

The cult of Apollo Delphinus was the main state cult of ancient Miletus. Though his sanctuary, the Delphinium, was dug out in the beginning of the 19th century (G. Kawerau – A. Rehm, *Das Delphinion in Milet*, Milet I 3 [Berlin 1914]), the cult itself was never subjected to a concentrated historical treatment. Only Fritz Graf (*Museum Helveticum* 36, 1979, 2–22) has shown in a comparative study the syncretistic origin of the cult of Apollon Delphinios which combined the Late Bronze Age god Delphinus with the Greek Apollo in Submycenaean or Protogeometric times. Graf has also shown the high political importance of that cult in some Greek polis-states, in which government, citizenship, time reckoning, and male initiation were organized.

The paper will present the epigraphical and archaeological testimonia for this cult in Miletus. The most important epigraphical source is the famous Molpoi-decree (Kawerau – Rehm, op. cit., 277 ff. no. 133), which was first published and commented by Ulrich Wilamowitz-Moellendorff (*Sitzungsberichte der Preussischen Akademie der Wissenschaften*, Berlin 1904, 619–640; cf. V. Gorman, *Miletos, the Ornament of Ionia* [2001] 176–186). A new analysis of this text leads to a reconstruction of the Milesian newyears-festival in Archaic and later times.

The participants of the three-days festival in the Delphinium are studied in their different functions as for example the *aisymnetes-stephanephoros*, who was at the same time chairman of Apollo Delphinus' cult association of the 'Molpoi' and eponymous highest magistrate (leading *prytanis*). As all other higher magistrates, he was solemnly introduced into his office during the festival. It becomes clear from the performed rituals, that the *aisymnetes* also had the duty to perform all actions of cult as 'master of the public sacrifices'.

He was assisted by two groups especially: the first was the so-called Onitadai, who functioned as sacrificial butchers and cooks, or in an ancient term, as *mageiroi*. They were a fictitious gentilician group which traced itself back to Onites, a mythical son of the Theban Heracles. The leading board of the second one, the Molpoi, formed together with the *aisymnetes* the staff of the prytaneis around the sacred hearth of the polis. This Hestia Prytaneia was situated in the 'Molpon', the clubhouse of the Molpoi. The association controlled the access to citizenship in Miletus.

The closing ritual of the initiatory circle for the new young citizens of Miletus, the *neoi*, were the 'Hamilleteria'. They happened on the third day of newyears-festival and consisted of a competition between Paeon-choruses of *neoi*, provided by every second Milesian tribe (*phyle*).

The close relationship between religion and politics is also manifested in the treatment of ritualized space: the festival happened in the Delphinium as religio-political center of the polis. It incorporated the Molpon, which had the function of a *prytaneum* for Miletus. It was located directly north of the agora, where the choral competition of the Hamilleteria shall have taken place. Here also, the following 18 km long state-procession to the extrarban oracle-sanctuary of Apollo in Didyma was formed, where the newyears-festival ended with final sacrifices to Apollo Didymeus. The processional road formed the 'cultic spine' of the Milesian chora. At seven stations gods and heroes were venerated by performing pians and sacrifices. It proclaimed the city's demand upon its territory and the main extrarban sanctuary and helped to shape the identity and cohesion of the Milesian people.

It can be demonstrated from the evidence of the Milesian colonies and from fragments of local Milesian chronicles, that the cult of Apollo Delphinus with its specific institutions existed as main state cult in the mothercity itself since the beginning of the 7th century B.C. at the latest.