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## Some evidence of the worship of Apollo Physician (Ietroos) in ancient Greece and the Black Sea Coast

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Based on the analysis of some contexts of ancient authors and epigraphic material we are talking about the place that takes the function of Apollo Ietroos in a complex set of Apollo's functions. This function is recorded as a cult epithet, especially in Istria and Olbia on the Black Sea. And why his son, Asclepius, and his descendants (Hygieia, Panakeya, Machaon, Podalirius) become major deities associated with the functioning of medicine of the temple in ancient Greece.

**Keywords:** *Apollo Ietroos (Physician), epithets of Apollo, Phoibos, light-shadow vocabulary, purification, Olbia, Asclepius*

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As A. F. Losev noted, "Information about the Greek language does not reveal the etymology of Apollo's name". However, ancient authors "have a tendency of combining a range of Apollo's functions (Plat. Crat. 404e-406a): arrow shooter, destroyer, soothsayer, guardian of cosmic and human harmony"[1, pg. 92]. In this article we try to show how from a series of several functions, specifically the maintenance of cosmic and human harmony, the function of healer-physician appeared and was fixated at the level of cult (in the Black Sea, Olbia and Istria). Therefore, we analyzed some of the epithets of Apollo and excerpts from the works of ancient authors.

One of the most common epithets of Apollo is "Phoebus" (Gk. Φοῖβος) [2, p. 632]. In late ancient and Roman literature (since Virgil), Apollo was often called precisely that and under this name he was also identified with the sun. L R Farnell believed that of all the epithets provided for in the Roscher Dictionary as "solar", only the epithet Φοῖβος had a possible solar interpretation: "If only Φοῖβος can be interpreted in terms of solar (and modern etymology recognize that the word contains the root phaos "the natural epithet of sun"), it provides a solid base for the proposition that pre-Homeric or Mycenaean era recognized this god as having a sunny character" [3, p. 140].

In connection with this possibility, the research of A. F Losev pays special attention to this epithet: "At a minimum, Hesiod (fragment 274) and Likofron (1009) were adjectives applied to water to signify 'clean', 'light', 'bright'. Bacchylides (XII 139 et seq.) was associated with weather. The verb phoebe does not specifically refer to Apollo, but generally means to 'be animate'; but this last meaning is not certain, because there is also a meaning of "clean" as, for example, hymn V, 11 of Callimachus, the cleansing of foam from the horses.

The same verb is used in a transitive form, for example, the anonymous hymn to Apollo (Orph., P. 285, 22) meaning "inspiring"; Pseudo-Longinus (Desublim.VIII 4) used it to mean "passion, an animating word". The verb phoibaō is almost equivalent to phoibazō. Euripides (Hec. 827) called Cassandra, Foybada. But Foybada, here again, has no relation to sun and light, and is only "prophetess", "fanatical", something like the maenads – frenzied Bacchantes .... "Etymologicum Magnum" explains the verb phoibazō not only as meaning "cover", but also in the sense of "clean", "prophesy". More specifically, Hesychius of Miletus explained phoibos as: "clean, brilliant, holy, unstained"[3, p. 340].

Thus, the basic semantic meaning of this epithet should obviously be associated with the idea of purity.

Cleansing may in general be called an Apollonian theme par excellence. It is a way of moving a

person from pariah to full-fledged member of the human community.

Summarizing the thoughts of the famous French scholar of Greek religion, Marcel Detienne [4, 149 sqq.], we can say that the cleansing process, in the forms known to us from myths, often lead to the following scenarios. To find out how it was possible to purify, the offender was forced to turn to the Apollonian oracle and cross its threshold. The responding god, as a rule, very vaguely pointed out where to go and what to do in order to remove the filth. If after much travelling and suffering the hero could fulfill the prediction, he was considered fully cleansed and his life apparently began anew.

One of the most illustrative texts describing such transitions is the story of Orestes, in which the hero goes through all the stages of "turning off" from society before his "return".

When examining the semantic field of light in "Oresteia", it is worth considering the fact that the way the author expressed his views in terms of the semantic field of lights and shadows is characteristic of the condition of heroes. At a symbolic level, light is clearly associated with good, freedom, justice, and the dark with wickedness, suffering and misery [5, p. 63-71]. Thus, at the time of judgment, at the end of "Oresteia", Orestes prays to Apollo, encouraging the epithet Φοῖβος, and Erin – "Black Mother Night". Accordingly, the decisive moment in the path of purification for the character of Aeschylus was illustrated through the struggle between light and darkness. [6, 7]

744Ορ. ὦ Φοῖβ' Ἀπολλων, πῶς ἀγὼν κριθήσεται;  
Χο. ὦ Νύξ μέλαινα μήτερ, ἄρ' ὄρας τάδε;  
Ορ. νῦν ἀγχόνης μοι τέρματ, ἦ φάος βλέπειν.  
Χο. ἡμῖν γὰρ ἔρρειν, ἦ πρόσω τιμὰς νέμειν.<sup>1</sup>

Another is, "killer by the will of the fates". Oedipus in Sophocles' tragedy, "Oedipus at Colonus" is depicted at the end of his travels. The chorus of the elders of Attic welcome the appearance of Oedipus in a suburb of Athens, explicitly notes

<sup>1</sup> – Oh, Phoebus Apollo, how will the court decide? -  
– Oh, Night, oh mother of the black! Do you see this?  
– Now shall I dying from the loop or look into the light.  
– Shall we leave with the shame? Will, as there be honor as of old? (trans. Vyach. Ivanov [7] with changes of the author

that before getting refuge in Athens, Oedipus must be cleaned. Describing the sequence of cleaning, the chorus of Coryphaeus mentions the time the ritual [8, 9]:

Ο. C. 476-477.

ΟΙ. Εἶεν· τὸ δ' ἐνθεν ποῖ τελευτῆσαι με χροῖ;

ΧΟ. Χοὰς χέασθαι στάντα πρὸς πρότην ἔω.<sup>2</sup>

Thus, it is recommended for Oedipus to perform the purification at dawn. This information from Sophocles allows one to conclude that the cleansing rituals, almost exclusively associated with the name of Apollo, took place at this time of day.

We now turn to a fragment of the "The Suppliants" written by Aeschylus, and discovered by P. Buayanse [10, p. 152-153].

The chorus in the tragedy is formed by the Danaids fleeing Egypt, arriving in Argos and seeking protection from the local king. The dialogue of the chorus and the father of the Danaids takes place in the first episode. They discuss the question of which gods should be prayed to in such a situation [6, 7]:

Supp. 212 Δα. καὶ Ζηνὸς ὄρνιν τόνδε νῦν κικλήσκετε.

Χο. Καλοῦμεν αὐγάς ἡλίου σωτηρίους.

Δα. ἀγνόν τ' Ἀπόλλω, φυγάδα πούρανοῦ θεόν.

217. τίν οὔν κικλήσκω τῶνδε δαιμόνων ἔτι;<sup>3</sup>

As can be seen from the above verses, on pg. 217, the bird of Zeus (i.e. obviously Zeus himself), "pure Apollo, a fugitive from heaven" and "savior of the rays of the Sun" unite the phrase "here these deities" – those who should be encouraged in such a situation. We emphasize that all three have something that could help the Danaids. Because of this, they are combined into a single group.

In view of the fact that the "naming and requests often become the common motif of requests" [11, p. 11], we examine which epithets accompany the names of the deities of interest to us.

<sup>2</sup> Oedipus. Let it be so. And shall the rest be done so?

Chorus, Lei libations, the first give to the rising dawn (Translation by F. F. Zelinsky) [9, Art. 476-477].

<sup>3</sup> – And to this bird of Zeus, now you cry out!

– Saving rays of the Sun we call.

– And Apollo clear that from the sky was a fugitive.

The sun's rays are called "salvation". When discussing the "Oresteia", we mentioned the relationship between the idea of "salvation" (i.e., to get rid of unfavorable developments), with the image of light. Note that the same word – σωτηρία – the scholiast say, explains why before the fight the Trojans Ajax and Hector make sacrifices to Gaea and Helios: Διὰ τί δοί Τρῶες Γῆ καὶ Ἥλιῳ; ὅτι ὁ κίνδυνος περὶ σωτηρίας καὶ γῆς.<sup>4</sup>

As for Apollo, on the one hand, his identification as a "fugitive from heaven" does not raise questions: the Danaids were fugitives and a God who was himself a fugitive would obviously help them. On the other hand, he was also called "pure", which for us is more interesting in this context.

Obviously, it is necessary to specify the semantics of the adjective: ἄγνός ("pure"), closely related in meaning to the epithet "Phoebus". It was precisely this epithet that was used when the judge decided the case saving the Athenian hero Areopagus Orestes. The context for other Apollonian epithets, ἀγυιεύς "street", "pillar" are specifically in the text of Demosthenes [5, p. 113-130; cf. 12: 313], directly calling Apollo "savior" – σωτήρ. This proves that this epithet was applicable to it.

Ultimately, salvation means that you can stay alive and continue to "see the sunlight" (this is one of the main characteristics of the human world and the main difference from Hades) [5, p. 52]. All this allows us to understand the meaning of Aeschylus in another context, also referred to by the little known French researcher Pierre Buayanse, from the kommos "Seven Against Thebes» (Aesch. Sept. 854 sqq.) [6, 7]:

854 ἀλλὰ γόων, ᾧ φίλαι, κατοῦρον  
ἐρέσσετάμφι κρατὶ πόμπιμον χεροῖν πίτυλον,

<sup>4</sup> "Why did the Trojans [sacrifice] to Gaia and Helios? Since the risk was in relation to salvation and the earth" (trans. Author).

ὄς αἰὲν δι' Ἀχεροντάμειβεται,  
τὰν ἄστονον μελάγκροκον ναύστολον θεωρίδα,  
τὰν ἄστιβῆ πόλλωνι, τὰν ἀνάλιον,  
πάνδοκον εἰς ἀφανῆτε χέρσον <sup>5</sup>.

The first thing that should be noted is the boat of Charon (in other versions called the river Acheron) here called "those who did not join Apollo" and "sunless". It turns out that the epithet "sunless" complements and clarifies the epithet, "the one that did not join the Apollo".

Given that we are talking about a rather specific ship, we emphasize that, as a talisman, there might have been an image of the column of Apollo on Agieya at the stern. (Fig. 1, 2).

Therefore, we can assume that the reference is not to the underworld. Apollo cannot be the guardian of the ship, since he deals only with human activity "under the sun" of the world.

Marcel Detienne came to same conclusion in his book about Apollo. Apollo "never opens the sacred road to Hades (emphasis added. – auth.); consecrated in mysteries, this belongs to Dionysus" [4, p. 240]. This is an "Olympian from our world," who "creates favorable conditions for human activities" [4, p. 240] and then safeguards the Apollonian based harmonious world inhabited by man (being a "guardian of cosmic and human harmony")<sup>6</sup>.



Fig. 1.  
Assarius coin from  
Lugdunum. LIME 22,  
Apollon Agyieus 22.



Fig. 2.  
Assarius coin from Vienna.  
LIME, Apollon Agyieus 23.

<sup>5</sup> Girlfriend, crying – we have a tail wind!

Beat the paddles – beat, laments on the chest! accompany the boat along the water Acheronta

Bleak, under sail black

Sunless it was not the foot of Phoebus on it – in the hospitable land and dull.

For the integrity of understanding we use the poetic translation of the C. Ivanov [7], which is not entirely accurate ("Phoebus" is used although in the original text it is "Apollo"), and we also use word constructions, which are important to us and are related to the Greek original.

<sup>6</sup> Terminology A. F. Losev.

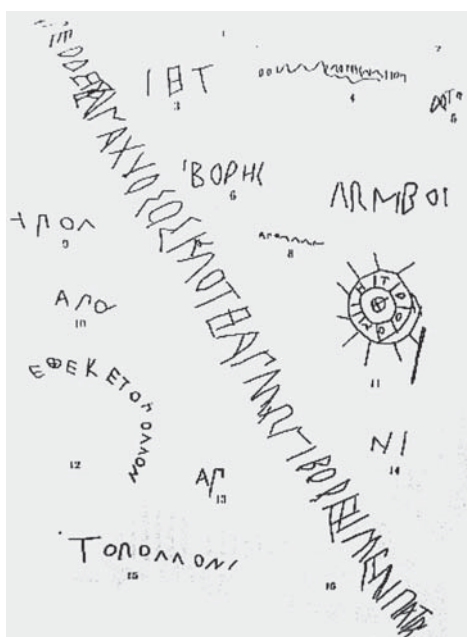


Fig. 3. Graffiti from the sanctuary of Apollo the Physician, Olvia. End of the VI-V cent. BC.

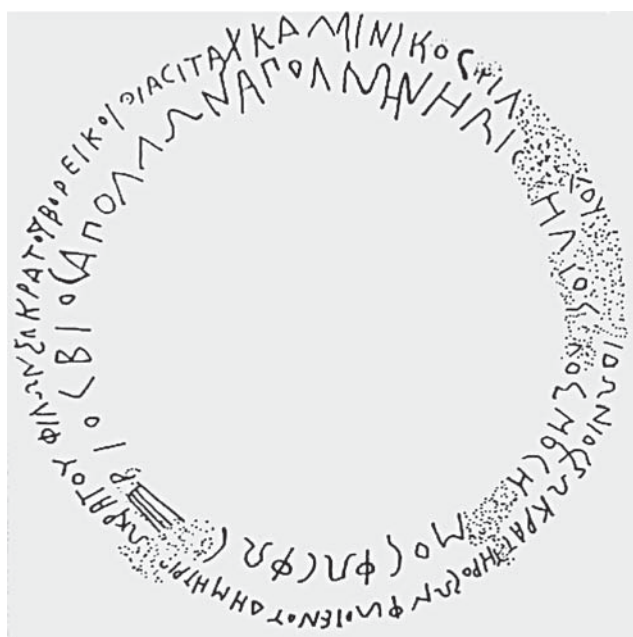


Рис. 4. Граффито на поддоне аттической чернолаковой чаши V в. до н.э. Ольвия.

The conclusions, based on an analysis of literary sources, are confirmed by epigraphic sources: graffiti from the excavations of the sanctuary of Apollo Ietros ("physician") on the territory of ancient Olbia [13]. As shown by A.S. Rusaeva, the cult of Apollo the physician was central to ancient Olbia [14, 15]<sup>7</sup>. Among the more than two dozen graffiti found on the territory of the sanctuary, there are two that are of most interest to us (Fig. 3, 4).

According to Y.G. Vinogradov and A.S. Rusaeva, the first of these was drawn on the middle of the wide edge of an ancient pentahedral caliper five- (Fig. 3 see graffiti number 11), and "represents a pattern of three irregularly shaped concentric circles. Seven straight lines radiate from the middle circle into the space between the sectors forming a letter. Together, they constitute the name of the temple of Apollo Ietrosa Ἰητρόον Ietroon. Below the third circle is a semicircle having another nine straight lines radiating away from it". The authors of the article believe that "the name of the temple clarifies the symbolism of the entire drawing: the center circle is like a wheel – the solar symbol of Apollo. The straight lines are

<sup>7</sup> same cult as in the territory of the colony of Istra

probably the sun's rays (their number, especially seven, played a major role in the cult), and the circle itself is the solar disk, a round shaped altar shape or the drum columns, radiating from construction like graffiti "[13, p. 136].

The graffiti dates to the end of the VI beginning of the V century BC, a time very close to when Aeschylus wrote the tragedy referred to. It should be noted that, in this case, there is no doubt about the connection between the cult of the solar symbol and Apollo the physician. This function is integrated with the cleansing properties of the ancient god and suggests reconsidering our idea about a "return to the world of the living".

The second graffiti is scratched in a circle on a pallet of black-lacquer Attica bowls and consists of two different texts (Fig. 4). The first of these has the names of the followers of Boreas, apparently, to propagandize the cult of Apollo. The second inscription is carved on the bottom, non-visible part of the vessel and also closed within a circle. It is somewhat better preserved and consists of a few pairs of words: Ἀπόλλων – ἥλιος, ἥλιος – κόσμος, κ (ός) μος – φῶς, φῶς – βίος, βίος – Ἀπόλλων<sup>8</sup>.

<sup>8</sup> Apollo – Helios (Sun), Helios – space, space – light, – life, life – Apollo (translated by the author).



Fig. 5. Hierapolis. Log in oracle (two species).

Here the deities are associated with each other and the direct association with the word "sun, is precisely with the 'cosmos'", i.e. an orderly organized space. This "cosmos" combines a well-organized earthly and divine world and, in contrast to the underground world, it is filled with "light", and life flows into it." Here, life itself is associated with the name of Apollo (which, of course, supports the idea of its close connection with healing and medicine).

Based on the paleographic features (Hellenistic italics), the second inscription refers to a period after the first graffiti (ancient or early classical) and the vessel itself (V cent. BCE). Given that both of the graffiti drawings are a few centuries old, we can conclude that the second inscription complements the first, verbalizing what was symbolically expressed in the first inscriptions.

Therefore, we can draw the following conclusions.

The Apollonian cleansing process is par excellence. It is associated with the return of the person to the ranks of full-fledged members of society, signifying the cleansing of filth and dirt, which is a symbolic expression of the darkness. It

is a transition to a new, clean and bright condition. Linked with this is the idea of "purity" (precisely how the epithet "Phoebus" is translated) and the idea of "light".

Sophocles identifies the time of purification rites as early morning. This shows an inherent connection between the idea of purification and dawn, the transition time of the day<sup>9</sup>.

Cleansing as an opportunity to return to the normal human world is directly related to the idea of healing and salvation as an opportunity to stay alive under this "sunny" world. The connection between Apollo and Helios is especially important. Both gods are embodiments of the earth, the human world! Helios provides its order from above and from the outside; Apollo "restores order" at the bottom and inside. Such enlightened purifications accompanied a "vertical passage" between the human world and the divine world, establishing links between them capable of "inspiring Phoebus" prophets and poets<sup>10</sup>.

Therefore, it is no coincidence that the temple medical centers of ancient Greece found them-

<sup>9</sup> For more on the role of the dawn in the identification of Apollo and Helios the sun see [5].

<sup>10</sup> Note that the epithet Cassandra is the same as Foybada.

selves in close proximity to the famous oracle of Apollo. For example, one of the most famous oracles of Apollo was located in the ancient Hierapolis (modern. Pamukkale) of Asia Minor, famous for its salt springs (Fig. 5). The pagan priests would descend deep into the Earth where toxic gases rose.

A twentieth century scientific tourist tried to repeat this, but died. It seems that the priests knew exactly where it was necessary to crawl when

underground to avoid exposure to poisonous gases.

The results of our study shows that the functions of Apollo included the image of this god as a healer and physician. That is why his son, Asclepius, and his descendants (Hygieia, Panacea, Machaon) are the main deities associated with the functioning of the temple of medicine in ancient Greece.

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