



Summary :

The pantheon of the Black Sea includes deities worshipped on the eastern coasts, Scythia, Thrace and the colonies of Asia Minor coasts. Apart from Apollo's cult, who seems to have been the central god of the pantheon, Artemis, Aphrodite, Demeter and the Daughter/Persephone, Athena, Dionysus and Zeus were also worshipped. The cults of Hermes, the Mother of the Gods, Boreas, the Dioscuri, the Kabeiroi, the Nymphs, Helios (Sun), Asclepius, Poseidon, Ares, Hestia, Nike, Tyche, Perseus, Heracles and Parthenos, a local deity whose cult assimilated elements of Artemis' cult and was associated with Iphigeneia, were less widely spread. Another feature was the cult of heroes, with Achilles holding an eminent position among them and the island of Leuke being the most important centre of his cult. Broadly speaking, there was a coexistence of different devotional traditions with an assimilation of local elements, while the role of Greek cults was very crucial as they acted as a link among the colonies.

Date

Archaic-Roman periods

Geographical Location

Black Sea

1. Setting

The cults of the Black Sea spread over four geographical areas on the coasts of the Black Sea. The first area includes the cults of the northern coast, ancient Scythia, which was centred around the Berezan Island, the cities of [Olbia](#), [Tyras](#) and [Chersonesus Taurica](#) as well as the state of the Cimmerian Bosphorus. The second area includes the western coasts of the Black Sea, namely the region of Thrace, which was centred around the cities of [Histros](#), [Odessa](#), [Callatis](#), [Mesembria](#), [Apollonia](#), [Dionysopolis](#) and [Tomis](#). The third area encompasses the cults of the Asia Minor colonies of the southern coast and particularly [Heraclea](#), Teos, [Amastris](#), [Sinope](#), [Cerasous](#), [Trapezus](#) and the cities of [Amisus](#) and Kotyora. The last area comprises the cults of the cities of ancient [Colchis](#), [Phasis](#), [Dioscurias](#) and [Pityous](#), on the eastern coasts of the Black Sea.

2. Apollo

[Apollo's cult](#) was of primary importance for all the Black Sea colonies. Apollo Iatros, the patron of the Milesian colonization, was worshipped from the very first moment the colonies were founded in the Black Sea, particularly in the cities of the northern and western coasts, around the Berezan Island, Olbia, [Panticapaeum](#), Histros and Apollonia.¹

In Olbia, where he was worshipped as Iatros and Delphinian, his was the main civil cult. The first Ionian temple dedicated to Apollo Iatros in Olbia is dated to the third quarter of the 6th c. BC, while the next one to the end of the same century. Similarly, the earliest temple of Delphinian [Apollo](#) appeared in the mid-5th c. BC.² The cult and the sanctuaries of Apollo in Olbia must have declined towards the end of the Hellenistic era, while they disappeared in the early Christian centuries, when none of the god's names was written on inscriptions.

In the Cimmerian Bosphorus Apollo was originally worshipped along with the other deities. The only exception was Panticapaeum, where his cult became of primary importance right from the beginning, as evidenced by the existence of a monumental complex unmatched to anything else all over the northern Black Sea, the [tholos](#) of Panticapaeum, dated to the late 6th-early 5th c. BC. It is there that the earliest votive inscription from the Bosphorus dedicated to Apollo Iatros was found.³

Inspired by the cult of Apollo Iatros, the cities of the Bosphorus formed a league under the rule of the Archaeanaktids in the second quarter of the 5th c. BC. Towards the mid-5th c. BC, a monumental temple of Apollo was built in Panticapaeum⁴ as the central temple of the league. A locally produced relief from Panticapaeum, dated to 475-450 BC and depicting the god as god-ruler, probably belongs to the temple's decor.

After the formation of a state by the [Spartocid](#) dynasty, Apollo's cult became the cult of the state. The key role of the cult in the



Cimmerian Bosphorus is shown by the fact that the Spartocids served as priests at Apollo's temple. An important element of the Spartocid policy was the introduction of Apollo's cult into the cities annexed to their state, where they built or reconstructed the god's sanctuaries.⁵ The cult started to decline in the Hellenistic period and disappeared in the early Roman years.

In Chersonesus, the cult of Apollo held an important position in the Hellenistic period, when the city promoted its relations with [Delos](#) and Delphi. It is worth mentioning that Delphi granted Chersonesus the privilege of *promanteia* (prior right of consultation) in the 2nd c. BC.⁶ It was possibly in that period that the god's sanctuary was founded in the city, while the domestic cult of the [Apollonian trinity](#) also appears to have been widespread.⁷ Apollo's cult continued in Chersonesus in the Roman years as well. In the 1st c. BC the god was represented on coins minted by Chersonesus, while the number of names attributed to Apollo increased.⁸

Another important centre of Apollo's cult was Histros. On a votive inscription of the second quarter of the 5th c. BC from Olbia, Apollo Iatros is reported as ruler of Histros.⁹ In the acropolis of the city, as it happened in Olbia, there were two shrines dedicated to the god, the oldest of which was dedicated to Apollo Iatros.¹⁰

In Callatis, which was possibly founded after a Delphic oracle,¹¹ Apollo was worshipped mainly as Pythian,¹² as it happened in other Megarian cities. His temple, where the archives of the city were kept, played a major role in the life city's life.

Pythian Apollo was also worshipped in Mesembria,¹³ where two temples of the god have been found, one in the harbour and a second one in the city [agora](#).¹⁴ As evidenced by inscriptions, the official resolutions of the boule and the demos were displayed at Apollo's temple.¹⁵

In Apollonia Pontica, named after the god, the cult of Apollo held a central position. A significant temple of the god¹⁶ was built when the city was founded, including a colossal statue created by the Athenian sculptor Calamides.¹⁷ Apollo Iatros is reported as the main civil deity in three inscriptions of Apollonia, while representations of the god are found on coins of the city issued between the 4th c. BC and the 1st c. AD.¹⁸

Apollo was also worshipped in Odessa, as proven by 5th c. BC epigraphic evidence.¹⁹ The city had a temple of Delphinian Apollo,²⁰ where the head of a god's statue was found.²¹

In Tomis, as indicated by early coins, Apollo was the main civil deity as well. The eponymous archon of the city held the title of the priest, as it exactly happened in [Miletus](#).²²

In Phasis, Apollo's temple is dated to the late 6th or the 5th c. BC. His cult played a key role judging from the phrase reading "Ἀπό λλωνος Ἴγεμό νος εἰ μ τῶμ Φά σι", on a silver [phiale](#) of the late 5th-early 4th c. BC found in the area of Kuban.²³ Amisos, where figurines depicting the god were found, was clearly influenced by Miletus. A temple of [Apollo of Didyma](#) existed in the city in the 1st c. BC.²⁴

3. Artemis

Some factors that contributed to the spreading of [Artemis](#)' cult to the Black Sea cities, apart from its usual connection with Apollo, were the mythological traditions related to the incorporation of the new territories into the ancient Greek world, the relations between the colonies and both their metropolises and other Greek cities of the Mediterranean Basin as well as local conditions.

On Berezan Island and in Olbia Artemis is found as Brauronia.²⁵ In Olbia, where she is also found as Pythian, [Ephesian](#), Delphinian and Agrotera (huntress), her cult was not particularly popular, at least until the Hellenistic era.²⁶ According to inscriptions, a sanctuary of the goddess existed there in the 2nd c. BC,²⁷ while in the same period she was depicted on city coins.²⁸



In the Cimmerian Bosphorus, Artemis appears in Panticapaeum as Ephesian in the third quarter of the 6th c. BC.²⁹ In the 4th c. BC, sanctuaries of the goddess existed in [Hermonassa](#) and [Gorgippia](#).³⁰ Broadly speaking, Artemis remained closely related to Apollo in the Cimmerian Bosphorus. It is not by chance that in Phanagoria towards the mid-4th c. BC there was a temple of Artemis, the goddess of hunting, who was called Agrotera.³¹

In Chersonesus Taurica, Artemis was worshipped from the foundation of the city in the late 5th c. BC until the Roman years, at the same time contributing to the formation of the cult of Parthenos, the major local deity of the city.³² It is very possible that the goddess was worshipped there from the 4th c. BC onwards together with Leto and Apollo in a common sanctuary. Her name is associated with the inclusion of the month Ευκλει ου in the calendar of Chersonesus,³³ the Artemis-related names found in inscriptions as well as with her representations used in coins, figurines and elsewhere.³⁴

Perhaps the cult was spread all along the Thracian coast. In Histros, the cult of Artemis was closely interwoven with the cult of Apollo, with whom, as it happens with Zeus, she is depicted on a 4th c. BC relief representation.³⁵ The existence of a month named after her as well as representations on coins witness that the goddess was worshipped in Callatis.³⁶ A 3rd c. BC votive inscription dedicated to Leto and her daughter was found in the city, where the goddess was called just Parthenos.³⁷ A variety of representations of the goddess in Callatis evidences that her cult played an important role in the city.³⁸ In Apollonia, she was worshipped as Brauronia and Pythian.³⁹

In Odessa, Artemis is found in the 4th c. BC under the name Phosphorus (light bearer). Moreover, she was probably worshipped in a common sanctuary together with the local deity, the hero Karabasmos.⁴⁰ The close relations between the goddess and Apollo's cult become evident in the inscriptions of Dionysopolis.⁴¹

The representations of the Apollonian trinity on the coins of Phasis in Colchis are a possible indication of Artemis' cult, which was closely related to Apollo.⁴² According to sources, there was a sanctuary of "Phasian Artemis" near the city of Phasis".⁴³

4. Aphrodite

The cult of [Aphrodite](#) is one of the most ancient cults in the Black Sea. Following the Asia Minor tradition and largely maintaining her aristocratic nature, the goddess was worshipped in the Black Sea mainly as Aphrodite Urania.

On Berezan Island, Aphrodite was worshipped in archaic years as Syrian Aphrodite.⁴⁴ Archaeological research has recently revealed a shrine of the second half of the 6th c. BC with a small temple and an altar, allegedly dedicated to Aphrodite Urania, according to findings. The shrine and the temple operated until the early 5th c. BC. The short period of the temple's operation is connected with the movement of the population of Olbia Island, where the cult was further spread in that period.⁴⁵

In Olbia, Aphrodite was worshipped mainly as Euploia and Pontike (of the open sea). Her closed archaic temple was revealed in the area of the western shrine of the city, where numerous findings were discovered, including incised inscriptions and figurines.⁴⁶

There is also limited evidence concerning Aphrodite's cult in Tyras.⁴⁷

In the Cimmerian Bosphorus, particularly spread was the cult of Aphrodite Urania, the goddess-patron of colonization in the area, according to some opinion.⁴⁸ The main centres of worship were on the Asian side of the Bosphorus, with the earliest of them being traced in Phanagoria and [Kepoi](#). The role Aphrodite's cult played in the area even from early on is evidenced by its close relation with Apollo due to its aristocratic nature and its correlation with the city's authorities.⁴⁹ Not by chance did the family of the Molpoi, traditionally connected with Apollo's cult, participate in Aphrodite's cult at Kepoi, according to an inscription from the 6th-early 5th c. BC.⁵⁰ Some researchers believe that the label "Aphrodite in Kepoi" was attributed to the goddess due to the local cult.



The most important centre of Aphrodite Urania's cult in the Cimmerian Bosphorus was the sanctuary of Apatouron, known for its springs⁵¹ and classified as an open sanctuary by researchers.⁵² Opinions are divided over the exact location of the sanctuary.⁵³

In the cities of the European Bosphorus Aphrodite was originally worshipped together with other deities, mainly as part of a popular religion, as evidenced by the name Pandemos (for all the people). Representations of Aphrodite Pandemos are found in figurines and clay tiles.⁵⁴

When the Spartocids formed a united state, Aphrodite's cult was upgraded in the cities of the European Bosphorus. A typical example is the city of [Nymphaion](#), where Aphrodite appears as the official partner of Apollo, the main god of the Bosphorus, and possibly becomes the second in rank official civil cult after the city was annexed to the state in the early 4th c. BC. In Hellenistic years her cult also appears in Cytaea and [Myrmekion](#).⁵⁵

The Spartocids also promoted Aphrodite's cult in the Asian Bosphorus in the same period. It is only typical that in the inscriptions of the 4th c. BC Aphrodite Urania is reported as "Ἀπατούρου μεδέουσα" (mindful of Apatouron).⁵⁶ In Gorgippia, where numerous marble and clay figurines of that period come from, hers is one of the official cults of the city. At the turn of the 2nd c. AD a temple was constructed there, dedicated to Aphrodite Nauarchis (mistress of the ships).⁵⁷

In the Dorian Chersonesus Taurica, Aphrodite was worshipped from the Hellenistic period until the end of Antiquity as a chthonic deity and as the goddess of love.⁵⁸ Some researchers consider her cult in Chersonesus a domestic cult.⁵⁹ Her cult was formalised in the second half of the 2nd-early 3rd c. AD, when the temple of the goddess was built in Chersonesus.⁶⁰

In Histros, Aphrodite's cult appeared already from archaic years.⁶¹ Once again, she was closely connected with the male civil cult of [Zeus](#). The 6th c. BC sanctuary operated until the end of Antiquity. The [temple in antis](#) has impressive dimensions and follows the Asia Minor standards.⁶² Inscriptions and numerous architectural parts come from this temple, including fragments of pottery decoration.⁶³

In Apollonia, where figurines of Aphrodite from the second half of the 5th c. BC⁶⁴ as well as the foundations of her temple were discovered, the goddess was worshipped as Syrian Aphrodite, at least in Classical years, as indicated by epigraphic evidence.⁶⁵

Aphrodite was worshipped together with [Dionysus](#) in Mesembria in the 1st c. AD.⁶⁶ Some indications of Aphrodite's cult are also found in Amisos, with the Roman coins minted in the city bearing representations of the goddess.⁶⁷

5. Demeter and Daughter

The cult of [Demeter](#) was introduced into the Black Sea from [Ionia](#), as indicated by the Ionian origin of most archaic clay figurines of the goddess found in the region of the Black Sea.⁶⁸ The propagation of her cult is directly connected with agriculture, one of the main sources of income for the Black Sea cities. The goddess was worshipped already from archaic years both in the cities and, mainly, in the sanctuaries of the [chora](#) of each city together with other deities.

In Olbia, her cult was associated with the cult of Eleusinian deities (Demeter, Persephone-Daughter, Triptolemus) from archaic years. The earliest figurines representing the goddess are dated to the second half of the 6th c. BC.⁶⁹ Some figurines depicting swines and others in phallic shapes highlight the chthonic aspects of her cult.⁷⁰ The cult reached its peak in Olbia in the 4th c. BC, when the grain trade with Athens thrived.⁷¹

In the Cimmerian Bosphorus, the goddess was worshipped from archaic years until the early Roman era. At the acropolis of Panticapaeum there was possibly an archaic temple of the goddess, whose existence in Classical years is confirmed by a relief representation of a procession honouring the goddess, on a marble altar base, manufactured in the late 5th c. BC,⁷² and a votive



inscription of the 4th c. BC.⁷³

Another centre of worship of Demeter in the Cimmerian Bosphorus was Nymphaion, where hers was originally the major civil cult. Demeter's sanctuary of the second quarter of the 6th c. BC is the earliest in the entire Black Sea region. The sanctuary was destroyed possibly because of natural causes and a new **prostyle** temple from mud bricks was built in the mid-6th c. BC, before it was later replaced by a third temple of the mid-5th c. BC, which was preserved until the late 3rd c. BC.⁷⁴

In the cities of the Asian Bosphorus, the development of Demeter's cult in the 4th c. BC is connected with the role the grain trade played in the economy of the state. The head of the goddess entwined with flowers is represented on a wall painting in a **tumulus** of the 4th c. BC, near Phanagoria, where two priestesses of Demeter were buried.⁷⁵

Sanctuaries of Demeter are mainly found in the city's chora. In the Cimmerian Bosphorus, in the settlement of Beregovoye 4, located in the Fontalovski Peninsula, recent archaeological research has revealed a rural sanctuary constructed towards the late 6th-first half of the 5th c. BC, whose operation, after a short break, continued from the 4th until the 1st c. BC.⁷⁶ A later sanctuary of Demeter and **Kore** with a temple and altars, dated to between the 3rd c. BC and the 4th c. AD, was revealed near the settlement of General'skoye Vostocnoye.⁷⁷

Demeter's cult acquired a more official character towards the late Hellenistic period.⁷⁸ The so-called "stone grave of Demeter" near Panticapaeum, known for its wall paintings depicting mythological scenes connected with the capture of Persephone by Pluto and Demeter's head, is dated to the 1st c. AD.⁷⁹

Demeter's cult is evidenced in other cities of the Black Sea as well. Clay figurines of the goddess dated to the second half of the 5th c. BC were found in Apollonia.⁸⁰ The goddess was also worshipped in Mesembria,⁸¹ where a priestess of Demeter is reported in an inscription of the 4th-3rd c. BC.⁸² In Callatis, as it happened in several other Megarian cities, Demeter was worshipped as Malophoros (apple bearer).⁸³ The recently excavated sanctuary in Odessa was perhaps dedicated to Demeter.⁸⁴ By all probabilities, the temple of Demeter existed in Odessa already from archaic years.⁸⁵ Archaeological findings confirm Demeter's cult in Dioscurias between the 5th and the 3rd c. BC.⁸⁶

6. Athena

Generally speaking, **Athena's** cult was not particularly spread in the Black Sea. Apart from Milesian traditions, the promotion of the Athenian economic and political interests in the basin of the Black Sea played an important role in the presence of the cult in the region.

Epigraphic evidence witnesses the cult on Berezan Island towards the late 6th-early 5th c. BC. In Olbia, the cult is evidenced from archaic years until the early Christian centuries. In the beginning the goddess was possibly worshipped there together with Zeus.⁸⁷ From the second half of the 5th c. BC onwards, the fact that Olbia participated in the **Athenian League** contributed to the propagation of the cult. In that period, the goddess was represented on city coins, while an inscription evidences the existence of a priest of Athena. In the late Hellenistic period the goddess was depicted as patron, mainly in figurines and sculpted works, some of which were modeled on the statue of **Athena Parthenos** made by Pheidias. A marble relief depicting Athena with a spear and an aegis over the chest is dated to the 2nd c. AD. However, it is one of the very few representations of the goddess from that period.⁸⁸

Unlike Olbia, Athena appears to be the major deity in Tyras and was represented on coins in the Hellenistic years.⁸⁹

There is almost no information about the presence of Athena's cult in the Cimmerian Bosphorus. Throughout the period when the Bosphorus cities enjoyed consolidated relations with Athens, several works of art related to Athena's cult were created, including the Panathenean amphoras depicting Athena and found in the Cimmerian Bosphorus. They were prizes of athletic games held in Athens



during the Panathenaea with the participation of athletes from the Bosphorus.⁹⁰ Among the most famous works of art from the Cimmerian Bosphorus are the gold earrings of the late 5th c. BC from the [Kul-Oba](#) tumulus depicting the head of the statue of Athena Parthenos made by Pheidias. Representations of the goddess from the 5th-4th c. BC have also been found in the tumuli of Nymphaion.⁹¹ The cult was revived only in the Hellenistic years. In the first half of the 2nd c. BC the goddess was represented on coins.⁹²

In Chersonesus Taurica, Athena was worshipped from the 4th c. BC onwards, when the city developed its relations with Athens. The goddess is found as Athena Soteira (saviour) in an inscription from the pedestal of a 4th c. BC bronze statue.⁹³ Although the statue, made by the Athenian sculptor Polycrates, has not survived, it must have been a monumental work whose height exceeded 5 m.⁹⁴ It has also been suggested that the statue adorned the 3rd c. BC **Dorian** prostyle or **amphiprostyle** temple of Athena, whose ruins have been discovered to the northeast of the city, on the cape dominating the entrance to the harbour.⁹⁵ Representations of the goddess appeared on city coins for a short period in the second quarter of the 2nd c. BC.⁹⁶

Athena was also worshipped in Histros, as indicated by coin representations. Under the name Soter (saviour), the goddess possibly held an important position in Mesembria as well, where a votive inscription of the 1st c. BC was found, connected with the victory of Mesembria against the army of Burebista.⁹⁷

In Odessa, Athena is found on the base of a 3rd-2nd c. BC statue under the names Pagkratios (all-powerful) and Nikephoros (victory bearer).⁹⁸ Her cult was also spread in Amisos, where Athenian **cleruchs** were sent in the 5th c. BC. The city's coins witness the important role of the cult in the city.⁹⁹

7. Dionysus

The cult of Dionysus, mainly associated with viniculture, was spread in the region of the Black Sea particularly after the end of the Classical period and was before long incorporated in the most important civil cults thanks to the influence of philosophy.

In Olbia, Dionysus' cult is evidenced by inscriptions of the 6th c. BC.¹⁰⁰ Just like in Miletus, it is certain that the Lenaea and the Anthesteria were celebrated in the city, apart from the Dionysia.¹⁰¹ A typical feature of Dionysus' cult in Olbia was that it was conducted inside the city. Besides, the propagation of the god's cult is also witnessed by the variety and number of relevant god-inspired names as well as by the numerous clay figurines of Dionysus.¹⁰²

The cult declined in Olbia in the early Christian centuries. Representations of Dionysus from that period are almost exclusively found on imported relief vessels, manufactured mostly in Asia Minor, which were frequently used as grave goods, thus reminding of the chthonic aspect of the Dionysian cult.¹⁰³

The god's cult was spread in Tyras already from the Hellenistic years, particularly after the city was annexed to the Roman province of Lower Mysia.¹⁰⁴ In the same period, the chthonic cult of Dionysus [Sabazius](#) (the barley god) of possibly Thracian origin was also conducted in Tyras.¹⁰⁵

A sanctuary of Dionysus with a 4th c. BC marble statue of the god was revealed to the south of the acropolis of Panticapaeum in the Cimmerian Bosphorus; the same representation of the god is also found on 1st c. BC coins of the Bosphorus. Numerous statue fragments, possibly votive objects, were also discovered in the temple. According to an opinion, near the sanctuary lied the theatre of Panticapaeum, reported by Polyaeus and Athenaeus.¹⁰⁶ A 4th c. BC Athenian relief from Panticapaeum depicting a Silen is also connected with Dionysus' cult.¹⁰⁷ The propagation of the cult of Dionysus to Panticapaeum and generally to the Cimmerian Bosphorus in the 4th c. BC is also related with the pivotal role Apollo's cult played in the state and the relation between the two gods. According to a 4th c. BC inscription of Panticapaeum, Dionysus was worshipped as Areios (of Ares/Mars) in the city.¹⁰⁸



In Nymphaion of the Cimmerian Bosphorus, Dionysus was worshipped together with Apollo and Aphrodite in the 4th c. BC at the central devotional complex of the city, where a votive inscription from the **epistyle** of the entrance to the shrine belongs.¹⁰⁹ The reference to the title of **agonothetes** in the inscription shows that games in honour of Dionysus were held in the city. The correlation of Dionysus with the two above gods is repeatedly reported by ancient writers. The cult in Nymphaion indicates the wide dissemination of the Dionysian movement, but also an effort towards its suppression through legalising the Dionysian cult, a practice originally adopted by the Delphi. At the same time, it is a sign of the forthcoming crisis for Apollo's cult, which followed the city's crisis.

In Chersonesus, the cult of Dionysus may be described mainly as domestic, although honours were customarily bestowed to the god during the celebration of the Dionysia. A temple of the god operated in the city until the 2nd c. AD.¹¹⁰ The chthonic aspect of his cult was also known in Chersonesus, particularly in the early Christian centuries.¹¹¹

The cult of Dionysus played an extremely dominant role in the cities of the western Black Sea. From the 4th c. BC onwards, the god's most important centre of worship in the Black Sea was doubtless Dionysopolis, named after him, with a renowned sanctuary possibly constructed in the Hellenistic years. According to a 3rd c. BC inscription, there was a statue of the god in the city,¹¹² while in the 2nd c. BC the city had a devotional club dedicated to Dionysus.¹¹³ A resolution of the 1st c. BC reports that celebrations and games honouring Dionysus were held with the participation of the city's adolescents.¹¹⁴

An important role was occupied by Dionysus' cult in Mesembria, where a temple of the god stood.¹¹⁵ Dionysus appears on the coins of the city¹¹⁶ as well as in inscriptions under the names Eleuthereus (liberator) and Eucarpus (fertile).¹¹⁷ As witnessed by epigraphic evidence, Mesembria celebrated the Dionysia.¹¹⁸ It is also known that the official resolutions of the boule and the demos of Mesembria were displayed at Apollo's temple.¹¹⁹

In Callatis, Dionysus' was one of the most important civil cults.¹²⁰ The cult of Dionysus Zagreus played a primary role in Apollonia and was directly connected with the development of mystic cults.¹²¹

In Histros, the Dionysian cult is evidenced by a 2nd-3rd c. AD inscription indicating that there was a temple of Dionysus Carpophorus (fruit-bearer) in the city.¹²² In Odessa, Dionysus was worshipped as Polycarpus (producing lots of fruit).¹²³

The cult of Dionysus is connected with the circle of rural deities in Amisos, where the clay figurines representing Dionysus Taurus and Dionysus Botrys (grape) come from.¹²⁴

8. Zeus

The cult of Zeus, of mainly Milesian origin, played a pivotal role in most Black Sea cities. On Berezan Island the cult of Zeus is confirmed by inscriptions of the 5th c. BC.¹²⁵

In Olbia, his cult held an important position already from archaic years. The role of his cult is witnessed by the various names attributed to the god, the earliest of which –Soter (saviour)– appeared in the third quarter of the 6th c. BC.¹²⁶ A sanctuary of the second half of the 6th c. BC dedicated to Zeus and Athena stood in the area of the eastern shrine of the city.¹²⁷

In the 4th c. BC, when the city of Olbia reached its peak, the cult of Zeus Soter held a special position, as evidenced by the votive inscription of the demos of Olbian citizens, made in the last third of the 4th c. BC.¹²⁸ More evidence is provided by the marble base of a statue depicting the god, created in the third quarter of the same century and bearing a list of the members of the devotional club Eurysibiades that was dedicated to Zeus Soter.¹²⁹ According to some opinion, annual games in his honour were held in the city.¹³⁰ The cult of Zeus Soter survived in Olbia at least until the early Christian centuries.

Towards the late 5th or the early 4th c. BC, the god was for a short period worshipped in Olbia as Zeus Eleutherios (provider of



freedom).¹³¹ In Hellenistic years the god was attributed the names Basileus (king), Olympian and Polieus (city protector). In the early Christian centuries he was also found as Olbian and Ammon.¹³²

Sporadic epigraphic evidence concerning the cult of Zeus is found in the European cities of the Cimmerian Bosphorus. The earliest piece comes from Panticapaeum and is dated to the late 5th c. BC¹³³ while, in the same period, his cult is confirmed in Nymphaion as well.¹³⁴ In the late Hellenistic period, when the Milesian traditions were revived, the god is found as Genarch (head of family) in a mid-1st c. BC inscription from Panticapaeum and as Soter in a 1st c. BC inscription from Myrmekion.¹³⁵ It seems that between the 1st-2nd and the 3rd c. BC Zeus and Hera were jointly worshipped in Panticapaeum.¹³⁶

In Nikonion, the cult of Zeus Basileus was spread already from archaic years until at least the Classical period.¹³⁷

Zeus Soter was also worshipped in Chersonesus Taurica, particularly after the Hellenistic years. Zeus is reported first among the gods in the vow the citizens of Chersonesus took in the 3rd c. BC,¹³⁸ while his cult held a central position in Chersonesus in the early centuries, as evidenced by the name Hypatus (supreme) attributed to him and the 2nd c. AD fortification wall that was dedicated to the god.¹³⁹

Zeus' cult was widely spread in the cities of the western Black Sea. In Histros, where his cult played an important role already from the 6th c. BC, there was a temple of Zeus Polieus.¹⁴⁰ In the Hellenistic years, this cult was the main civil cult of the city. In Histros, Zeus was also worshipped as Ombrios (rain bringer), while a celebration was held in his honour.¹⁴¹

In Callatis, the god was worshipped in the same temple with Athena, while in Hellenistic years the two gods appeared under the common name Hyperdexios (over-adroit).¹⁴² Just like in Histros, the god was worshipped in Callatis as Ombrios and was honoured during a special celebration.¹⁴³

Zeus Hyperdexios was also worshipped in Mesembria, where the remains of his temple have been found.¹⁴⁴ According to findings, there was a second temple in the city, dedicated to Zeus and Hera and dated to the 5th-3rd c. BC.¹⁴⁵

9. Other Deities

The pantheon of the Black Sea is completed with other, less famous deities of various origins.

In Olbia, among others, there were also sanctuaries of [Hermes](#), Boreas, the Great Mother of the Gods and the Dioscuri already from the third quarter of the 6th c. BC.¹⁴⁶ Hermes was worshipped in Olbia as family patron, while the festival of the Hermaea was celebrated in his honour already from the archaic years. In the 2nd c. BC, when the Milesian traditions were revived, the city had a sanctuary dedicated to the god.¹⁴⁷

The local cults of Olbia included the god of the Borysthenes River, frequently depicted on the Hellenistic coins of the city.¹⁴⁸

Among others, the Kabeirian cult was also found in the Cimmerian Bosphorus in archaic years. The sanctuary and the temple of the Kabeiroi at the acropolis of Nymphaion are dated to the second half of the 6th c. BC. Towards the late 5th c. BC, a new arched temple was built in the city, but its operation was suspended in the late 4th-early 3rd c. BC.¹⁴⁹

Between the Hellenistic period and the years of [Mithridates VI Eupator](#), [Helios](#) was worshipped in the Cimmerian Bosphorus¹⁵⁰ and was represented on coins of Panticapaeum and Gorgippia in the 3rd-2nd c. BC.¹⁵¹ There is also epigraphic evidence witnessing the cult in the early Christian centuries.¹⁵²



The cult of [Ares](#) was widely conducted in the Cimmerian Bosphorus in the 2nd c. AD. It was then that a temple dedicated to the god was built.¹⁵³

In Chersonesus Taurica, the cult of the female local deity, known from the sources as Parthenos, played a central role. Her cult was introduced in the 4th c. BC by assimilating certain features of Artemis' cult and relevant traditions.¹⁵⁴ The same deity was also connected with Iphigeneia. [Herodotus](#) identifies Taurian Parthenos with Iphigeneia and associates her with human sacrifices performed by the [Taurians](#).¹⁵⁵

Representations of Parthenos are found on 3rd c. BC coins of Chersonesus.¹⁵⁶ Her role as the major civil cult and patron goddess of the city is evidenced by the inscriptions of that period, mainly by the 3rd c. BC honorary resolution concerning the painter Syriskos and the resolution honouring Diophantus.¹⁵⁷ As a matter of fact, as witnessed by epigraphic evidence, the concept of the central authority of Chersonesus was identified with or even personified as the major deity of the city already from the early Christian centuries.¹⁵⁸

The sanctuary of Parthenos in Chersonesus has not been revealed yet. A very important sanctuary of the goddess existed near Chersonesus, on Parthenion Cape.¹⁵⁹

According to inscriptions, Helios was worshipped in Chersonesus in the Hellenistic era.¹⁶⁰ The cult of Hermes, as the patron and saviour of the city, became particularly famous here in the 2nd c. AD, with games being held in his honour.¹⁶¹ In Roman years, the cult of [Asclepius](#) reached its peak in Chersonesus,¹⁶² where a 2nd c. AD temple reported by inscriptions stood.¹⁶³ The local cults of Chersonesus also included the cult of the god Chersonasus.¹⁶⁴

From the late 6th c. BC onwards [Cybele](#),¹⁶⁵ [Asclepius](#)¹⁶⁶ and [Poseidon Heliconius](#) (of Helicon)¹⁶⁷ were worshipped among other deities in Histros, while the city celebrated the Taureia in honour of Poseidon.¹⁶⁸ A sanctuary of the Muses existed in Histros, according to a 3rd c. BC inscription.¹⁶⁹ Demos was worshipped here in the 3rd c. BC, with his statue being displayed in the city market.¹⁷⁰ Representations of Helios appeared on 3rd-2nd c. BC coins of Histros.¹⁷¹

In Mesembria as well, as indicated by inscriptions, there were numerous cults, including deities such as [Asclepius](#), [Isis](#), [Sarapis](#), the Hero of Sosipolis¹⁷² and Hermes, who was considered the patron of adolescents in the 1st c. BC.¹⁷³

From the late 6th c. BC onwards, Apollonia worshipped [Cybele](#),¹⁷⁴ [Hestia](#),¹⁷⁵ [Poseidon Taurius](#)¹⁷⁶ and the local Chthonic Gaia (earth).¹⁷⁷

In [Anchialos](#), the inscriptions witness the possibly Thracian cult of the Nymphs.¹⁷⁸

In Odessa, the Kabeiroi were worshipped as gods of Samothrace in the Hellenistic years, while the city archives were kept at their sanctuary.¹⁷⁹ The [Hermaea](#) was celebrated in this city as well.¹⁸⁰ Among the local cults of Odessa was the cult of the Great god of Odessa, later known under the name Darzalas or Derzelas, the god of panspermia (seeds everywhere), fertility and wealth, directly interwoven with the operation of the city as its patron, who also had chthonic features. Representations of the deity are found on clay figurines as well as on coins between the 4th c. BC and the 1st c. AD, while the city possibly had a temple dedicated to the god. In Roman years the festival of Darzalea was celebrated in his honour. From the 4th c. BC onwards, the Great Goddess, a co-patron of the city, started to appear sitting beside the god.¹⁸¹

In Tomis, apart from Hermes, whose festival is evidenced by inscriptions,¹⁸² [Hestia](#) and [Poseidon Heliconius](#) were also worshipped.¹⁸³



In Phasis, the entrance to the city was adorned by a statue of Cybele, according to [Arrian](#).¹⁸⁴ Pompeius Mela reports that Phasis had a temple and a bosage dedicated to Phrixus.¹⁸⁵

The pantheon of Amisos is quite extensive as well, with the 4th-1st c. BC coins of the Roman period representing various deities and heroes, including Apollo, Ares, Artemis, Asclepius, Athena, Demeter, Dionysus, Hermes, Nike and Zeus, [Tyche](#), [Perseus](#) and [Heracles](#).¹⁸⁶ In Roman years, Amisos worshipped Poseidon, too.¹⁸⁷

Sinope, as indicated by representations on coins, worshipped the nymph (or amazon) Sinope, the mythical founder of the city.¹⁸⁸ [Autolycus](#) and Phlogius were also worshipped here. Autolycus' sanctuary included an oracle and his statue, made in the 4th c. BC by the sculptor Στεννί δη.¹⁸⁹ The two cults were probably maintained even after the early Christian centuries.¹⁹⁰ It is also possible that the founders of Sinope were worshipped as local heroes and saviours.¹⁹¹

One of the most important cults of the city between the 3rd c. BC and the early Christian centuries was the cult of Poseidon, as indicated by coins. Helios was worshipped in Sinope in Hellenistic years, as evidenced by the representations of his head on city coins minted in the 3rd-2nd c. BC.¹⁹²

10. Cults of Heroes

One of the typical features of the Black Sea pantheon is the cults of heroes in the cities of the region. The most widespread cult was that of [Achilles](#), who was worshipped between the 6th c. BC and the 4th c. AD as an extremely important hero and god with beneficent and therapeutic properties, and as the patron of seafaring and sea routes.¹⁹³ His cult became famous mainly in the state of Olbia and on the western coasts of the Black Sea.

His earliest sanctuary is the open sanctuary of the 6th-first half of the 5th c. BC on cape Baykuş, which was possibly the most important of all in the wider region, including Berezan Island and Olbia.¹⁹⁴

Among the most important sanctuaries of Achilles were that on [Leuke Island](#), with a sacred thicket, a renowned oracle, an infirmary, altars and [treasures](#),¹⁹⁵ and the sanctuary at Achilleiodromos on a finger of land called Tendrovskaya Kosa. Both sanctuaries were originally under the control of Olbia, whose devotional festivals and horse riding games were connected with Achilles' cult.

The sanctuary on Leuke Island was founded in archaic years. Recent archaeological research dates Achilles' temple in Leuke to the mid-second half of the 6th c. BC.¹⁹⁶ According to an opinion, the Ionian, possibly in antis, temple of Achilles in Leuke was contemporary with the temple of Apollo Iatros in Olbia and was built with Milesian contribution.¹⁹⁷

A new temple was constructed on the site of the earlier one in the 4th c. BC, a fact connected with the heyday of Olbia.¹⁹⁸ The participation of Olbia in the erection of the temple is also confirmed by inscriptions.¹⁹⁹ The numerous coins from various centres found there indicate both the prosperity of the sanctuary and the role it played in the economy of the wider region. The hero's sanctuary and oracle in Leuke started to decline in the mid-1st c. AD.²⁰⁰ The new climax, connected with the cult of Achilles as Pontarches (lord and master of the Pontic/Black Sea), covers the 2nd and the 3rd c. AD, when the sanctuary came under the control of the city of Tomis.

In his second sanctuary, on the northern edge of Tendrovskaya Kosa, Achilles was worshipped mainly as a hero and was associated with athletic games (certamen gymnicum). The sanctuary, among others, is reported by Euripides in *Iphigeneia Taurica*.²⁰¹

The third centre of worship dedicated to Achilles was possibly in the city of Achilleion of the Asian Bosphorus, on the entrance to the Maeotian (Azov) Sea, where [Strabo](#) reports a sanctuary of the hero-patron of mariners stood.²⁰²



The [cult of Heracles](#) is found mainly in Heraclea Pontica and its colonies, namely Chersonesus Taurica and Callatis. Mythological tradition wants it that Heraclea was the point from where Heracles entered the Underworld.²⁰³ Tradition also reports that the city was founded following an oracle advising the Boeotians to create a city dedicated to Heracles in the Black Sea.²⁰⁴ In Chersonesus Taurica, Heracles' cult is confirmed by coins minted in the second quarter of the 3rd c. BC.²⁰⁵ In Callatis, where a temple dedicated to Heracles stood,²⁰⁶ the hero is depicted as Ktistes (founder) on city coins.²⁰⁷

Apart from these cities, his cult is also found in Histros, where the inscriptions report the existence of a club dedicated to the hero,²⁰⁸ Mesembria, where the hero was worshipped mainly as patron of adolescents,²⁰⁹ and Amisos.²¹⁰

Another important cult in the Black Sea was that of the Dioscuri, found in Sinope, Amisos, Histros, Olbia, Odessa, Phanagoria and, of course, Discurias of northern Colchis, which traditions reports that was founded by the Dioscuri themselves²¹¹ or by Amphias and Kerkias (or Telecheas), their charioteers.²¹² The cult of the Dioscuri in the city lasted at least until the late 2nd c. BC, when certain coins minted by Discurias depicted the poles of the Dioscuri.²¹³

Towards the late Hellenistic period, the singular cult of the hero Sosipolis was found in Mesembria, where a relief of the 2nd-1st c. BC depicting the hero was discovered.²¹⁴

11. A General Assessment of the Cults of the Black Sea

The major deity of the Black Sea pantheon was Apollo, the patron of colonization, whose cult contributed, among others, to the wide dissemination of Dionysus' cult by significantly broadening its services and leading to the emergence of the god as Ares and Eleutherias (liberator). A significant position was also held by specific female cults, directly connected with either the foundation of cities, such as Aphrodite Urania, or local traditions, such as the cult of Parthenos. The great dissemination of the cults of heroes was due mainly to the necessity for an ideological connection of the Black Sea with the rest of the ancient Greek world.

The general characteristics of the region involve the coexistence of different devotional traditions, with an obvious assimilation of local elements in certain cases. In the Hellenistic period complex cults were disintegrated, while very ancient cults incorporated into them were at the same time revived, a phenomenon connected with the strengthening of popular religion as a result of the crisis of the ancient city. The tendency towards the elevation of deities of second generation after Zeus to a primary position is a sign of renewal, but at the same time it indicates the declining route the Greek cults followed from the foundation of the colonies until the end of Antiquity. In Roman years, there was deep penetration of various eastern cults, which created a completely different – multilevel and multicultural – picture of the pantheon.

In general, the Greek cults played an important role in uniting and connecting all colonies, and were an indispensable part of the ancient Greek world.

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2. For a graphic reconstruction of the latter, see: Пичикян И. Р., *Малая Азия – Северное Причерноморье: Античные традиции и влияния* (Москва 1984), pp. 178-179, fig. 1, 5.

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190. *CIG*, III, 4162.

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Glossary :

	agonothetes, the
Official assigned with the task of organising and hosting the contest in the framework of a contest.	
	agora, the
The term initially meant the gathering of the people. During historical times this gathering was called ecclesia and the word agora meant the public space where citizens gathered. The agora consists of commercial and religious buildings as well as constructions of political character.	
	amphiprostyle temple, the
Temple bearing colonnades at its two narrow sides (the colonnade usually comprised of 4 columns at each side)	
	architrave or epistyle
The lowest part of an entablature resting on the columns capitals and supporting the frieze.	
	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.	
	cleruchs, the
Citizens who were sent as colonists to a conquered area. There they became landowners by lot. They belonged to the lower social classes.	
	doric order, the
One of the three orders or organizational systems of Ancient Greek originated on the mainland and western Greece. It is characterized by short, faceted, heavy columns with plain, round capitals (tops) and no base. The capital consists of a necking which is of a simple form. The echinus is convex and the abacus is square. Above the capital is a square abacus connecting the capital to the entablature. The Entablature is divided into two horizontal registers, the lower part of which is either smooth or divided by horizontal lines. The upper half is distinctive for the Doric order. The frieze of the Doric entablature is divided into triglyphs and metopes. A triglyph is a unit consisting of three vertical bands which are separated by grooves. Metopes are plain or carved reliefs. The Doric order comes without an individual base. They instead are placed directly on the stylobate. The capital consists of a necking which is of a simple form. The echinus is convex and the abacus is square. Above the capital is a square abacus connecting the capital to the entablature. The Entablature is divided into two horizontal registers, the lower part of which is either smooth or divided by horizontal lines. The upper half is distinctive for the Doric order. The frieze of the Doric entablature is divided into triglyphs and metopes. A triglyph is a unit consisting of three vertical bands which are separated by grooves. Metopes are plain or carved reliefs. The Doric order comes without an individual base. They instead are placed directly on the stylobate.	
	phiale, the
A (metal, rarely clay) shallow vessel with an open rim. Used primarily in libations.	
	prostyle temple
A term applied to a temple with a portico of columns in front.	
	temple in antis
Temple with two or more columns between the antae of the pronaos.	
	Thesaurus [1. treasure (archit), 2. hoard (archaeol,numism.)]
Space for storing, repository or threasure.	



1. (archit.) Temple like structure of votive character. It was dedicated by different cities to famous sanctuaries (Delphoi, Olympia, Delos). It was used to store the cities' valuable offerings as well as the smaller offerings of their citizens.
2. (archaeolog, numism.) Collection of valuable objects or artifacts, coins and metal objects buried in the ground.



tholos

Circular building with a conical roof.

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Appian *Mithridatic Wars* 12. 83

Arrian *Periplus Maris Euxini* 11, 32-34

Euripides *Andromache* 1260-1262

Euripides *Iphigenia Taurica* 435-438

Zosimus 1. 32. 3

Herodotus 4. 103

Justinus 16. 3. 4-7

Xenophon *Anabasis* 6. 2. 2

Pausanias 3. 19. 11

Plutarch *Lucullus* 23

Ptolemaeus mathematicus 5. 8. 2

Strabo 6. 6. 1, 7. 4. 2, 11. 2. 6, 12. 3.11

Philostratus Lucius Flavius *Heroicus* 19

Pseudo-Arrian *Periplus* 22. 8, 35-38

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Pompeius Mela 1. 19, 1 108