and Histria “and other neighbouring towns in order to fight united against Lysimachos”.
23. *IGBR* I2, 389.
24. *ISM* I, 12 = *IGBR* I2, 389.
25. *IGBR* I2, 388.
26. *ISM* I, 23=SEG 19, 465.
27. *ISM* I, 30.
28. Tit. Liv *Ab. Urb. Cond.* 40. 58. 8.
29. *ISM* I, 64.
30. The wording in the Histrian inscription is suggestive: φίλοι και συγγενεῖς και σύμμαχοι.
31. *IGBR* I2, 392.
32. Strab.*Geogr.* 7. 6. 1; Plin. *N.H.* 34. 1. 39.
33. Dion Chrysost. *Or.* 36. 4.
34. Ptol. *Geogr.* 3.11. 10.
35. Arr. *Peripl. Pont. Eux.* 36; Menip. Pergamen. *Peripl.* 156.
36. Anon. *Peripl. Pont. Eux.* 14.
37. Amm. Marc. 22. 8. 43.
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42. *IGBR* I2.
43. *IGBR* I2.



Apollonia Pontica/ Sozopol

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Apollonia Pontica/ Sozopol

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Apollo or Gorgon? (the coins of Apollonia Pontika)

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Glossary :

Bastarnians

German tribe dwelling in the area of the Vistula river.

chora, the

The agricultural land (including villages and land-plots) belonging to a polis. It was bounded with the polis on an administrative and economic basis.

emporion, the

Places where trade was conducted, usually small settlements of urban character on the borders or along the coasts and the commercial routes. With the same term are characterized the trade districts, the markets outside the walls of a city and/or settlements being themselves trade centers.

talent, the

Numismatic weight unit. The silver talent equaled 60 mnai or 6000 silver drachmas.

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