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Methods of Divination at Delphi: the Pythia, Necromancy and Cleromancy.



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INTRODUCTION

More than two thousand years have gone by since it operated at its peak and still the Oracle at Delphi seems to be a modern topic of discussion and research. There is no doubt about the great influence that this Oracle exercised in classical antiquity, something that is confirmed by the huge variety of ancient sources that are available to us. It will be clear via this paper that most of the ancient authors have at least one short and simple reference to Delphi, in the context of their work.¹ The Delphic oracle exerted significant influence and was consulted every time a decision of major importance had to be taken,² a point that is also made by Karrer who mentions that Greek and foreign dignitaries, heads of states and everyday people visited the site and paid great sums for the Pythia's oracular responses.³ It played a determining role in the field of politics and religion and was perceived as a source of divine guidance on many other issues.⁴ Its divine consultations affected not only decisions of every day life but, the field of politics, moral issues and religious aspects as well, points that will be discussed in detail in the following chapters. People came not only from all over Greece but from distant areas as well, in order to have their questions answered by the Pythia. Her oracular responses could determine almost everything, from the harvest problems of the earth to wars and politics, something that validates its importance in antiquity. Delphi was considered to be the centre of the world (*Γης Ομφαλός*).⁵ According to the well known myth, Zeus wished one day to indicate the centre of the world. Thus, he released two eagles, one to the East and one to the West. The place where the two eagles would meet again would be the centre of the world; this place was Delphi.⁶ Also, its importance and the fact that it was the most reliable Oracle is illustrated by the fact that one day the King Croesus of Lydia wanted to determine which of the famous oracles of that time was the most trustworthy. So, he sent his messengers in different Oracles and the messengers, who were dispatched, had to inquire each one of the Oracles what Croesus, king of Lydia, was doing at that particular moment. The oracle of Delphi gave the correct answer; that Croesus was putting a tortoise and a lamb in a cauldron, in order to boil them together.⁷

¹ For example: Herodotus (*Histories*, 1. 46 – 1. 49) mentions how Croesus found out that Delphi was the most trustworthy Oracle in antiquity, whereas later (*Histories*, 1. 53. 3) he describes what happened when Croesus misinterpreted a Delphic oracle. Also, again in Herodotus (*Histories*, 7. 140 – 7. 144) we find the well known example of the 'wooden wall'. Plato in his *Apology* (20e – 21b) describes the oracle Chaerephon received from Delphi, that Socrates is the wisest man. Moreover, Sophocles (*Oedipus the king*, 70 – 145) reports the Delphic oracle that Creon received in order to save the city from the plague, whereas in lines 710 – 725 there is reference to the oracle that the Pythian Apollo gave to Laius, that he would be killed by his son. Confirmation of this oracle is given in lines 789 – 794, where Oedipus outlines an oracle he received from Delphi, according to which he would kill his father and sleep with his mother. What is more, Euripides (*Iphigenia in Tauris*, 937 – 985) Orestes and his friend Pylades are going to Tauris to take the *ζόανον* of Artemis and bring it to Athens. According to Apollo, this is the only way for Orestes to escape the persecutions of the *Ερινύες* for killing his mother and her lover.

² See Evgeni 2014 where the topic discussed is the dispute between Beerden - Naerebout and Struck about whether we should take into consideration oracles that are described in ancient Greek literature or not and for what reasons.

³ Karrer 2013: 21.

⁴ Bowden 2005: 13 – 14. About the importance of the Delphic Oracle see Bowden 2005: 38 – 64.

⁵ Evgeni 2014.

⁶ Vögelin 2000: 31.

⁷ Herodotus, *Histories*, 1. 46 – 1. 49. See also Evgeni 2014.

I. WHY DELPHI?

The examples mentioned above attest to the great importance of the Delphic Oracle and this is the reason why I have chosen to analyze topics and issues concerning this particular Oracle and not for example, the one at Dodona. Both Oracles played important roles in antiquity. However, Delphi was considered to be more prestigious. The theologian Mozley indicated that the Delphic Oracle was an institution standing high above all the others, mostly because it was the only one where the god himself was the absolute administrator.⁸ However, it is known that at Dodona oracular responses were coming straight from the god Zeus.⁹ What I would suggest is that the Delphic Oracle was standing high above all the others perhaps because, from mythical context, the god Apollo was known as born for being the oracular god; oracles and prophecies were among his main characteristics and I would dare to point that in that sense, he was more important than Zeus.¹⁰

What is more, Delphi was considered to be the centre of the world and its importance is also attributed to its central location. It was located almost in the middle of Greece, something that made it easily accessible to a huge amount of other Greek communities. Moreover, foreigners would usually visit it in order to receive divine consultation, as the example of king Croesus indicates.¹¹ The Oracle at Dodona was difficult to reach because of its location (Northern Greece – Thesprotia) and hence, Delphi ended up being the supreme authority in classical antiquity. Also, many ancient sources attest to the influence the Oracle exerted in antiquity and I believe that, by getting to know the inner depths of the way the Oracle worked, we can also understand the way ancients perceived life, especially since divination was part of people's everyday life and Delphi in particular, was seen as the most famous and reliable Oracle in ancient Greece. For as Scott claims, «an understanding of the ancient world and, I would argue, of humankind itself, is incomplete without an understanding of Delphi».¹²

In addition, while many Oracles throughout Greece preserved a certain weight as far as future prediction was concerned, the Delphic Oracle stood always a bit forward and held an important position in religious and political matters, since both Strabo and Pausanias attribute the institution of the Amphictyonic league to this Oracle.¹³ Mozley continues that with this league, the Oracle managed to control the centre of the Grecian world and as Muller observed, the formation of the Greeks into what is called nation under the common name of Hellenes, is attributed to the Delphic Oracle, when the Amphictyonic league was established.¹⁴ Consequently, Delphi was important as far as city development was concerned. Moreover, if we want to get a general view of the oracular influence among the ancients, Mozley claims that the Delphic Oracle is the most appropriate starting point.¹⁵ Hence, these are the reasons why I have chosen to focus on the Delphic Oracle and not on any other.

⁸ Mozley 1835: 7 – 10.

⁹ Philostratus the Elder, *Imagines*, 2. 33.

¹⁰ Burkert 1985: 143 – 149.

¹¹ Karrer 2013: 21.

¹² Scott 2014: 6.

¹³ Strabo, *Geography*, 8. 6. 14, Pausanias, *Description of Greece*, 10. 8. 2 – 10. 8. 5.

¹⁴ Mozley 1835: 10.

¹⁵ Mozley 1835: 9.

II. STRUCTURE OF CHAPTERS AND TIME SCOPE

As far as the structure of this paper is concerned, I have to point out that my approach underlines the separation between emic and etic approach. These two terms were introduced by anthropologists and are usually used in the field of social and behavioural sciences. They deal with the way scientists examine an issue; from within the social group – from the perspective of the subject (emic) or from outside – from the perspective of the outsider (etic). Hence, in each chapter I will approach a specific issue first from an emic point of view and then from an etic perspective.¹⁶

Chapter One focuses on a general definition of what divination is, mentioning at the same time some of its main characteristics along with examples taken from ancient Greek literature. Next my analysis becomes more specific showing the distinction between the oracle with a lower case ‘o’ and the Oracle with a capital ‘O’, which is the place where people visited to receive divine consultation.

In Chapter Two, I continue with more information about the Oracle and especially the one at Delphi, where the god Apollo was worshipped. Following mostly the information provided by Parke and Wormell, I present a history of the origins and the myths that deal with the establishment of the Delphic Oracle. Following that, I analyze a number of reasons on why people consulted Delphi, explaining what were their main problems and difficulties and in what way the divine consultation assisted them. Also various references are demonstrating the great influence the Oracle exercised, especially on the heyday of its function, in the fields of politics and religion. All these claims are based mostly on what primary sources and ancient authors attest about each one of these issues.

Chapter Three is completely dedicated to the Pythia and the procedure of her divine consultation in Delphi. Using Parke and Wormell on one hand and Scott on the other as my main starting point, I analyse emically and then etically, the way the Oracle functioned, from the pre – consultation procedure and the rituals that both the enquirers and the Pythia had to follow to the inner depths of the way the Pythia gave oracles and the opinions of ancient authors and modern scholars about her so – called ‘trance’. The debate of whether there was or not a chasm below the prophetess where vapours were emerging from, is also analyzed along with opinions that modern scholars and scientists have expressed over all these years of research.

Chapter Four focuses on necromancy at Delphi. Definition and examples from ancient literature are being presented along with an analysis of necromantic practices at Delphi. How was it practiced and why some modern scholars speak about necromancy at Delphi?

Chapter Five is dedicated to another method the Oracle practised, cleromancy. I make an analysis of how it functioned and what ancient and modern sources describe about this topic, pointing out at the same time that this was an alternative way of how the Pythia worked, apart from being possessed by the god.

¹⁶ Kottak 2006: 47, Groot 1992: 126 – 128, Pelto J. and Pelto H. 1978: 54 – 67. See also Berry, Poortinga, Breugelmans, Chasiotis and Sam 2011: 24 and Harris 1976: 329 – 350.

As far as the time scope of my paper is concerned, I will focus on the eighth century BC and extend till the first century AD, when the decline of the Oracle took place. In particular, Delphi was inhabited since Mycenaean times (14th – 11th century BC) by colonies who worshiped Mother Earth. Apollo's worship as the god of revelation, light and harmony was introduced between the eleventh and ninth centuries. Over the next five centuries the sanctuary grew in importance and size and during the eighth century BC Delphi was well known for the oracular powers of its prophetess, who seated on her tripod and gave oracular responses as coming from the god, who was said to possess her spirit. However, between the seventh and fifth century BC, the prophetic powers of the Oracle had already diminished. By that time Plutarch was already working as a priest there and this is how information about the decline of the Oracle has come down to us.

III. DEBATE

As we will later on find out, there are many different opinions on what happened at Delphi and how the Pythia prophesied. Most of the ancient sources mention that the Pythia was experiencing spirit possession by Apollo, something that is accepted by scholars like Maurizio and Sissa.¹⁷ On the other hand, modern scholars like Parke and Wormell, believe that the Pythia's trance came as a result of her psychology¹⁸, whereas others like Dempsey, Flacelière, de Boer and Hale suggest that there was a chasm under the temple and that the gases that were emerging from it, caused the trancelike state of the Pythia.¹⁹ However, scientists like Fontenrose, Littleton, Holland and Oppé supported what on the site excavations showed; that there was no chasm under the temple and hence, the Pythia did not inhale any kind of gases.²⁰ Therefore, it is obvious that all these controversial opinions lead inevitably to a debate, especially when what ancient sources attest is not sufficient or satisfactory in order to help us realize how eventually divination functioned at Delphi.

IV. RESEARCH QUESTION

Following the above mentioned debate, one would wonder what actually happened there, at Delphi. How and when did the Pythia give oracular responses? Was she indeed possessed by the god? If so, the only way that one could receive divine consultation was only when the Pythia experienced spirit possession by Apollo or there were other ways of divination practised on the site, like necromancy and cleromancy, as some scholars have claimed? Was there some kind of connection between these three methods of divination? These are all questions that I will attempt to answer throughout this paper, providing each time satisfactory arguments and presenting my opinions and ideas about these topics. Also, I will attempt to prove that my special approach, categorizing sources based on whether they are emically or etically oriented, gives new insight in all these questions.

¹⁷ Maurizio 1995: 69 – 86, Sissa 1990: 51 – 70.

¹⁸ Parke and Wormell 1956: 38 – 39.

¹⁹ Dempsey 1972: 8, Flacelière 1965: 48, De Boer and Hale 2002: 189 – 196.

²⁰ Fontenrose 1978: 204 – 211, Littleton 1986: 76 – 91, Holland 1933: 201 – 214.

V. METHODOLOGY AND DIFFICULTIES

In order to investigate what actually happened at the Delphic Oracle and how exactly the Pythia gave prophecies, I will examine what ancient Greek literature testifies along with opinions of modern scholars on issues concerning the way the Pythia worked and various theories that have been formed about other related matters as well, such as the gaseous vent theory. Hence, the method that I am going to use is source investigation in order to form my own idea on what happened there and to extract my own conclusions. Epigraphical sources and archaeology will also be a helpful tool for my research. However, we need to consider the difficulties that lurk behind this method; difficulties that have to do with both the literary and the archaeological evidence. First of all, for an important institution like the Delphic Oracle there has not been preserved straightforward or complete account on the value of the Oracle itself or on how exactly consultation worked. This is quite strange especially if one is to think that the whole situation of consulting the gods was not forbidden and it was not considered to be an occult. This is probably the reason why sources from the classical period «treat the process of consultation as common knowledge, to the extent that it does not need explaining, and indeed the consultations at Delphi often act as shorthand for descriptions of other oracular sanctuaries».²¹ Many of the primary sources that are available to us come from Roman times and focus more on what the ancients thought about the Oracle than to the actual process of consultation. Moreover, although the archaeological evidence sheds light on various issues concerning the gaseous substances that the Pythia was supposed to inhale in order to fall in trance, it still comes up short in helping us form an idea about the way the Oracle worked during the first centuries, when it was said to be at its peak.

Therefore, our knowledge of the Oracle's activity should depend significantly on literary evidence. However, we cannot be sure to what extent we should count on what ancient authors recorded. Most of them were relying on other sources for their information and used this kind of information about the oracular process not in order to give us a 'straight' history of what happened but in order to perform a particular function within their own narratives. This is why some scholars consider some of the oracular responses 'ahistorical', in the sense that we cannot rely on them if we want to examine 'real' oracular pronouncements.²² As Parke and Wormell put it, «there are thus practically no oracles to which we can point with complete confidence in their authenticity».²³

In conclusion, if the situation is indeed like this and if the Pythia decided to take the 'secret' of divine consultation with her into her grave, then we cannot but speculate by creating a snapshot of what we do know about the oracular process; an idea which is the result of combining primary sources from different times and places with the opinions and theories of modern scholars, something that makes them confusing and mixed. This is the reason why I have chosen to divide my analysis in emic and etic perspective, in an attempt to distinguish between the emic and etic elements of the sources (ancient and modern).

²¹ Scott 2014: 10.

²² About the 'ahistorical' accounts before the fifth century BC, see Fontenrose 1978: 11 – 195.

²³ Parke and Wormell 1956: xxi. See also Fontenrose 1978.

CHAPTER 1

I. DIVINATION

Emic

According to Cicero, divination is a presension and a knowledge of future things.²⁴ In our modern ears ‘divination’ may sound strange. Yet, it is known that any serious decision would not be taken in ancient Greece without first consulting the supernatural, the gods, usually by some form of divination. Divination was an important part of everyday life, which means that almost everyone was a potential user of this method. It was perceived as essentially a human act which informs us about human society,²⁵ something that is made clear by the Roman author Cicero who said that «I know of no people, whether they be learned and refined or barbaric and ignorant, that does not consider that future things are indicated by signs, and that it is possible for certain people to recognize those signs and predict what will happen».²⁶ People in antiquity would often practice or experience methods of divination.

From my point of view, divination is considered to be a type of communication between humans and the supernatural, aiming to make people’s lives easier, by eliminating the feeling of uncertainty. This is a definition given by an emic point of view.

Etic

On the other hand, an etically oriented definition describes divination as a knowledge obtained by means of observation and recognition, where the human plays an important role in interpreting the signs coming from the supernatural. The most important thing is that in an etic definition the gods do not play an active role. It is the human that should be able to recognise the signs sent by the gods and interpret them in a way that eventually, the hidden message²⁷ will offer him/her solution to them problems. The supernatural (usually a god) would either unveil information to the enquirer or would ask the enquirer to perform a particular task for him/her.²⁸ Besides, the term itself tells a lot about it; it comes from the Latin word *divinatio* which means ‘to deal with the gods’. As Beerden claims, the divine signs could be anything perceived as abnormal in the human world. Once these signs were recognized by the human as divine they needed to be interpreted. Hence, the three basic elements of a proper divinatory process were: the *homo divinans* (the diviner, whether layman or professional), the sign observed, recognized and interpreted and the textual framework that the diviner had to use during the process.²⁹ These three are the main characteristics of the divinatory practice. At this point we should make clear that divination was not concerned only with the future. As Struck mentions, the information given to the inquirers could also have been about the past (as in *Oedipus*

²⁴ Cicero, *On Divination*, 1.1, 2.63.

²⁵ Beerden 2013: 3.

²⁶ Cicero, *On Divination*, 1.2.

²⁷ I say ‘hidden message’ because as we will see later, according to Heraclitus, ‘The oracle neither conceals, nor reveals, but indicates.’ See Plutarch, *Moralia*, 404d.

²⁸ Evgeni 2014.

²⁹ Beerden 2013: 20.

the King where one of the oracles is referring to the murder of king Laius, something that happened in the past) or about the present (as when the Pythia gave prophesy about what Croesus was doing in Herodotus' *Histories*).³⁰

Thence, the phenomenon of divination created many questions for modern scholars. As Johnston mentions in her article, in the book *Mantikê: Studies in Ancient Divination*, the first attempt of a complete idea about Greek divination was made by Auguste Bouché – Leclercq, with his book *Histoire de la divination dans l'antiquité*, in the late nineteenth century. Since then, scholars followed his ideas but still the information available was scarce. The majority of the scholars would simply gather information about specific practices or oracular sites. However, ancient Greek divination needed further investigation and research, as more and more questions would be formed; scholars wanted to find more. For these reasons, as Johnston mentions, they started to examine the issue again, from an emic and etic perspective as well, comparing Greek divination to divinatory methods of other cultures, trying to figure out how divination worked in its social contexts and also trying to get an idea of the general way of thinking and acting of people, back in those ancient days.³¹ Hence, after years of research we arrived to a point where we can say that we can give a satisfactory definition of what divination in antiquity was. And since this dissertation is concerned with the Delphic Oracle and its methods, first of all we need to give a definition of divination, the method that was principally practised in Delphi.

However, each one of the modern scholars gives a different explanation of the term, pointing out every time a different characteristic of divination, depending on whether the definition is emically or etically oriented.³²

II. CHARACTERISTICS

- **The aim of divination in antiquity**

What was the actual aim of this practice? For what reasons would someone use divination? The persistence of desire for divinatory knowledge and certainty, attests to a human basic need; that of dealing with uncertainty.³³ Anxiety rises from unpredictable situations and as Beerden observes, «uncertainty is created by everything humans do not or cannot know. Humans can thrive on uncertainty because they experience hope and even fear as stimulating emotions. Paradoxically, simultaneously every attempt is made to diminish that same uncertainty because it is necessary to have some idea or conception of the future if one is to make up».³⁴ Thus, divination was used mainly to calm the fear and the uncertainty of the future and to provide security for the present; divination practises worked as a weapon against the unknown. People were in need of the divine consultation, in order to be well prepared about the future, mainly because as Lawson claims, since one has *preorganized* his future, there might a possibility of avoiding or changing situations that he does not want them to occur.³⁵ Consequently we come to the conclusion that ancients used to

³⁰ Struck 2003: 167 – 186. See also Evgeni 2014.

³¹ Johnston 2005: 1 – 6.

³² Beerden 2013: 19 – 20.

³³ Johnston 2008: 3 – 4.

³⁴ Beerden 2013: 195 – 221.

³⁵ Lawson 1994: 79

consult the gods above all because they wished to know the situations or the problems they were going to face and also because of the great respect and awe humans had for the supernatural; they would not undertake anything important without first knowing that the gods were favourable and acceptable about their deeds. Oracles were perceived by humans as an authority, appointed by the supernatural, privileged to determine what humans were allowed to do or not.

- **What is the Oracle?**

As already mentioned in the introduction Oracle with a capital case 'O' is the place where prophesies coming from gods were passed down to mortals. This paper is going to be about divination that took place in a particular site: Delphi. However, there were many other methods of divination not practised in a site; there were for example, individual seers who performed divination by receiving money as a reward for their services.³⁶

Two of the most famous Oracles in Greece were the one at Delphi and the one at Dodona. They were both of major importance and of huge prestige because they were ruled by two of the most famous gods of ancient Greek religion; the Delphic Oracle was under the ruling of the god Apollo, whereas the one in Dodona was believed to be the Oracle of Zeus. It might seem strange that Zeus, the father of all gods and deities, did not own many Oracles in ancient Greece but we need to point out that, according to the beliefs of the ancients, he was the creator of most of them.³⁷ There were many other Oracles spread around Greece of less importance compared to the ones previously mentioned. In the place called Oracle usually there were temples and shrines of ancient Greek gods, depending on who was the dominant god of the area. Gods were absent in these areas and that is why they usually used a medium in order to communicate with humans, like the well known Pythia at Delphi.

CHAPTER 2

I. DELPHI

- **The founding and the origins of the Oracle**

Most of the information about the history and the origins of the Delphic Oracle comes from the work of Parke and Wormell,³⁸ which is considered to be the most representative on this field. They argue that ancient Greek literature gives us information about the foundation of the Oracle. In particular, the *Homeric Hymn to Apollo* describes how Apollo went through the earth looking for a central Oracle for humans. First he positions accurately the place of his temple and then, at a fair – flowing spring beside it he kills a female serpent. The name of this place – Pytho – was believed to come from the rotting corpse of the serpent.³⁹ In this hymn, there is no information about the way the god gave prophesies, but if one considers the settlement of Cretan travellers there who acted like priests, it is possibly implied that

³⁶ About the seer in ancient Greece see Flower 2008.

³⁷ Sophocles, *Oedipus in Colonus*, 629, Aeschylus, *Eumenides*, 611.

³⁸ Parke and Wormell 1956: 3 – 16.

³⁹ *Homeric Hymn to Apollo*, 300 – 374.

Apollo gave prophesies from his laurel tree in the sanctuary and that his utterances were pronounced by his servants. This way of divining reminds us of the way the Oracle at Dodona worked, through a sacred oak tree.⁴⁰

Apart from this hymn, Aeschylus also presents his own version of the foundation of the Delphic Oracle. His work *Eumenides* begins with the Priestess of Apollo praying before entering the sanctuary. After that, she narrates how Apollo came from Delos to occupy his temple, in peaceful mood. Here there is neither reference of previous owners of the place nor of the monstrous serpent that the god had to slay in order to become the ultimate ruler.⁴¹ As Parke and Wormell observe, «this account is chosen by Aeschylus because it exactly suits the tone of his play».⁴² The main theme of the play is the triumph of law over violence and therefore, hence Apollo's slaying of the serpent and the forcible occupation of the shrine by him would seem inappropriate for the prologue.

On the other hand, the violent and forcible occupation of the shrine by Apollo is presented in Euripides' *Iphigenia in Tauris*, where the author wishes to glorify Apollo, without exalting his dignity. The Chorus describes how Apollo, still a baby, slaughtered the monstrous serpent, entered the holy shrine and sat on the golden tripod, distributing prophesies from gods to mortals. But when Apollo had driven Themis, the daughter of Earth, from the sacred place, Earth decided to take revenge by sending in the night prophetic dreams to humans. Then Apollo asked Zeus for help and he stopped Earth's dream oracles by restoring Apollo's domination in the place.⁴³ All in all, the myth of Apollo slaying the monstrous serpent underwent various changes and there was a debate in antiquity concerning the place where Apollo came from.⁴⁴

In the field of archaeology, excavations have shown that the place was previously occupied in Late Helladic times. As Parke and Wormell mention, «evidently this mountain shelf, a place not suited by nature for extensive settlement, was already inhabited as early as 1500 BC by a considerable population».⁴⁵ A Minoan object - a limestone vessel in the shape of a lioness's head - and a few other fragments were found there, but this evidence is not sufficient in order to indicate that there was some kind of ancient worship or cult on the classical site. On the contrary, it seems that the worship was centralized in the cleft of Castalia fountain and close to it there was the shrine of Athena Pronaia, where excavations attest to a continuity of worship from prehellenic times. Thence, all investigations show that the chief deity of the Minoans was a goddess, guardian of the earth and its fruits, who was worshiped especially by women with orgiastic features. This was probably the first and original worship at this place, though most of the literature insists on presenting Apollo as a settler coming from elsewhere and on making Earth his predecessor.⁴⁶

⁴⁰ Plutarch, *Moralia*, 409e – 409f.

⁴¹ Aeschylus, *Eumenides*, 1 – 63.

⁴² Parke and Wormell 1956: 4.

⁴³ Euripides, *Iphigenia in Tauris*, 1234 – 1284.

⁴⁴ Parke and Wormell 1956: 8.

⁴⁵ Parke and Wormell 1956: 5.

⁴⁶ Parke and Wormell 1956: 3 – 13. See p. 6 – 9 about two other theories concerning primitive and pre – Apolline cult.

After having presented the origins and the myths about Delphi, one might wonder why people consulted the Oracle. What did they wish to know? What were the issues that made people worried so that they sought for divine help? Did they use to consult it on occasions of war and other public matters?

- **Divination and the Delphic Oracle in private and public life**

The phenomenon of divination was something that characterized private and public life in ancient Greece. Unfortunately, there is no abundant literature about personal examples of divine consultation from the Delphic Oracle, as oracular texts were not inscribed on lead tablets.⁴⁷ However, as we will find out in the next chapters, the majority of private oracular responses from Delphi concerned the dead.⁴⁸ For Fontenrose, not all of the Delphic oracular responses are real. That is why he divided them into Historical (authentic), Quasi – historical (responses attested by ancient authors as historical events occurring in historical times), Legendary (fictitious) and Fictional responses.⁴⁹ According to him, people would consult the Delphic Oracle on occasions concerning plague, famine or catastrophe, sickness, exile, loss of country or on occasions that one wanted to move to another place, crime, wars or *casus belli*, problems of rulership, colonization, family issues, marriage, pregnancy or about knowing the child's future and religious problems or about the worship of gods and in what ways humans can honour them.⁵⁰ Oracular responses were usually in the form of commands or instructions in order for the enquirers to have success or avoid problems or misfortune, while others were in the form of prohibitions or warnings attested as 'Beware of doing this' or 'Do not do this'. Moreover, oracular responses included reference to present or past events, like the Pythia's response to the question of Chairephon on whether there was anyone wiser than Socrates (H3). There were also statements about the future, although some of them were promises or statements of intention expressed in the future tense, like Apollo's statement to Agamedes and Trophonios that they will get paid by him on the third or seventh day (L9).⁵¹

Private Life

As Parke and Wormell observe, most of the private divine consultations of early times in Delphi concern classic poets (Homer, Hesiod, Archilochus, Calondas, Aesop and Pindar) and philosophers (Pythagoras, Chairephon and Socrates).⁵² However, the majority of the private enquirers used to consult the Pythia under the procedure of the lot oracle, since this procedure was more effective when questions in the form of 'Is it better to do this or that?' or 'To what god should I pray?' needed to be answered. Some of them are mentioned by Parke and Wormell, like the legend that deals with

⁴⁷ Oracular inquiries and answers were inscribed on lead tablets at the Oracle of Dodona, so there is a huge variety that has been passed down to us. For more about Dodona see Treadwell 1983, Fontenrose 1988, Johnston 2008: 60 – 75, Nicol 1958: 128 – 143.

⁴⁸ People were interested in the way the dead were faring and in what they were doing. Apollo usually intermediated between the two worlds and helped humans to discover what the dead wanted. See Fontenrose 1978: 25 and Johnston 2005: 283.

⁴⁹ Fontenrose 1978: 11 – 13. Parke and Wormell do not agree with Fontenrose's categorization. For more see Fontenrose 1942: 472 - 476.

⁵⁰ For an analysis see Bowden 2005: 109 – 133.

⁵¹ Fontenrose 1978: 39 – 57.

⁵² Parke and Wormell 1956: 393 – 407.

two successful appeals to Apollo for children. In particular, «in response to the first enquiry, Phoebus gave offspring by his prophesy hearkening to the vow and bade bring the child's hair as an offering. On the eleventh month thereafter a baby daughter was born intact with hair on her head reaching to her eyes and in the first year it grew in length to her chest. Her mother, when pregnant, did not suffer such ills as before, nor did she endure bad extreme pains in childbirth due to the skills of Lochia, nurturer of the young, and the accomplishing Fates, and through the purpose of Apollo». Then the parents, in order to thank the god, named their first child Delphis and the second one Pytho. In some other occasions, it seems that Apollo would usually be consulted as a god of healing, especially when there was war.⁵³

Public Life

As already mentioned, divination was concerned with public life as well. Ancient Greek literature offers us a variety of instances. Bowden in his book about divination at Delphi and democracy in classical Athens, states that divination in the field of politics was of major importance «for its ability to oppose authority, and to serve as a resistance mechanism, hence ensuring that leaders are not seen to act entirely on their own initiative over matters where dispute would seem possible or likely. Furthermore, as Robert Parker has emphasized, the decision to seek such a sanction implies acceptance of an obligation to act according to the will of the god, and thus the sign which is sought acquires greater authority than that which offers itself».⁵⁴ Therefore, divination worked as a means of eliminating possible disorder in the field of politics. Consultation would usually come from the supernatural, from a power coming from above, from the gods. Hence, this kind of divine consultation had gravity and was meant to be for the good of the city and its citizens. This is what also Bowden states in his book, by saying that «divination would make some difficult decisions easier by reframing the issues at stake, and give the appearance of external authority for those decisions, making it easier to reconcile members of the society to them».⁵⁵ In general, the author highlights the relationship between religion and democracy and shows us how Delphi affected the way humans dealt with the supernatural and its commands or consultations. For Bowden, the gods used to be involved in all matters of humans' lives and the Delphic Oracle usually provided humans information about how to make them favourable; Delphi was a means to know what gods required.⁵⁶

To sum up, it is profound how much the Delphic Oracle helped people in their everyday problems, in private and public life as well. Without divine help, humans might not have been successful in wars, might not have taken the right decisions or be able to survive successfully. As Bowden states, political issues mattered very much for Athenians and for all these problems they counted more on the favour of the gods than on the judgements of their politicians.⁵⁷ Delphi could also affect the way people perceived some religious matters. Hence, let us now consider the Oracle's influence in politics and religion.

⁵³ Parke and Wormell 1956: 409 – 414. For more information about Apollo's consultations as a god of healing, see 410 – 413.

⁵⁴ Bowden 2005: 3.

⁵⁵ Bowden 2005: 3

⁵⁶ Bowden 2005: 1 – 3.

⁵⁷ Bowden 2005: 159.

II. INFLUENCE OF THE ORACLE

There is no doubt about the great influence that this Oracle exerted on various fields, like politics and religion. In antiquity it was an important religious centre to which people from all over the world flocked in order to take the divine consultation. As Dempsey states, Greeks and barbarians from the adjacent countries consulted it about everything: laws, colonization, wars and healing of disease or pestilence and its divine consultations affected the history of thousands of Greek noble families and were received faithfully.⁵⁸ Apart from these occasions, ancient sources attest that Delphi was consulted on private matters as well.

- **Politics – *Res publicae***

City Development

Many of the ancient sources linked Sparta with Delphi in its early development. During the sixth century BC ancient sources mention that Sparta was in excellent terms with the Delphic Oracle and its general policy seems to be based on the Pythia's oracular utterances and guidelines. According to Herodotus, the special position that the Oracle had is attested by the fact that the kings had associated with each of them two Spartans elected as Pythii.⁵⁹ The Sparta's internal constitution was defined by Lycurgus and seemed to be connected with Delphi. It was said that it was the Pythia who dictated to Lycurgus this constitution. However, Herodotus recorded that the Spartans themselves claimed that Lycurgus introduced this idea of constitution from Crete. Parke and Wormell analyzed this issue by combining and examining what ancient sources describe. They concluded that King Pausanias and later writers described the Sparta's constitution as something indicated by the Pythia. Aristotle also believed that these instructions were addressed to Lycurgus by the Apolline prophetess.⁶⁰ What modern scholars believe, as Parke and Wormell put it, is that changes in Spartan constitution were sent as draft proposals to Delphi waiting for Apollo's approval. The documents were submitted with a request for the god's *imprimatur*. This is how the whole matter was considered as officially coming from the Delphic Oracle and this is how eventually the rest of Greece associated Lycurgus constitution with the Pythia's oracular utterances. Hence, judging from the ancient sources, we form a picture of Sparta as a state which had strong associations with the Pythian Apollo, something that is also supported by Mozley.⁶¹

Colonization

Delphi was also consulted in cases of doubtful succession and in matters concerning colonization'.⁶² Delphi was involved with colonization mostly during the 8th century BC.⁶³ As Malkin observes, it was the most influential Oracle as far as colonization

⁵⁸ Dempsey 1972: 38 – 41.

⁵⁹ Herodotus, *Histories*, 6. 57. 3.

⁶⁰ Plutarch, *Lycurgus*, 6.

⁶¹ Parke and Wormell 1956: 90 – 98, Mozley 1835: 12.

⁶² Mozley 1835: 12, Parke and Wormell 1956: 82 – 98. About the Delphic Oracle and colonization, see Parke and Wormell 1956: 49 – 81, and pages 99 – 232 about the relationship Delphic Oracle – War. See also Bowden 2005: 89 – 108.

⁶³ See also Parke and Wormell 1956: 50.

was concerned.⁶⁴ Enquirers interested in colonization would usually ask the oracular god about the location of the colony and its future prospects. For a body of citizens to be removed from their native land to another place, it was not a simple process where Apollo's assurance about their safety was sufficient; his blessing was of greater importance. Based on Nilsson, Apollo functioned as a mediator between humans and the supernatural, pointing out at the same time the proper cults and rites and to whom they should be addressed, something that is confirmed by Herodotus.⁶⁵ Usually the foundation of a colony involved the constitution of temples and cults on the new land. Hence, colonization was in a way connected to religion. According to Parke and Wormell, usually founders of colonies visited Delphi with a colonization plan already shaped up. All they hoped for was to receive divine authorization for a project already conceptualized, in a positive form that will encourage them to continue with their plan.⁶⁶

As far as the primitive times are concerned, according to some traditions related to colonization, usually people dedicated a tithe to the gods and on some occasions this tenth part was calculated not in property, but in persons. In Greece the receiver of these dedications was the Pythian Apollo. As Parke and Wormell observe, a tithe of a captured tribe was brought to Delphi and given to Apollo. After some time, they were allowed by the god to relocate.⁶⁷ It is probable that most of these stories, which show Apollo directing the foundation of colonies in Greece, such as the Dorian invasion or the Ionian migration, are considered as myths or legends,⁶⁸ mostly because a large number of oracles concerning colonization was delivered after the events took place. Nevertheless, nothing prevents us from assuming that Delphi was consulted on occasions of settling from one area to another and when people needed to obtain information about leaders of future colonies and the cults that had to be introduced. Examples that have come down to us, either fictitious or authentic, led to the creation of the bulk of colonization oracles from Delphi, which may occasionally hold some historic value.⁶⁹

War

Delphi was also consulted in cases of war. A famous example from literature is the well – known case of the ‘wooden wall’. After the defeat of the Greeks at Thermopylae, more and more Greeks were joining the Persians. Themistocles tried to persuade his fellow citizens to abandon the city because he did not want to quit the war. The Athenians sent messengers to the Delphic Oracle in order to be informed about the god's opinion. The divine response was discouraging; they asked for a second divine response and the gods said that a wooden wall would save them. The oracle given was quite ambiguous and needed careful interpretation. Themistocles interpreted these ‘wooden walls’ as their fleet:

Vainly does Pallas strive to appease great Zeus of Olympus;
Words of entreaty are vain, and so too cunning counsels of wisdom.
Nevertheless I will speak to

⁶⁴ Malkin 1987: 17.

⁶⁵ Herodotus, *Histories*, 5. 42, Nilsson 1949: 637 – 640. See also, Malkin 1987: 17 – 29.

⁶⁶ Parke and Wormell 1956: 50.

⁶⁷ Parke and Wormell 1956: 51.

⁶⁸ Parke and Wormell 1956: 55 – 78. See also Pease 1917: 1 – 20.

⁶⁹ Pease 1917: 1 – 20.

you again of strength adamantine. All will be taken and lost that the sacred border of Cecrops Holds in keeping today, and the dales divine of Cithaeron; Yet a wood-built wall will by Zeus all-seeing be granted To the Triton-born, a stronghold for you and your children.

In order to strengthen his argument he called divine signs by indicating that the sacred serpent of the goddess Athena, the defender of the city, had fled the city, pointing to the Athenians the way to the sea. Eventually the Athenians were convinced and fled to Aegina, Troizina and Salamis.⁷⁰

According to another example attested by Herodotus, when the Athenians were about to activate counter – measures against Aegina, Delphi consulted them to wait for thirty years and then they could dedicate a piece of land to Aeacus and declare war. But the Athenians could not wait that long and eventually suffered the consequences of as much loss as they had inflicted.⁷¹

To sum up, it is obvious that people were looking more for the Oracle's advice than to know the future or to look for divine help on what to do as far as politics were concerned. They would undoubtedly ask for Apollo's opinion in politics but as Bowden states, it is like the question asked is more about relations with the gods; there were no fields of people's everyday life where gods or religion were not involved.⁷² As also Dempsey mentions, in political matters the word of Apollo was usually not enough, perhaps because on people's mind the Apolline word was to be trusted exclusively on issues concerning religion and not politics.⁷³ However, there is no doubt that the Oracle had knowledge and power at the same time, affecting significantly human lives. This is the reason why people wanted to propitiate it with presents and offerings, like Croesus used to do.⁷⁴

- **Religion – *Res divinae***

Plato mentions in one of his works that the Delphic Oracle is the common place for all Greeks who are seeking light on important religious legislation matters. Apollo was considered to be an authority; the fitting one to explain humans such religious matters.

What part of legislation, then," he said, "is still left for us?" And I replied, "For us nothing, but for the Apollo of Delphi, the chief, the fairest and the first of enactments." "What are they?" he said. "The founding of temples, and sacrifices, and other forms of worship of gods, daemons, and heroes; and likewise the burial of the dead and the services we must render to the dwellers in the world beyond to keep them gracious. For of such matters we neither know anything nor in the founding of our city if we are wise shall we entrust them to any other or make use of any other interpreter than the God of our fathers. For this God surely is in such matters for all mankind the interpreter of the religion of their fathers who

⁷⁰ Herodotus, *Histories*, 7. 140 – 7. 144. Translation by A. D. Godley. Cambridge. Harvard University Press. 1920. (Perseus Digital Library). See also Bowden 2005: 100 – 107. About the example see also Evgeni 2014.

⁷¹ Herodotus, *Histories*, 5. 89. 2.

⁷² Bowden 2005: 132 – 133.

⁷³ Dempsey 1972: 38 – 41.

⁷⁴ Mozley 1835: 11 – 15. See Parke and Wormell 1956: 91 – 111 about the attitude of the Oracle towards tyrants and the role of the Pythian Apollo as legislator.

from his seat in the middle and at the very navel of the earth delivers his interpretation.” “Excellently said,” he replied; “and that is what we must do.”⁷⁵

As Fontenrose mentions, most of the ‘historical’ oracular responses have to do with religion and the worship of the gods.⁷⁶ For instance, according to ancient sources, Xenophon asked the Pythia to which of the gods should he sacrifice in order to prosper in his enterprise. And Apollo answered to which gods he should sacrifice (H11).⁷⁷ Also, we know that the Ionians consulted the Oracle about the worship of Poseidon. The god told them to take copies of the ancient ancestral altars of Helice.⁷⁸ Another example describes that when the Greeks, after their victory at Plataea, consulted the Oracle about the appropriate sacrifices, they were told to erect in Plataea an altar in honour of ‘Zeus of Freedom’.⁷⁹

As Dempsey observes, «in religious matters the Delphic Oracle did not encourage religious innovations. Its general tendency is illustrated by the well – known statement of Xenophon: consultants are advised to follow the custom of each particular state. This policy of the Oracle in religious matters is quite in harmony with its policy in matters political», something that has already been mentioned.⁸⁰

To conclude, if one is to consider that one of the most famous gods of the Twelve Olympians was dominant, it seems logical the fact that divination was inextricably linked with religion and that both fields were significant for people’s daily life.

• **Private matters – *Res domesticae***

According to Fontenrose, people would also consult Delphi on occasions of birth, marriage or sex relations and death or burial.⁸¹ For example, one day the emperor Hadrian wished to know the origins of Homer. He received an answer from the Pythia that Homer was from Ithaca, son of Telemachos and Epikaste.⁸² Another inscription is about the birth of a daughter, where the enquirer had to offer child’s hair as a sacrifice, after the girl was born.⁸³ What is more, an interesting example is presented by Pausanias. According to him Erginus, having lived a long life without wife or children, visited Delphi to ask the Pythia about children. The prophetess consulted him to *ιστοβοήι γέροντι νέην ποτίβαλλε κορώνην*, meaning that he should take a young wife. He did so and eventually had children.⁸⁴

Everything considered, it is clear that if one is to look for inscriptions concerning Delphi there is a wide variety of topics, something that confirms the power of the Oracle on affecting and shaping every aspect of people’s lives and decisions. Last but not least, all the above mentioned examples establish and strengthen the fact that to ancients’ mind Delphi was the most trustworthy Oracle.

⁷⁵ Plato, *Republic*, 4. 427b – 427c. Translation by Paul Shorey. Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press; London, William Heinemann Ltd. 1969. (Perseus Digital Library).

⁷⁶ Fontenrose 1978: 41 – 42.

⁷⁷ Fontenrose 1978: 43.

⁷⁸ Diodorus Siculus, *Library*, 15. 49. 1 – 15. 49. 6.

⁷⁹ Pausanias, *Description of Greece*, 9, 2. 5 – 2. 7.

⁸⁰ Dempsey 1972: 115. Also, see Bowden 2005: 122 – 133.

⁸¹ Fontenrose 1978: 25 – 29.

⁸² H 65, PW 465. See Fontenrose 1978: 18, 25, 36, 188 – 189, 194.

⁸³ H 34, PW 334. See Fontenrose 1978: 19, 25.

⁸⁴ Pausanias, *Description of Greece*, 9.37.4.

CHAPTER 3

I. THE PYTHIA

There were many options in which one could consult Delphi. The most famous way was by the Pythia herself, who was considered to be as a medium from the god Apollo. Moreover, various sources mention that necromancy was also practised in Delphi, along with cleromancy, performed by tossing and turning beans with different colours. For now I will focus on the Pythia and her *enthusiastic* way of prophesying; how the Delphic Oracle functioned, what was the consultation procedure, both for the enquirers and the Pythia, what were the rituals that they had to follow and finally how the Pythia was inspired. As I have already mentioned, my approach will be divided to an emic and etic point of view. In the next chapters I will give more details about necromancy and the lot Oracle.

- **The person**

Emic

A small amount of information is available about the Pythia herself. ‘Pythia’ was the name of any priestess giving prophesies, throughout the years that the Oracle was active. The first known Pythia was Phemonoe (prophetic mind).⁸⁵ Our main source about the Pythia is Plutarch, who worked there as a priest in the early second century AD and therefore provides us with some information about the Pythias. According to him, the Pythia had to be a Delphian, not necessarily coming from a rich or noble family. When Plutarch was a priest, he said that the woman was chosen from one of the «soundest and most respected families to be found in Delphi». She was usually brought up by poor peasants but, as Plutarch observes, after the fulfilment of her oracular responsibilities, she would behave like nothing happened; like she did not possess any special gift or knowledge of divination. Once chosen she dedicated for life herself to Apollo and committed herself to intense and continuous exercise and chastity.⁸⁶

According to Diodorus Siculus, the Pythia had to be a young virgin.⁸⁷ However, after a few years this changed. In particular, Echecrates of Thessaly came one day to consult the Oracle, fell in love with the young Pythia, carried her off and raped her. After that, the Delphians decided that the Pythia should be a woman over fifty; it did not matter if she was married and had children before being selected as the Pythia. But after the selection she had to leave behind all of her conjugal and maternal duties, in order to be fully devoted to Apollo.⁸⁸ She would continue however to wear the white dress that the previous virgins used to wear, as indication of her purity and in memory of the original virgin priestess.⁸⁹

⁸⁵ Strabo, *Geography*, 9. 3. 5, Pausanias, *Description of Greece*, 10. 5. 7. For more about other known Pythias see Parke and Wormell 1956: 36.

⁸⁶ Plutarch, *Moralia*, 405c.

⁸⁷ Diodorus Siculus, *Library*, 9. 16. 1.

⁸⁸ This is the reason why in some ancient sources she is described as an old woman. See Euripides, *Ion*, 1324, where Ion addresses her as mother.

⁸⁹ Diodorus Siculus, *Library*, 16. 26. 1 – 16. 26. 6, Plutarch, *Moralia*, 405c, 435d, 437d.

The most important of all the questions concerning the function of the Delphic Oracle deals with the fact that the oracular advice was transmitted from Apollo through a woman, and not a man. As Parke and Wormell observe, male gods used male priests as their mouthpiece and female deities used female mediums and priestesses. Hence, the official priests of Apollo were men and the prophet used as his mouthpiece was a man, like in Didyma and Claros. However, things were different in Delphi; the priests were males but the ancient vehicle of the god's utterance was a woman.⁹⁰ Why the official Apolline mouthpiece was a woman? A possible explanation can be given if one is to consider the previous worship that existed in Delphi; that of Ge (the Earth). In my opinion, it comes as a natural thought that, after the worship of Ge, Apollo might have derived the institution of a 'prophesying' woman in order to notify his divine commands and consultations. As also Parke and Wormell state, ancients thought that during the first centuries Apollo gave prophesies from his scared laurel or other methods and later used and derived the institution of the Pythia from the worship of Ge. We know, for instance, that at Aegira in Achaea a priestess of Ge used to descend into a cavern and return fully inspired, which indicates that there was a belief that this kind of descending was linked with a closer contact with the god. Another example comes from Olympia, where the worship of Ge had preceded that of Zeus.⁹¹ Moreover, Herodotus records that, among the tribe called Satrae there was an Oracle of Dionysus where the one uttering oracular responses was a woman, just like in Delphi, whereas men acted as prophets.⁹² Delphi is geographically far from Thrace but, in my opinion it might have subsisted some kind of influence by the Oracle in Thrace, mostly because Dionysus was not only connected with Thrace but with Delphi as well. In particular, it is said that Dionysus ruled the sanctuary when Apollo was absent.⁹³ As Amandry puts it, we sometimes grant Dionysus an equal, if not superior to that of Apollo, share of the Delphic Oracle.⁹⁴ Also, according to Rohde, maybe the institution of the Pythia in Delphi derived from the worship of Dionysus.⁹⁵ Although Dionysus was a male, it is known that his followers and votaries were women, on whom he usually produced orgiastic excitement.⁹⁶ In particular, Dionysus is described as preceding Apollo by Aeschylus; however the priestess of the play mentions this idea as an afterthought.⁹⁷ Plutarch mentions that nothing indicates a preceding bacchanal worship and the importance of Dionysus comes only from the so – called grave of Dionysus, a monument in the innermost sanctuary of Apollo.⁹⁸ However, nothing prevents us from connecting the Delphic Oracle with the one in Thrace, not only because in both Oracles the mouthpiece was a woman but also because both have a strong attachment to Dionysus.⁹⁹

Apart from that, there are theories that connect Delphi and its female prophetess to the Sibyl. In particular, Parke and Wormell mention that «she (the Sibyl) was linked with the pre – Apolline period at Delphi, and she was to have prophesies ecstatically from

⁹⁰ Parke and Wormell 1956: 10.

⁹¹ Parke and Wormell 1956: 10 – 11.

⁹² Herodotus, *Histories*, 7. 111.

⁹³ Plutarch, *Moralia*, 388e. See also Holland 1933: 201 – 214.

⁹⁴ Amandry 1950: 196 – 200.

⁹⁵ Rohde 2000. See also Parke and Wormell 1956: 6 – 13.

⁹⁶ Parke and Wormell 1956: 11.

⁹⁷ Aeschylus, *Eumenides*, 24.

⁹⁸ Plutarch, *Moralia*, 388e. For a discussion on this issue see Holland 1933: 201 – 214.

⁹⁹ See also Flower 2008: 222 – 226.

beside the sanctuary of Earth».¹⁰⁰ Her stories are known only through legend and it was said that she gave prophesies from a rock which still exists over the sacred way below the temple.¹⁰¹ According to Pausanias, the Sibyl was born between man and goddess, while other theories claim that she was daughter or sister to Apollo or that she received her powers from Ge, who passed the Oracle to Themis, who passed it to Phoebe.¹⁰² However this is a debatable topic, since as Bowden indicates, the Delphic Sibyl and the Delphic Pythia are two completely different characters and so, they should not be treated as the same figure.¹⁰³

All in all, it seems that whether coming from the worship of Ge or from the worship of Dionysus, the mouthpiece of Apollo was a woman, from the very beginning of the Oracle till its complete decline. But if we have to be more specific, nothing attests to a different theory than the one stating that the influence came from the previous worship of Ge at Delphi. In my estimation, the theory presented above about Dionysus cannot be accepted probably because of Plutarch's claim that there is no evidence about a previous bacchanal worship in Delphi.

Etic

As far as the opinions of modern scholars about the Pythia are concerned, the mystery that prevails her can be accounted for by each one of two separate theories or by combining both of them, according to Parke and Wormell. Theory no. 1 claims that the Pythia and the rest of the personnel were charlatans who were deceiving people and got paid for it, whereas theory no. 2 states that the Pythia and the priests were completely sincere and that they were the ones to be deceived. As the two scholars mention, «the phenomenon of prophetic frenzy was the product of some power which they could not explain, whether one is to describe it as the promptings of a spirit or the manifestation of a subliminal human consciousness... there is now no way to explain the Pythia's frenzy in terms of a strictly physical phenomenon. Of the opposite attitudes to the problem, the theory of utter charlatanism is hard to maintain in view of the long and distinguished history of the oracle».¹⁰⁴ To my mind, an Oracle such as the one at Delphi, with such a long and famous history for so many years, could not be a fake idea, a myth or a deceiving mechanism of antiquity in order for Delphi or the State to make more money. In addition, scarcely any ancient author was so suspicious to think of the Delphic Oracle and the way it worked as a fraud. At least there are no such ancient sources available, referring to the complete operation as a fraud. Most, if not all of the ancient sources present the Pythia and the Delphic Oracle as something respectful to people's minds. Otherwise, it would not have captured ancient's attention operating for so long and we, nowadays, would not be still interested in something which could have been delusive. Accepting the charlatanism mentioned earlier, is like denying the Oracle's history and everything that has been said about it so far, both from ancients and modern scholars. Last but not least, even anti – pagan Christians described the Oracle's function as a real phenomenon. They accepted that the Pythia was possessed. They did not question the facts; they just explained things in a different way. They thought that the Oracle was driven or

¹⁰⁰ Parke and Wormell 1956: 13.

¹⁰¹ Burkert 1985: 117.

¹⁰² Pausanias, *Description of Greece*, 10. 12. 1 – 7.

¹⁰³ Bowden 2005: 14.

¹⁰⁴ Parke and Wormell 1956: 36.

occupied by evil spirits, who aimed to seduce people's minds from the true and real God.¹⁰⁵

On the other hand, Parke and Wormell claim that the accounts of the Pythia's actual behaviour when prophesied cannot be considered as trustworthy data for investigation, since they come as attestations given from ancient authors and poets, who used them in order to serve the unravelling of the plot in their tales.¹⁰⁶ However, ancient sources and especially Plutarch never mentioned that the oracular process might be false or that it was all worked up by the priests. Parke and Wormell might be right about suggesting that the Pythia's oracular statements cannot be considered as reliable. However, people back then believed that she was the one giving prophesies and not one of her male priests; she was presented as an authority set by Apollo and we cannot but take into account everything related to this phenomenon, from stories, myths or tales attested by ancient authors to opinions of modern scholars. The idea ancients had on their mind about the Delphic prophetess can be made clear considering the figure of Cassandra, as she is presented in *Agamemnon*; her utterances are compared to Delphic prophesies.¹⁰⁷ But then again, Plutarch approached the issue from an emic point of view, which makes sense since he was there, he was present during these days. In other respects, if we prefer an etic approach, then yes, we cannot count only on what ancient authors attest. Perhaps we should first consult Fontenrose's categorization of authentic and non – authentic responses in order to continue with the investigation.¹⁰⁸

II. DIVINE CONSULTATION (THE PROCEDURE)

Emic

Despite the height of the Oracle's fame, we do not possess straightforward attestations of its consultation procedure. In fact, very few famous authors or writers of antiquity visited her or witnessed a consultation. Even Plutarch who was occupied as a priest in the Oracle tells us very little about the consultation procedure.¹⁰⁹ This is very strange, especially if one is to think that divination in antiquity was not considered to be a mystery or an occult. Besides there is no indication attesting that the ones consulting the Oracle did not describe the procedure to anyone else; it was part of people's everyday life and we would expect to have more primary sources about this issue at our disposal. Parke and Wormell believe that one reason why we do not know much about the procedure is the fact that the methods of the Oracle were taken as granted, especially in classical antiquity. No one needed to mention nowhere how the Pythia was consulted and how the Oracle worked.¹¹⁰ This is also confirmed by Herodotus, who as already mentioned, explained how the Oracle of Satrae in Thrace worked by saying that the prophetess acted just like the Pythia in Delphi and that the method is no more complicated in Thrace than in Delphi, meaning that the method of divination was the 'usual' one.¹¹¹ In my opinion, it is possible that not everyone was aware of

¹⁰⁵ John Chrysostom, *The Homilies on the First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 29.1.

¹⁰⁶ Parke and Wormell 1956: 39, Maurizio 1995: 69 – 86, Fontenrose 1978: 200.

¹⁰⁷ Aeschylus, *Agamemnon*, 1255.

¹⁰⁸ Fontenrose 1978: 7, 240 – 416.

¹⁰⁹ See *SIG*, 829a and Plutarch, *Moralia*, 792f, 700c.

¹¹⁰ Parke and Wormell 1956: 17.

¹¹¹ Herodotus, *Histories*, 7. 111.

what exactly was going on when the Pythia prophesied and that still for people in antiquity the way she functioned was also a mystery. Which of course takes us back to the same starting point; either people indeed did not know what was going on when the Pythia prophesied or they did, but there are not many sources available, probably because no one thought it was necessary to describe the actual divinatory process. Hence, it is one and the same for modern scholars.

Although not a secret procedure,¹¹² according to Parke and Wormell, the consultation did not take place in public. People who came to the Oracle were enquirers and not spectators. And of course, there were purification rituals and sacrifices for both the enquirers and the Pythia; rituals that took place before the consultation procedure.¹¹³ Most of our information comes from Plutarch, who left many details about the inner workings of the Oracle. Although a very late source, it is considered to be the most trustworthy mainly due to his occupation as a priest of the Oracle, meaning that he described practices and situations from the inside. In particular, he mentions that the Oracle could not be consulted all periods and days of the year. The Oracle was closed for three months during winter, where the god Apollo was supposed to be absent.¹¹⁴ During this period, Delphi was considered to be «oracle – less, but not god – less», as Scott states.¹¹⁵ Instead, Dionysus was believed to rule the sanctuary, confirming this way the theory about the bacchanal influence in Delphi. Therefore, the Pythia prophesied only one day in each month, which was thought to be the seventh day of the month Bysios, where Apollo had his birthday.¹¹⁶ Now, we will consider what the Pythia and the enquirers had to do before the consultation and then examine what the ancient authors attest about this issue.

Before the procedure, the Pythia would purify herself in the Castalian spring near the sanctuary. After that, probably accompanied by a one of her retinues, entered the sanctuary and would burn laurel leaves and barley meal to the god Apollo, as it is indicated by Aeschylus.¹¹⁷ At the same time, the priests had to be sure that the consultation procedure would proceed smoothly and that Apollo was positive about giving his divine consultation. Thus, they would sprinkle cold water on a goat; if it started shaking, then the procedure could go ahead, because Apollo was favourable and the prophetess was expected to have the same reaction with the goat: trembling and losing control. The goat would then be sacrificed to Apollo, on the great altar of the sanctuary.¹¹⁸

¹¹² Holland 1933: 201 – 214.

¹¹³ Parke and Wormell 1956: 17.

¹¹⁴ The Oracle was available only on the seventh day of each month. Hence, when the Oracle was closed, people used to consult individuals known as seers; people who were supposed to have the gift of communicating with the gods. See Flower 2008: 1 – 6. For more about the diviner (*homo divinans*) see Beerden 2013: 55 – 105, where she analyzes the position of the divinatory expert in society, by placing emphasis on his education, income and career. One of the most famous examples of expert seers comes from Herodotus and has to do with the *μάντης* Tisamenus of Elis. In particular, he was the one that helped the Spartans to win the battle against the Persians at Plataea in 479 BC, Herodotus, *Histories*, 9.33 – 9.36.

¹¹⁵ Scott 2014: 12.

¹¹⁶ Plutarch, *Moralia*, 388e.

¹¹⁷ Aeschylus, *Eumenides*, 1 – 35.

¹¹⁸ Plutarch, *Moralia*, 397a – 438b.

The enquirers, on the other hand, had also to purify themselves in the springs of Delphi. As Scott mentions, local Delphians would always come first. However, there were the so – called *προμαντεία*, which means that some cities had the right to be consulted first, before others.¹¹⁹ This was supposed to be an honour for the cities that were consulted first but apart from that, the *προμαντεία* had a practical value. In particular, on the heyday of the Oracle, there was a huge number of enquirers and little time on the other hand, especially if one is to consider the reduced number of days each month that the Pythia was available. Thus, as Plutarch mentions, on some occasions there were two Pythias sitting alternatively on the tripod, with a third one held in reserve.¹²⁰ Hence, this suggests an operational pressure in a short time frame and precedence was of major importance in order for enquiries not to be postponed. Apart from the *προμαντεία*, this kind of precedence could be conducted performed by a lot drawn Oracle, an idea which will be analyzed in detail later.

After the procedure of purification, the money had to be paid. In particular, the enquirer had to offer the *πέλανος* cake, which was burned on the altar of the sanctuary.¹²¹ We do not know much about the actual price of a regular consultation, apart from the fact that it varied. After the offering of the *πέλανος*, the enquirer had to make sacrifices of sheep or goats on the inner hearth, accompanied by the *πρόξενος*, who was a kind of representative of his own city. Later the *πέλανος* became a simple monetary tax or tariff, as it is indicated by Amandry.¹²² A fifth century inscription describes an agreement between the people of Phaselis and the Delphians about the fees the enquirers had to pay. 7 drachmas and 2 obols had to be paid whenever the state of Phaselis consulted the Oracle, whereas individuals had to pay 4 obols for the *πέλανος*.¹²³

When all these rituals were ended, the enquirer was admitted to a space below the level of the temple, where there was the *ομφαλός* (navel) stone, marking the sacred spot. The Pythia was waiting in an inner sanctuary, called the *άδυτον*, meaning ‘not to be entered’. Outside the *άδυτον*, visitors would ask their questions and wait for the response. In the *άδυτον*, the Pythia stood on her tripod, already under the influence of Apollo. No other woman except the Pythia was permitted to enter the inner sanctuary. He was encouraged by the priests to «think pure thoughts and speak well - omened words». ¹²⁴ Later, the prophet or chief priest¹²⁵ asked the enquirer’s question to the

¹¹⁹ Herodotus, *Histories*, 1. 54., Scott 2014: 14. Local Delphians would be consulted first. Then, cities or tribes that were part of the governing council of Delphi, then the rest of the Greeks and finally non – Greeks. See also, Parke and Wormell 1956: 31.

¹²⁰ Plutarch, *Moralia*, 2. 292f.

¹²¹ See Euripides, *Ion*, 226 – 229, where Ion tells the servants that it is not possible to enter the temple and consult Apollo if they do not offer the *πέλανος*. Further discussion in Roux 1976: 80 – 81 and Amandry 1950: 86 – 89. On the cost of the *πέλανος* see Parke and Wormell 1956: 32 where, according to one inscription, there was an agreement between Delphi and Phaselis, a city in Asia Minor, in 402BC.

¹²² Amandry 1950: 89 – 103.

¹²³ *CID* 1:8.

¹²⁴ Plutarch, *Moralia*, 378d, 385a.

¹²⁵ Amandry 2000: 18. There were two priests of Apollo at the beginning, but three by the first century AD. Bowden 2005: 14, thinks that there was only one priest during classical times. As Scott states, «Yet the sources also mention individuals named prophetes, and, in later sources, individuals called hosioi, as well as a group of women who were in charge of keeping the same burning on the (laurel-wood-only) inner sacred hearth. (see Herodotus, *Histories*, 8.36, Euripides, *Ion*, 413 – 416). Part of the problem in understanding this collection of people and their roles is that the terms may overlap (e.g.,

Pythia (which he had received in written or verbal form¹²⁶) and the answer given¹²⁷ would be notified by the priest to the enquirer who could, if he wanted, have it recorded in writing.¹²⁸ The consultation was then over and the enquirer was free to leave the sanctuary.

At this point, we need to mention that during the consultation the enquirer stayed at another room¹²⁹ and it is possible that his question was transmitted orally or in written form to the Pythia, by one of Apollo's priests, who were said to be present in the consultation procedure, along with the *προφήτες* and the *όσοι*.¹³⁰ However, there is confusion about all these terms, as they seem to overlap in the ancient sources and over the years people and their occupation in the Oracle changed. The Pythia gave oracular responses in prose, which were turned into verse by priests or poets who worked there. Therefore, the consultant was not present when the Pythia prophesied and had to remain silent; he was not allowed to make further questions. As Parke and Wormell state, «only in unhistoric instances does the Pythia allow herself to be cross – examined, but it was possible in exceptional cases to approach the oracle a second time, and, as suppliant, ask Apollo to give a different answer».¹³¹

III. HOW THE PYTHIA PROPHESED

There is no more controversial and debatable issue than the one dealing with the way the Pythia was inspired to give prophesies. As Scott mentions,¹³² before the fourth century BC, there is no source describing how the Pythia prophesied, apart from references that she was sitting on her tripod, from which she uttered *βοαί* (cries/songs).¹³³ From the fourth century onwards, some ancient authors mention her shaking a laurel branch, but perhaps this was aiming more to purify than to inspire her.¹³⁴ Sometimes she is presented as seated on her tripod, chewing laurel leaves and inhaling the vapour coming out of the chasm, while other sources describe her as entering a cavern and going to encounter the vapour. Both these descriptions seem to be an interpretation of a general idea about the prophetess, dating back to the late fourth century BC. Different opinions have been presented both from ancient sources and modern scholars; opinions that are on a dispute and make modern scholars want

“prophetes” is used in literature but not recorded as an actual title in Delphic inscriptions), and that the numbers as well as groups of people present changed over time».

¹²⁶ Euripides, *Andromache*, 1100 – 1110.

¹²⁷ Godwin 1876: 11. The Pythia's answers would be put in hexameter by the priest. As Scott mentions, modern scholars have remarked the perfect hexameter verse responses reported as coming straight from the Pythia. It is a debatable issue whether it was indeed the Pythia or not the one that uttered prophesies in perfect hexameter. Some of the modern scholars have been doubt about her abilities to utter them and instead adopt the theory of the priests constructing in hexameter the oracular responses. Scott 2014: 27 – 28.

¹²⁸ Herodotus, *Histories*, 7. 142.

¹²⁹ Plutarch, *Moralia*, 437c where the place where the enquirer waited is called *οίκος*, Herodotus, *Histories*, 7. 140 where the room where the consultant waited is called *μέγαρον*. However, this room has not been identified archaeologically. See Scott 2014: 18.

¹³⁰ Plutarch, *Moralia*, 292d, 385c, 407b, 438b, Herodotus, *Histories*, 8.36. However, there is still confusion, especially if one is to take into consideration the famous vase painting where the consultant is in the same room with the Pythia, who is seated on the tripod.

¹³¹ Parke and Wormell 1956: 34.

¹³² Scott 2014: 18.

¹³³ Euripides, *Ion*, 91.

¹³⁴ Callimachus, *Hymn to Apollo*, 1 - 113.

to investigate the issue even more. For instance, Oppé in 1904 claimed that the entire consultation process involving the Pythia's trance was fake, a sham, put on by the priests of Apollo.¹³⁵

- **The Pythian 'Trance'**

Emic

The first ancient source mentioning a possible way on how the Pythia prophesied is that of Diodorus Siculus. In particular, he refers to a 'chasm' below the Pythia.¹³⁶ In Diodorus narrative, it was this chasm that led to the discovery of the Oracle; in his story he describes how a goatherd noticed that his goats, approaching a particular point on the mountain, started to scream and leap around. Goatherds who approached this point had the same reaction and were also able to give prophesies. The news spread quickly and people started leaping in the chasm; in order to eliminate the danger, the Delphians decided to choose one woman as prophetess of all. They also constructed a tripod above the hole, so that she can sit on it and be safe during the prophesying ceremony.¹³⁷ Diodorus attestation could have been an invented story from someone who seemed to know a lot about the way the Oracle functioned and who wished to provide us an explanation strictly rationalistic. The idea of the goat jumping into the hole probably came as a result of a ritual suggested by Plutarch, according to whom, before the consultation process, people had to confirm if the god and the Pythia were favourable.¹³⁸ Thus, the priests first poured cold water on a goat; if the animal trembled, then the god was favourable and this meant that the Pythia would start shaking as well, lost in her ecstasy. Also, as Parke and Wormell mention, in historical times, the Pythia prophesied seated on her tripod and not by inhaling vapours from the chasm; this is actually the typical Delphic picture that existed on the minds of the fifth century and early fourth century authors.

Moreover Plutarch, being one of the most valuable sources about this issue,¹³⁹ in the first century AD, he speaks of the *πνεύμα*¹⁴⁰ and of the *ενθουσιασμός* under which the prophetess speaks the god's oracles. However, he does not describe it. Instead he seems to discuss the reasons why the Oracle is less active now than it was in the past. For him, the arguments include less *πνεύμα*.¹⁴¹ Nevertheless, about the Pythia, he does not describe any trance condition; after the consultation procedure, the prophetess is calm and peaceful. The only attestation about the Pythia being possessed was when the entire consultation process was forced.¹⁴² However, by his time, the idea of the chasm and the vapour seemed quite logical, since it fitted well with the *πνεύμα* theory. Plutarch, in his attempt to describe the vapour as something perceived only by the

¹³⁵ Oppé 1904: 214 - 240.

¹³⁶ Diodorus Siculus, *Library*, 16. 26. 2. ('όντος χάσματος εν τούτω τω τόπω')

¹³⁷ Diodorus Siculus, *Library*, 16. 26.

¹³⁸ Parke and Wormell 1956: 20 - 21.

¹³⁹ Fontenrose 1978: 197 - 203.

¹⁴⁰ It is translated as 'air', 'breeze', 'wind' or 'inspiration'. '... a breath which was regarded as something midway between the material and the spiritual', Parke and Wormell 1956: 23, Fontenrose 1978: 198 - 200.

¹⁴¹ Plutarch, *Moralia*, 432c - 438d.

¹⁴² Plutarch, *Moralia*, 438b. ('It was at once plain from the harshness of her voice that she was not responding properly; she was like a labouring ship and was filled with a mighty and baleful spirit')

senses, he mentioned a sweet odour emerging from the *ἀδυτον*.¹⁴³ But, if the vapour was all over the *ἀδυτον*, then why the priests or the enquirers did not prophesied just like the Pythia did? Plutarch seemed to recognise this difficulty. Nevertheless, Plutarch did not confirm the existence of any cleft, crypt, cavern or chasm. The idea of the adyton was only implied; not described. Hence, as Parke and Wormell put it, it seems that Plutarch's acquaintance with the Oracle did not provide him much information about its function and that this is the reason why he attempted to give an explanation based on spiritualism.¹⁴⁴

According to Strabo, the Pythia used to sit on her tripod, receive the *πνεύμα ενθουσιαστικόν* from a chasm below her and give prophesies by inhaling this *πνεύμα*,¹⁴⁵ while Pausanias states that the woman first had to drink from the Cassotis spring in order to speak prophesies in verse or in prose.¹⁴⁶ Also for Lucian, the Pythia chewed laurel leaves and drink not from the Cassotis but from the Castalian spring for inspiration.¹⁴⁷ To chew laurel leaves was supposed to bring humans in communication with the gods and the supernatural; that is why it was consumed by poets and prophets to inspire them.¹⁴⁸ Lucian on the other hand, mentions a different theory according to which the Pythia's body is possessed by the god, she raves and prophesies through the inhalation of the vapour coming from the chasm below her.¹⁴⁹ John Chrysostom, a few years later, focuses again on the functioning of the pneuma, by indicating that the prophetess's 'madness' comes as a result of the intercourse between the Pythia and the evil *πνεύμα* that enters through her genitals as she sits on the tripod.¹⁵⁰

Nevertheless, the famous theory about the Pythia being mad by breathing in the vapours, emerging from the chasm below her, is a composite one, coming from late Roman and anti – pagan sources.¹⁵¹ Romans were unfamiliar with ecstatic prophesy and the idea of the Pythia being intoxicated by vapours emerging from a chasm seemed to them quite satisfying and intelligible.¹⁵² Perhaps the way Roman sources conceived the Pythia's consultation process was affected by a misinterpretation of Plato's description of her divine inspirations as *μανία* (mania), translated in Latin as *insania* (insanity).¹⁵³

All things considered, we conclude that according to the majority of ancient sources, the Pythia was supposed to inhale subterranean vapours, chew laurel leaves, receive the *πνεύμα ενθουσιαστικόν* and in this way was possessed by Apollo, something that enabled her to deliver oracular responses. Besides, as Fontenrose states, «the Pythia represented the god Apollo, and she went through a process of receiving his inspiration. She would show herself inspired, enthusiastic; her emotion would affect her utterance... After all she was a Delphian woman chosen from all others to speak

¹⁴³ Plutarch, *Moralia*, 437c.

¹⁴⁴ Parke and Wormell 1956: 24.

¹⁴⁵ Strabo, *Geography*, 9. 3. 5.

¹⁴⁶ Pausanias, *Description of Greece*, 10. 24. 7.

¹⁴⁷ Lucian, *The Double Indictment or Trials by Jury*, 1.

¹⁴⁸ Tibullus, *Elegies*, 2. 5. 63, Ovid, *Letters from the Black Sea*, 2. 5. 67.

¹⁴⁹ Lucan, *On the Civil War*, 5. 165 – 5. 174.

¹⁵⁰ John Chrysostom, *The Homilies on the Epistles of Paul to the Corinthians*, 29. 1.

¹⁵¹ For a chasm see Strabo, *Geography*, 9. 3. 5, 13. 2, Apollodorus, *Library*, 1. 4. 1.

¹⁵² Parke and Wormell 1956: 22 – 23.

¹⁵³ Plato, *Phaedrus*, 244a – 245c. See also Amandry 1950: 41 – 56, Fontenrose 1978: 204.

for Apollo; she felt the meaning and sanctity of her office». ¹⁵⁴ Moreover, Parke and Wormell attribute the way the prophetess was inspired to a state of hypnosis but there are no reliable sources to support this opinion. ¹⁵⁵ Now let us examine what modern scholars suggest.

Etic

First of all, excavations in the place where the chasm was supposed to be, have shown that there was no cleft in the rock beneath the sanctuary and hence, no chasm, like the one described in ancient sources. ¹⁵⁶ In particular, Delphi was first excavated in 1892 by the French, a team led by Homolle. Unlike the ancient sources, the results from the excavations were quite disappointing, since no chasm could be traced. ¹⁵⁷ Courby along with Homolle gathered all the information they got in *Fouilles De Delphes* in several instalments from 1915 till 1927. Since then, many modern scholars followed the opinions of the French, amongst them Oppé, Bourget, Poulsen and Amandry. ¹⁵⁸ Moreover as we already saw, Parke and Wormell claimed there was no chasm and that Diodorus' tale about the chasm could be an invented one. In accordance with all this scholars was Fontenrose as well, who stated that no ancient source earlier than Diodorus – third century BC - attested to the existence of chasm or vapors coming out of it. ¹⁵⁹

On the other hand, some modern scholars did not accept these opinions. In particular Dempsey, following Plutarch's arguments about the decline of the Oracle because of less pneuma, claimed that probably the chasm in modern times had completely closed up, just like the pneuma was becoming less and less and that the Pythia's inspiration came from the Castalian spring or a cleft that produces vapours. ¹⁶⁰ A similar theory was presented by Flacelière, who suggested that earthquakes could be the cause of the chasm's disappearance, something that in my opinion is not absurd, especially if one is to consider how seismic the area is. ¹⁶¹ This is probably the reason why the French could not trace any chasm; it was covered up by earthquakes or other geological phenomena.

Furthermore, Littleton suggested that the excavators did not trace any chasm because there was indeed no chasm; the Pythia was prophesying by consuming hallucinogenic drugs, like marijuana or psychedelic mushrooms and she did not need the vapours emerging from the chasm. ¹⁶² Also, Holland stated that the Pythia descended to a room

¹⁵⁴ Fontenrose 1978: 211.

¹⁵⁵ Parke and Wormell 1956: 38 - 39.

¹⁵⁶ About the excavations, see Courby, *Fouilles de Delphes*. Broad 2006: 87. Homolle, director of the excavation at Delphi in 1892 – 1901 said that 'the temple, on which so much hope had rested, has been a great deception.'

¹⁵⁷ *Fouilles de Delphes*, Vol II, fasc. I, pp. 65 – 66.

¹⁵⁸ Oppé 1904: 214 - 240, where he pointed out that the chasm was a fiction that passed down from source to source, mostly because ancient sources confused the fissure with a nearby gorge. See also Bourguet 1914: 249, Poulsen 1920: 24 and Amandry 1950: 219-220.

¹⁵⁹ Euripides, Aeschylus, Pindar or Herodotus, all of whom were familiar with how the Oracle functioned. See also Fontenrose 1978: 202.

¹⁶⁰ Dempsey 1972: 8.

¹⁶¹ Flacelière 1965: 48.

¹⁶² Littleton 1986: 76 – 91.

below her tripod to light a fire that produced the smoke she later inhaled, as coming from the gods.¹⁶³

The first step towards a modern reassessment of the evidence was made between 1980 and 1990 when the geologist de Boer and the archaeologist Hale, along with a chemist and a toxicologist investigated the site and the water beneath the temple and found ethane, methane and ethylene, which had been used in the 1920s as anaesthesia, because of the trancelike state it produced. Hence, they concluded that the geology of Delphi and especially ethylene could have caused the Pythia's trance. This claim enjoyed widespread reception in academic journals and science magazines, since it was perceived as significant progress in the field. Also, they explained that what ancient sources described as a chasm was probably a small fracture extending up from the crossing of two faults: the Delphi fault and the Kerna fault, as these scholars named them.¹⁶⁴ In accordance with these opinions was Courby as well, where in his 1927 publication of the French's excavations stated that the bedrock was 'fissured by the action of the waters'.¹⁶⁵

Nevertheless, Foster and Leroux claimed that the de Boer and Hale hypothesis is implausible, since problematic scientific and textual evidence led them to fallacious arguments. In particular, they stated that there is no evidence suggesting that there was ethylene emerging from a chasm into the *ἀδύτον*; at least not in sufficient quantities in order to create a trancelike state. There might have existed concentrations of ethylene in the site, but in very small quantities. Also ethylene, at concentration of 2.7 percent and higher, is highly explosive. During the active years of the Oracle, are we to believe that ethylene was never ignited accidentally by a lamp or a brazier? But then again, after a research conducted by Leroux, ethylene does not give us the expected results, so that we conclude that the Pythia was 'inspired' by gases.¹⁶⁶ Foster and Leroux accused de Boer and Hale of trying to solve the problem by applying modern research with scientific explanations to what ancient sources attest,¹⁶⁷ something that, from my point of view, indicates that the two scientists tried to approach the issue emically. When a scientist or a scholar investigates a topic only from an emic perspective and does not take into account an etic approach, then his arguments are considered to be lacking evidence and hence are weak.

The fact that de Boer and Hale's arguments are fallacious is also supported by Etiope, who interpreted Delphi's geology differently, indicating that the two key faults they described is an error and that the Delphi fault does not pass under or close to Apollo's temple. After investigation, Etiope detected small amounts of methane and carbon dioxide; but none of them are psychoactive, especially when found in small quantities. Hence, Etiope concluded that if he has to accept that the Pythia prophesied under the influence of gases, then he considered the possibility of oxygen depletion due to methane and carbon dioxide.¹⁶⁸ And as for the sweet smelling gas the ancient sources mention, benzene could be a possibility, as a result of the geological phenomena that could have occurred in the site. However, no benzene was traced in

¹⁶³ Holland 1933: 201 – 214.

¹⁶⁴ De Boer and Hale 2002: 189 – 196.

¹⁶⁵ Courby 1927: Tome 2.

¹⁶⁶ For an analysis see Leroux 2007: 51 – 54.

¹⁶⁷ Foster and Leroux 2007: 85 – 89.

¹⁶⁸ Etiope 2006: 821 – 824.

Delphi. As Leroux mentions, the reason why Etiope continued to offer gaseous explanations is because he did not question the historical evidence presented by de Boer team, even though gases offered by de Boer have been discredited.¹⁶⁹

Leroux on the other hand, focused on the analysis of the discussion between Plutarch and Lampias, about the decline of the Oracle.¹⁷⁰ For Lampias, the cause of the decline was that the Oracles the gods created are, like everything else created, perishable.¹⁷¹ What is created and what gods create, perish by the Nature. He speaks of an air that spreads out ‘certain pores into which the images of the future enter’, trying to support his idea that the prophetic faculty needs something to inflame it, just as the sun, in heating and cooling the earth causes *διάθεσις και κράσις*, from which *αναθυμιάσεις* (exhalations) come.¹⁷² Hence, as Leroux correctly states, exhalations and pneumata in antiquity did not have the meaning of gaseous vapours. Indeed, *πνεύμα* had many and different meanings in antiquity, meanings that are far from the meaning of gas, wind or breath.¹⁷³ Apart from that, another problem concerning the emerging gases theory is the fact that, as Leroux states, Lampias seems to represent a specific philosophical school and hence, his ideas might be biased in a particular direction. Also, his opinions about the Oracles are contradictory and last but not least, he is accused by an interlocutor of changing facts and reports to suit his arguments.¹⁷⁴ Finally, he closes the dialogue by informing his audience that what he said are only speculations.¹⁷⁵

Therefore, the ethylene theory de Boer and Hale provided is not accepted. Experiments showed that this substance does not cause a trancelike state and hence, the Pythia did not inhale ethylene in order to give prophesies. Also, the research of de Boer and Hale might have been an important step in the scientific fields of geology and chemistry, but it did not contribute to the field of history.¹⁷⁶ They provided us with interesting information about the geological history of Delphi and the seismic activity of the site; that is why the results from their research were published in scientific journals and not in ancient history books.¹⁷⁷

Personally I would follow Dempsey’s and Flacelière’s explanation about the disappearance of the chasm, if it indeed existed, due to intense seismic activity of the site. This is why the French excavators did not trace any chasm. Following this theory, I suggest that, if the Pythia inhaled some kind of hallucinogenic substances in order to give prophesies, probably we cannot trace them because they have also vanished, like the chasm. Over the years, probably various geological occurrences and phenomena took place so that neither the chasm nor the vapours or the substances the Pythia was inhaling can be detected. The geological composition of the ground probably was quite different back in those days and appropriate for producing various vapours and gases; gases that cannot be traced nowadays, since the quality of the soil

¹⁶⁹ Leroux 2007: 41 – 56.

¹⁷⁰ Plutarch, *Moralia*, 411e.

¹⁷¹ Plutarch, *Moralia*, 414d.

¹⁷² Plutarch, *Moralia*, 433d – 433e.

¹⁷³ For example, *πνεύμα* in the nerves transferred the motor function between the limbs and the brain, or *πνεύμα* in the arteries explain why they seem so empty in anatomy, whereas they bleed abundantly when pierced in an living organism. Neither of the two explanations contains gases.

¹⁷⁴ Plutarch, *Moralia*, 386a. See also Leroux 2007: 48.

¹⁷⁵ Plutarch, *Moralia*, 438d.

¹⁷⁶ Leroux 2007: 49 – 50.

¹⁷⁷ See also Piccardi et al. 2008: 5 – 18.

at Delphi has changed. Besides, this is something supported by Plutarch as well. When he was commissioned at the Oracle as a priest, emissions of pneuma in the adyton were slighter than before, leading to its decline. He suggested that whatever produced the pneuma had been exhausted or that the fissures in the rock had been blocked up in the 373 BC earthquake. Since then, the Oracle did not recover its former prestige, even when the temple was rebuilt. Hence he attributed the absence of chasm and vapours to earthquakes, rains and landslides.¹⁷⁸

All the above mentioned ideas concerning the existence of a chasm could have some weight if primary sources indeed made a reference to it; it is only mentioned by Strabo and Diodorus Siculus, whose story about the discovery of the Oracle must have been an invented one, a myth, as modern scholars like Parke and Wormell suggested. Hence, we cannot find evidence neither in ancient sources nor on the results from on site excavations. Where does this leave us? Exactly where we started from. We cannot be sure about how the Pythia prophesied. But we can make speculations; speculations on a topic which is and will be debatable, even if science evolves. However as Fontenrose mentions, scholars who do not accept the existence of a chasm attribute the prophetic abilities of the Pythia to her madness or frenzy.¹⁷⁹ Yet as Amandry has shown, ancient sources do not speak about the Pythia raving or being mad.¹⁸⁰ The conception of the Pythia's madness comes from Plato's conception of *prophetic mania*.¹⁸¹ Thence, what if science is not able to offer us a rational explanation? What if we have to accept that the way the prophetess was inspired will always remain a mystery? Perhaps the way she functioned was a mystery for the ancients as well. There are no sources describing in detail how the prophetess was inspired, which means that either the procedure was well known or that no one knew with certainty what eventually took place there. In any case, we will probably end up with satisfactory explanations if we examine the issue from all possible scientific aspects and angles, such as geology, chemistry, archaeology, history, philosophy, theology and anthropology, something that is suggested by Leroux too.¹⁸²

Furthermore, regarding the rumours of the Pythia chewing laurel leaves, one German scholar tried to explain her trance by eating laurel leaves to test the theory, claiming afterwards disappointedly that he felt nothing.¹⁸³ Nevertheless, as Parke and Wormell mention, laurel leaves are bitter in taste and when consumed, do not cause any kind of trance or intoxication, since the amount of prussic acid they contain is extremely small.¹⁸⁴ Thus, for these two scholars, the Pythia's trance came as a result of her psychology. «She had been brought up in a locality heavily charged with the emotional intensity of Apollo's worship, and would believe implicitly that the god himself took possession of the Pythia and spoke through her bodily organs... Such a woman when seated on the tripod after elaborate emotional stimulus and supernatural suggestions, fell an easy victim to a self – induced hypnosis». ¹⁸⁵ But, what if the plant she was supposed to consume was not laurel but oleander? In particular, Harissis

¹⁷⁸ Plutarch, *Moralia*, 434b – 434c.

¹⁷⁹ Fontenrose 1978: 204.

¹⁸⁰ Amandry 1950: 41 – 56.

¹⁸¹ Plato, *Phaedrus*, 244a – 245c, 265a – 265b. See also Fontenrose 1978: 204 – 206.

¹⁸² Leroux 2007: 55.

¹⁸³ Price 1985: 128 – 154.

¹⁸⁴ Parke and Wormell 1956: 26.

¹⁸⁵ Parke and Wormell 1956: 39. See also Dodds 1951: 70.

mentions that according to a review of toxicological literature, it was oleander which caused the Pythia's inspiration, while a closer examination of the term indicates that it was usually included under the more general term 'laurel'. His theory is satisfactory, since it finds its evidence in many ancient sources (Empedocles, Nicander, Antigonus) and at the same time his idea explains the process of pouring cold water on the goats to check if the god was favourable. In particular, he observes that «the ritual involving the 'besprinkling' of the sacrificial goat and the animal's subsequent tremor, which was viewed as a 'godly sign' and permitted the initiation of the Pythia's prophecy, could also have included oleander. I believe that during this ritual, oleander - infused drink extracts were, in fact, offered to the goat, which caused it to tremor. My interpretation stems from what I believe is the correct translation of Plutarch's term 'kataspeiseis', as 'drink - offerings' (to the goat), and not 'besprinkling (the goat) with holy water', as is how the word is usually translated. Pliny, in *The Natural History*, says that 'goats, if they drink water in which the leaves (of oleander) have been steeped' get intoxicated». ¹⁸⁶

Other scholars, like Sissa, focused on the prophetess' possession by Apollo. In particular, she made a parallel between the Pythia's posture while she is seating on the tripod and the medical treatment of the hysteria and extracted the conclusion that this posture represents her sexual nature of the god's possession. Hence for Sissa, when the Pythia speaks Apollo's word she is supposed to give birth.¹⁸⁷ To my mind, this theory represents feministic ideas about women and religion over the male dominance on all these fields. According to her, the Pythia was supposed to interact sexually with the god but this theory seems to be quite narrow – minded; these are all ideas expressed by anti – pagan Christians who were considering Apollo as entering the Pythia's *kolpos*, like an evil spirit.¹⁸⁸ The Pythia might be possessed. But this does not mean that the god entered her sexually.

About spiritualism and possession, an interesting approach is presented by Maurizio. If we accept that a previous bacchanal worship existed in Delphi, the image of the raging Maenad fits perfectly with the image of the frenzied and uncontrollable Pythia. For Maurizio, this is how the Pythia's trance is explained; in the context of spiritualism and spirit possession. As she puts it, «I will use the term 'spirit possession' to mean any altered state of consciousness, where the behaviour of an individual is markedly different, though in a stereotypical way, from his or her normal behaviour, and hence is indigenously interpreted as the influence of an alien spirit, where 'influence' may be variously defined». This is how she describes the Pythia's reaction when inspired; the Pythia was possessed by Apollo.¹⁸⁹ Moreover as Flower observes, the Pythia's spirit possession resembles what anthropologists call the Patterned Dissociative Identity. «This phenomenon takes place when an individual's identity is dissociated and the subject manifests an alternative identity that is culturally patterned – that is, determined and shaped by the society in which it occurs». ¹⁹⁰

¹⁸⁶ Harissis 2014.

¹⁸⁷ Sissa 1990: 51 – 70.

¹⁸⁸ Johnston 2008: 40.

¹⁸⁹ Maurizio 1995: 69 – 86.

¹⁹⁰ Flower 2008: 226.

What is more, Rohde and Dodds believe that the Dionysiac cult played an important role as well. The Pythia was possessed of the god in the manner of a Maenad and this explains, according to Dodds, why oracular responses were given in the first person.¹⁹¹ However according to Fontenrose's categorization, many of the oracles are given in the third person and as Latte observes, Dionysiac ecstasy has nothing to do with prophesy; the prophetess' mania is not Dionysiac but Apolline and totally mantic.¹⁹²

To sum up, the theories of the Pythia being possessed by the god and consuming laurel in order to get inspired, in my view are taking into consideration both ancient and modern sources and we cannot but accept that the Pythia was indeed experiencing some kind of spirit possession, due to her being occupied by Apollo and not due to her chewing laurel. Besides as Tully points out, the Pythia when prophesying, did not have to be out of control. Modern examination of spirit possession shows that it is a technique controlled, structured and learned. The practitioner is not absent or does not go mad temporarily. On the contrary, he is intellectually engaged and in control of himself.¹⁹³ How else could we explain the fact that a woman, brought up by peasants and being completely illiterate, was able to give prophesies and perhaps solutions, not only about problems of the daily life but about war, religion and politics as well? Hence it is probable that the Pythia experienced some kind of enthusiasm but not an uncontrolled frenzy, as Amandry suggested. Perhaps confusion arises from the translation of the platonic word *mania* to 'madness' or 'insanity'.¹⁹⁴ Finally, as Maurizio puts it, the concept of possession did authorize a simple Delphian woman to work as the mouthpiece of gods and to deliver their divine consultations. These oracular responses were not work of the priests; all of them originated from the Pythia herself. Otherwise, «to remove the Pythia from the centre of this religious drama and deny her agency is to render the spectacle of consulting Apollo incomprehensible».¹⁹⁵ The enquirers at Delphi believed that they were consulted by Apollo, not some woman, so it was under the control of the gods that the Pythia was capable of exercising authority in political and religious matters. Hence, under the god's guidance, the Pythia was able to have access to a position of power.

IV. AMBIGUITY

The fact that neither ancient sources nor modern scholars have a clear view of the form the Pythia's oracular statements used to have, combined with the fact that usually her oracles were cryptic is the reason why we consider most of her oracles as ambiguous, something that is confirmed by examples from literature.¹⁹⁶

Emic

It was notorious in antiquity that Apollo's responses were crooked. Usually they had to be converted from this encrypted form to plain text. Besides, one of the epithets of

¹⁹¹ Dodds 1951: 70 – 74, Rohde 1925: 287 – 291. See also Bouché – Leclerq 1880: 3.88 – 3.89 and Parke and Wormell 1956: 12 – 13.

¹⁹² Latte 1940. See also Amandry 1950: 42, 196 – 200.

¹⁹³ Tully 2008: 41 – 52.

¹⁹⁴ Amandry 1950: 41 – 56.

¹⁹⁵ Maurizio 1995: 69 – 86.

¹⁹⁶ See Naerebout and Beerden 2012: 121 – 147, Struck 2003: 167 – 186, Evgeni 2014.

the god was *Λοξίας* (Loxias), meaning that his oracles were sometimes ambiguous and demanded a process of further interpretation from the consultant.¹⁹⁷ For instance, according to Herodotus, the king of Lydia, Croesus, thinking that oracular responses were always straightforward, he misinterpreted the oracle he received from Delphi. When the oracle replied to his request that a great empire would be destroyed, Croesus thought that the Pythia was referring to Persian Empire. It did not cross his mind that this empire might be his own empire.¹⁹⁸ Another example of ambiguous oracle is the episode with the ‘wooden wall’, which has already been mentioned.¹⁹⁹

Etic

Regarding the issue of ambiguous oracles, Fontenrose provides us with a list of the oracular responses from Delphi, dividing them to ‘authentic’ and ‘unauthentic’ responses, indicating at the same time that the majority of the ambiguous oracles come from literature and were used by ancient authors only to help in the unravelling of the plot; for him ancient Greek oracles were rarely ambiguous. In particular, he presents us 75 ‘historical responses’, both from inscriptions and literature, out of which only 3 are to be considered riddles (H67, H18 and H7); the rest is clear and simple.²⁰⁰ Hence, as I have already stated in a previous paper, all these inscriptions «give us a clear idea of the structure that oracular inquiries had in real life; they were questions of everyday individuals about issues concerning everyday life and by the structure of these questions it seems that the answer was a straightforward one. We cannot but agree on that and especially when the evidence comes from inscriptions that have been found and published. The purpose of the oracles was to provide guidance to individuals or communities that might face problems and if they were not clear, they would not serve their purpose successfully».²⁰¹

CHAPTER 4

I. NECROMANCY

Emic

Necromancy, which is a method of divination, was perceived as the practice of consulting the dead. It was a way of communication between the living and the dead. For a successful communication between the living and the dead, both sides had to enter into a common condition. In particular, the living had to die a little and the dead had to come to life for a while. According to Ogden, «the conceptual home of necromancy in the ancient Greek world was probably the tomb».²⁰² But if one was not to evoke a dead or his ghost in a tomb, he could go to the place where its body laid,

¹⁹⁷ *Λοξίας* is the noun of the ancient Greek verb *λοξέω*, which means ‘to bevel’, ‘to deviate’, ‘to turn aside’.

¹⁹⁸ Herodotus, *Histories*, 1. 53. 3. See also Evgeni 2014.

¹⁹⁹ Herodotus, *Histories*, 7. 140 – 7.144. Also, one of the most representative examples of oracular ambiguity in Greek literature is Sophocles’ *Oedipus the King*. For an analysis of the riddling oracles, see Evgeni: 2014. About ambiguity see also Scott 2014: 28 – 30.

²⁰⁰ Naerebout and Beerden 2012: 121 – 147. See also Fontenrose 1978: 189 – 190, Fontenrose 1988: 198 – 190. Some oracles are from the Oracle at Didyma.

²⁰¹ Evgeni 2014.

²⁰² Ogden 2001: 17 – 74.

such as a battlefield or on some other occasions, in an Oracle of the dead, the so – called *νεκρομαντείο*.²⁰³ In antiquity, there were four big *νεκρομαντεία*: Acheron in Thesprotia, Avernus in Campania, Heracleia Pontica on the south coast of the Black Sea, and Tainaron at the tip of the Peloponnese’s Mani peninsula. Whenever necromancy in Oracles of the dead is mentioned, it is associated with one of these four *νεκρομαντεία*. The problem is that there is no epigraphical evidence available and, although it is hard to identify other *νεκρομαντεία* apart from these four, it is also hard to consider these four as ‘official’.²⁰⁴

Etic

For modern scholars, the etymology of the word is clear: necro- from the Greek word *νεκρός*, which means ‘dead’ and –mancy from the Greek word *μαντική*, which is the art of prophesying. There are many ancient sources containing necromantic practices and thus, we come to realize that it was a famous practice as all the other methods of divination. As Ogden mentions, Homer because of his ability to narrate Odysseus’s journey to the underworld, he is considered as an authority on necromantic practices.²⁰⁵

II. METHODS AND TECHNIQUES

Necromancy was strongly associated with the laying of restless ghosts and in order for the necromantic practice to be performed, the ghost had to be conjured up with some traditional rites, such as simple evocation, reanimation and manipulation of body parts or incubation in the place where the ghost was supposed to lay, whether this was a cave, a tomb or a battlefield. One of the most representative examples of incubation is mentioned by Plutarch about the Elysious of Terina.²⁰⁶ However, the most famous case of a simple necromantic evocation comes from Homer with his well known *Νέκυνια*, which constitutes the oldest source about necromantic practices. Ogden analyzes in one of his chapters the main characteristics of a regular evocation, stating that factors such as purification, time of consultation, the kind of libations and the way one managed a ghost, should all be taken into account for the necromantic process.²⁰⁷ Thus, when Odysseus wanted to meet the ghost of Teiresias in order to be informed about his destiny, he had to dig a pit and follow a particular ritual, according to Circe’s instructions. He poured libations for all the dead; the mix was consisted by milk, honey, sweet wine, water and then he sprinkles barley on the top. He later prayed to the dead, promising to make for all of them sacrifices. But a special sacrifice of a black ram would be made for Teiresias, the ghost of whom Odysseus wished to speak with. Then he opened the necks of a pair of black sheep with his silver sword, holding their heads down towards the ground so that their blood flowed into the pit. Finally all the ghosts gathered, eager to drink the blood which would enable them to be reanimated and speak at the same time. Hence, Odysseus had to use

²⁰³ Apart from *νεκρομαντείο*, the ancient Greeks used many different terms for Oracles of the dead: *ψυχαγωγείον* (drawing - place of ghosts), *ψυχομαντεῖον* (prophesy – place of ghosts), *ψυχοπομπείον* (sending – place of ghosts), *νεκνώριον* (seeing – place of the dead). See Ogden 2001: 167 – 195.

²⁰⁴ Ogden 2001: 22.

²⁰⁵ Ogden 2001: 259.

²⁰⁶ Plutarch, *Moralia*, 109b – 109d. About dreaming and incubation see Ogden 2001: 75 – 92. Also, see Ogden 2002: 188.

²⁰⁷ For more about this issue see Ogden 2001: 163 – 190 and Ogden 2002: 179 – 182.

his sword to make sure that only the ghost he wanted to speak with would drink blood. But before that, he was confronted by the ghost of his dead fellow Elpenor, who asked him to ensure his burial.²⁰⁸

Moreover, about the technique of reanimation, one of the most representative examples comes from Heliodorus, where Egyptian influence is obvious, since the Egyptians were familiar with necromantic practises. In his work, the reanimated corpse stands upright to symbolize its return to life and is at the same time aggressive and resentful at the disturbance of its peace. In particular:

The old woman, believing that she was now free of hindrance and was not being watched, first dug a pit and then kindled a fire on one side of it. She laid out the body of her son between the two and took a ceramic bowl from an adjacent tripod. She made a libation of honey into the pit, another of milk from a second bowl, and another again of wine from a third bowl. Then she crowned with laurel and fennel a dough cake molded to resemble a man and threw it into the pit. After all that she took up a sword, worked herself up into an inspired frenzy and invoked the moon with names that sounded foreign and strange. She cut her arm open, wiped up some of the blood with a laurel branch, and threw it into the fire. She did some other strange things in addition to these and then bent over the corpse of her son and sang some incantation into his ear. She roused him and compelled him to stand upright by her witchcraft. Charicleia had been taking the scene in somewhat fearfully all along, but now she began to tremble in terror at this bizarre process. She woke Calasiris up and had him watch what was being done. They themselves could not be seen, since they were in the dark, but they could see easily what the old woman was doing in the light of the fire, and they could hear what she said because they weren't too far away, and the crone was now interrogating the corpse more loudly. She was inquiring whether her remaining son, the brother of the dead man, would return home safe and sound. The corpse made no reply, but just nodded, allowing its mother the insecure hope that the response was favourable. But then all at once it fell headlong onto its face. The woman rolled the corpse onto its back again and would not finish with the interrogation. But she sang more powerful, as it seemed, compulsive incantations into its ears again, and there were many of them. Then, armed with her sword, she kept jumping between the fire and the pit. She managed to rouse him again. When she had uprighted him she made the same inquiries, and compelled him to reveal the divination plainly, not just by nodding, but also by speaking. While the old woman was doing this Charicleia earnestly begged Calasiris that they should approach the scene of action and make an inquiry of their own about Theagenes. He declined; it was not holy, he said, even to watch the rite, but he suffered it under the constraint of circumstance. It did not befit a prophet either to attempt or to attend such rites. Prophets derived their divination from lawful sacrifices and pure prayers, but the impure and earthly actually derived their divination from circling around corpses, just as, by accident, they were now seeing the Egyptian woman do.²⁰⁹

²⁰⁸ Homer, *Odyssey*, 11. 1 - 11. 154.

²⁰⁹ Heliodorus, *The Ethiopian Story*, 6.12 – 6.15. This translation is provided by Ogden 2002: 199 – 201.

- **Why people consulted the dead?**

Emic

After all this general information about necromancy, it comes as a logical question why would someone consult the dead. Probably because the divination or the information required was one that only the dead could provide, such as the time of death of those who are still alive or how the afterlife looks like. Hence, it makes sense that the dead supplied information concerning the underworld, afterlife and the dead; eschatological information about life, death and the universe, information which is not really placed in past, present or future. As Ogden states, people thought that the dead were wise and that they could offer the most powerful form of divination, since ghosts and souls detached from their bodies, had a clearer perception of all things. Besides it is said that «the future was prepared in the underworld and that ghosts could observe these preparations».²¹⁰ They had experience of the underworld and of the afterlife and they could predict the future based on the knowledge of their own past judging from the past of other people who were also dead and hence, were also 'living' in the underworld.²¹¹ For example, the advice Agamemnon gives to Odysseus, to approach his home by avoiding detection and moving carefully, come from his own murder by his wife Clytemnestra when he returned in public.²¹²

Etic

On the other hand, for some scholars, the power of the dead stemmed from their association with the earth, something that leads us to the next topic of discussion, which deals with the relationship between the dead and the Delphic Oracle.

III. THE DELPHIC ORACLE AND THE DEAD

Emic

According to Euripides, when Apollo took possession of the site from Earth's daughter Themis, Earth in an attempt to avenge him by spoiling his prophetic trade, sent 'ghosts of dreams' (*φαντάσματα*) to humans. These ghosts visited them when they were sleeping in night and told them about their past and future. Apollo, having his dignity impaired, sought the help of Zeus, who put a stop to these visions. After that, whenever someone wanted to receive a prophesy, he would go to Delphi and pose his question, waiting for an answer from the oracular god, Apollo.²¹³ According to Johnston, with this twist of myth, Euripides gives us information about a familiar characteristic of the Oracle in antiquity. «For Delphic Apollo himself knew a lot about what the ghosts of the dead were up to and frequently conveyed that knowledge to the living, thus serving as mediator between the two realms».²¹⁴ As the scholar mentions, judging from the categorization of Fontenrose, the majority of the oracular responses from Delphi are concerned with the dead; most of the enquirers wished to know what the dead were doing and Apollo helped them to find out. When an

²¹⁰ Ogden 2001: 244.

²¹¹ Ogden 2001: 231 – 250.

²¹² Homer, *Odyssey*, 11. 405 – 11. 456.

²¹³ Euripides, *Iphigenia in Tauris*, 1259 – 1282.

²¹⁴ Johnston 2005: 283.

individual or a city suffered from problems like famine, plague or crop failure, usually advised Apollo on how to deal with these kinds of problems. Thus usually, the god would consult them to perform special rituals in order to tame the anger of the ghosts or the dead; because these kinds of problems were attributed to the wrath of the dead.²¹⁵ One of the most representative examples is the oracle that Corax, the murderer of Archilochus received, on how to appease Archilochus's dead soul with libations.²¹⁶ Most of the oracular responses from Delphi are of this type. Moreover, other questions had to do with the establishment of a cult for the dead, like the oracle the Delphians received about establishing a cult to Pindar.²¹⁷ Also, other examples like the one indicating to Heraklids where to bury Alcmene,²¹⁸ designated burial places or disallowed mistreatment of the corpse remains. In all of these types, Apollo is the one introducing the oracular responses to humans, creating this way a balance between the dead and the living. Thence, as Johnston claims, one of the dominant concerns of the god was to maintain good relationships between the two worlds.²¹⁹ Delphic Apollo revealed to humans, on many occasions, past injustices that made the dead angry and also, possible futures, like the oracle given to the city of Thebes that, if they buried Oedipus' body in Thebes his ghost would help them.²²⁰ With these oracles, Delphi was like promising humans that by following the Oracle's recommendations or by acting on a specific way, they could – up to a point – determine the present and the future.²²¹

The question is, why ancients needed a god to mediate between them and the dead? In order to answer this, we should think again why ancients practised divination; in order to eliminate the feeling of uncertainty. People's lives, back in antiquity, were full of uncertainty and as already mentioned, divination was a way of facing this problem. Thence, the fact that a god was mediating between two worlds made them feel secure. As Johnston observes, «forms of divination that are explicitly mediated by a god, such as at Delphi, reassure enquirers by the very fact that a god intervenes». It was more familiar for the ancients to communicate with the world of the gods than with that of the dead,²²² probably because the underworld and everything related to it was something that the humans could barely conceive completely. For these reasons, humans in their attempt to come in touch with the dead, needed an intercessor, a medium; gods. And gods in return – Apollo in our case - used other mediums, like the Pythia, to communicate with mortals.

Moreover, another reason why people needed a god they trusted to work as a mediator between them and the dead, was because they thought that «the god is stronger not only than the enquirer but also than the dead - the situation is analogous to praying to gods to avert demonic ills insofar as, if one wins the favor of a god, one

²¹⁵ Johnston 2005: 283.

²¹⁶ PW 4-5, Q58ng, where PW stands for Parke and Wormell 1956 and their list of oracular responses, whereas the letter Q comes from Fontenrose 1978, where H = Historical, Q = Quasi-historical and L = Legendary. The letter "g" after a "Q" oracle indicates that Fontenrose judged it genuine or probably genuine; "ng" means that he judged it unlikely to be genuine. Absence of either "g" or "ng" means that he gave no opinion.

²¹⁷ PW119, Q178g.

²¹⁸ PW562, L137.

²¹⁹ Johnston 2005: 285.

²²⁰ PW153, L21.

²²¹ I say 'up to a point' because the past cannot change.

²²² Johnston 2005: 300.

needn't fear the demon. Granted, in the case of aversion the demons are dispensed and in the case of divination the dead express their needs, but in both cases, a threat to human welfare is obviated by a god's intervention». ²²³

Etic

«The prophetic powers attributable to the earth in antiquity are most famously observable in the traditions relating to Delphi, which Knight could actually regard as a *νεκρομαντείο*». ²²⁴ He claims that the Delphic Oracle often, if not always, operated as a *νεκρομαντείο* mostly because the Pythia worked as a medium set by Apollo to interact between the living and the dead, ²²⁵ so that the god Apollo could 'transfer' his oracular responses to the human world through her, like she was possessed by the god. Knight mentions that these mediums were controlled by spirits, ²²⁶ a theory which is supported not only by modern spiritualists but by ancient sources as well and particularly by Plutarch, in the part where he describes that at some point the Pythia was forced to give prophesy, despite the fact that Apollo was not favorable. She spoke in a harsh voice and after the shock she experienced, she died due to her being possessed by evil spirits. ²²⁷ Maurizio describes spirit possession as an altered state of consciousness, where the subject behaves in a different way from his/her normal behavior and hence, this is supposed to mean that the subject has been influenced by alien powers and spirits. ²²⁸ Knight mentions that in antiquity this entire mysterious situation was attributed to prophets, psychagogoi, goetes and manteis, who usually were able to purify other people by casting out of them evil spirits. They could also control the dead by communicating with them and addressing their problems. This is how the living and the dead interacted. ²²⁹ These experts in communication were placed under the control of an oracular god and usually, if not always, this god was Apollo; a god that people entrusted to communicate with the dead, through the experts he had under his services. ²³⁰

Last but not least, the critical question is not 'why did the ancients practice necromancy' but 'why don't we practice it'. As Bremmer observes, one of the main characteristics of modern life is that the dead are not significant in our lives anymore, especially compared to the way ancient or earlier civilizations perceived death and the relationship between the living and the dead. ²³¹ We have left aside anything relevant to the dead and the afterlife. As a result, people today tend to fear the unknown, what they cannot perceive logically. Probably this is the reason why earlier Johnston stated

²²³ Ibidem.

²²⁴ Ogden 2001: 245.

²²⁵ See Dodds 1936: 367, where he mentions «that the 'ενθουσιασμός' of the Pythia and similar personages was at bottom the same psychological condition (when we have allowed for the difference of the organizing belief – pattern) as the modern 'mediumistic trance', seems to be reasonably certain: both states are auto – suggestively induced, though not completely dependent on the subject's volition; both are characterized by a temporary but profound disturbance of the sense of identity, together with strong mental excitement and a claim to supernormal knowledge; and both may be followed by amnesia.»

²²⁶ Knight 1970: 67.

²²⁷ Plutarch, *Moralia*, 438a – 438c.

²²⁸ Maurizio 1995:76

²²⁹ Knight 1970: 68, Johnston 2005: 287. For more about *manteis* and *psychagogoi* as mediums see Johnston 1999: 82 – 126.

²³⁰ Johnston 2005: 293.

²³¹ Bremmer 2002: 86.

that ancients were afraid of the dead; she analyzed the topic mostly from an etic perspective and thought that if we nowadays are afraid of the dead and anything supernatural, the same happened in antiquity as well. As Ogden points out, ancient necromancy does not help us to understand and form conclusions about the nature of ancient society; it is possible that it helps us find out more about our own society, in the sense that necromantic practices and death «have been pushed to their margins».²³²

In summary, Delphi functioned as a *νεκρομαντείο*, where Apollo was the mediator between humans and the world of the dead, creating this way balance between the two worlds. Evidence is provided by the fact that the majority of the inscriptions found at Delphi concern the dead.²³³ Hence, we get to realize that Delphi was not only all about the Pythia and her prophetic – mantic abilities. There were other methods of divination practiced on the site; necromantic practices. Not only the Pythia but the dead as well were able to provide humans with information of every kind, not only about the future but for things that were happening in the present or happened in the past.

CHAPTER 5

I. THE LOT ORACLE

As Johnston describes, Delphi had a reputation of being a ‘conversational’ Oracle, in the sense that delivered ambiguous oracles. There was an interaction between humans and the supernatural in the form of a conversation, even if this interaction was brief and led by the Pythia. Its contrasting element was ‘binary’ divination, which occupied other divinatory mechanisms to obtain a straight ‘yes’ or ‘no’ answer.²³⁴ Thence, modern scholars proposed that there was another way of consultation, apart from the necromantic side of the Oracle and the Pythia’s regular act of prophesying by being possessed by the god: cleromancy, which was the art of giving consultation by casting of lots, beans or stones. According to Amandry, there were two rites by which the Pythia gave prophesies: the prophetic rite, in which the Pythia was possessed by the god (*ενθουσιασμός*) and spoke the oracular responses in verses and the divinatory rite, in which the prophetess drew lots. According to him, prophetic rites were held only on the days that the Oracle was open, whereas the other rite was available on any other day, as long as the preliminary rites showed that Apollo was favourable.²³⁵ However, as Plutarch describes, prophetic and divinatory rite usually co – existed.²³⁶ Also, cleromancy is a method of divination among the few that survived in historic times.²³⁷

Emic

²³² Ogden 2001: xvi.

²³³ Fontenrose 1978: 25 – 35.

²³⁴ Johnston 2008: 52.

²³⁵ Amandry 1950: 29 – 36, 84 – 85, 232 – 233. Also, Robbins: 1916 emphasized the lot oracle and claimed that there were two kinds of oracles delivered at Delphi.

²³⁶ Plutarch, *Moralia*, 492b.

²³⁷ Parke and Wormell 1956: 10.

Johnston suggests that «the beans or pebbles were marked ‘yes’ or ‘no’ or were of two different colours when the question posed was of a ‘yes or ‘no’ variety. When the question was more complex there would be more beans or pebbles, each marked with a different possible answer».²³⁸ Lot divination was thence, a way to eliminate possible answers and reduce the well known ambiguity that characterized Apollo and hence some of the oracular responses he gave.²³⁹

As we mentioned earlier, the Oracle was available for consultation only one day each month, apart from the three winter months of Apollo’s absence, where it was completely closed and the site was ruled by Dionysus. Despite the limited availability of the Oracle, modern scholars have debated the existence of a lot or bean Oracle. In particular, it is said that the Pythia sometimes used to ‘read’ a set of randomized lottery objects in order to give prophesies. The temple made money on non – religious days by tossing beans with different colours; one colour meant yes and the other meant no.²⁴⁰ Hence, this rite was accessible on any day, as long as the temple was not completely closed for all oracular business. As Raphals mentions, «at Delphi the lot Oracle may have served to augment the considerable constraints on access to consultation of the Pythia».²⁴¹ Ancient sources indicate that enthusiastic prophesy and prophesy by drawing lots were co – existing. But let us examine the process in more detail.

Unfortunately we have not many literary descriptions available. The oldest attestation, known by Zenobius, is that of Phichorus, who lived at the third century BC and it is said that he was a man of great influence. His small amount of work is among our most reliable authorities, since he was a serious and careful scholar in antiquity.²⁴² According to him, there were three Nymphs serving Apollo, called Thries, who occupied the mount of Parnassos. They were daughters of Zeus. The mantic pebbles or lots were called *θρίαι* after them, something that indicates that this was their method of divination.²⁴³ Furthermore, Fontenrose mentions that late lexicographers connected the three Nymphs with mantic pebbles, while Hesychios states that they were the first *μάντις*.²⁴⁴

According to Lucian, beans or lots were kept in the tripod in which the Pythia was said to mount in order to give prophesy.²⁴⁵ Also Plutarch mentions that, at some point, the Pythia selected the king of Thessaly by drawing a bean with his name on it; beans that the Thessalians had submitted, inscribed with their names. Hence, in some cases, the lot Oracle was used for a selection among a great variety of choices.²⁴⁶ According to Parke and Wormell, «obviously the submission of names on lots was a device occasionally employed for consulting the Delphic Oracle».²⁴⁷ Also, in

²³⁸ Johnston 2008: 53.

²³⁹ For more about the lot Oracle and ambiguity see Johnston 2008: 55 – 56, Parke and Wormell 1956: 18 – 19.

²⁴⁰ Karrer 2013: 21.

²⁴¹ Raphals 2013: 154.

²⁴² Holland 1933: 201 – 214, Amandry 1950: 27.

²⁴³ Philochorus, 195, 3b. 153J, Amandry 1950: 27.

²⁴⁴ Hesychios of Alexandria 1867: 688. See also Johnston 2008: 53, about a variation of this process that the Athenians performed for a special occasion.

²⁴⁵ Lucian, *The Double Indictment or Trials by Jury*, 1.

²⁴⁶ Plutarch, *Moralia*, 492a. See also Fontenrose L162.

²⁴⁷ Plutarch, *Moralia*, 492b, Fontenrose 1978: 219 - 224.

Euripides's *Ion*, the use of the verb *κληροίς* indicates the practice of cleromancy.²⁴⁸ Moreover, when Plato described a scene in the afterlife where souls coming back to life were given their new destinies, he perhaps had in his mind the way the Pythia prophesied when using beans.²⁴⁹

Prophesying by lots usually gave to the enquirers the simpler directions on what to do as far as questions of the type 'is it better or not to do this' or 'to what gods should I pray' were concerned. One typical example comes from Xenophon, where he consulted Apollo to which of the gods he should sacrifice and pray in order to have a successful journey and return home safely.²⁵⁰ Also, the encyclopaedia of Suda describes that above the brazen tripod stood a basin where prophetic lots could be found. Every time enquirers stated questions and lots were drawn, the Pythia was voicing Apollo's will, either by being occupied by the god or by simply 'reading' the lots. Prophecy by the drawing of lots was very famous in ancient Greece, since it was the method practiced at Dodona and it is possible that it was also used at Delphi before Apollo became the ruler of the site.²⁵¹ Last but not least, an inscribed treaty between the Delphi and Skiathos indicates, according to Amandry, the use of a lot Oracle. After the charge of the well known *πέλανος*, the inscription assigns the consultation fee 'by two beans' as an Aeginetan stater for a public issue.²⁵²

Also, another fact that shows that lot divination was famous in antiquity, comes from the assumption that not everyone could afford to consult the Pythia being in enthusiastic state. Enthusiastic divination was available only one day in each month and hence, there was not enough time for all the enquirers to be served. Consulting the Pythia on the seventh of each month required a large amount of money, since the fees were quite high; that is why they opted for the lot Oracle. Moreover, as Johnston suggests, it seems that people who needed a quick oracular answer and could not wait for that one day of the month, received prophecy by the method of drawing beans.²⁵³

Etic

As far as the opinion of modern scholars is concerned, about the treaty between Delphi and Skiathos, Amandry believes that the use of a lot Oracle is indicated by *φρυκτώ*, mostly because this word was also used when the Thessalians presented their beans to the Pythia. He concludes that during the fifth century BC, consultation by drawing beans was a normal and famous practice.²⁵⁴ However, as Fontenrose mentions, Sokolowski translates *φρυκτώ* as a sacrificial cake, like the *πέλανος*. Fontenrose adds that everything in the inscription is related to charges for sacrificial cakes and victims. In particular he states that <if we interpret *φρυκτώ* as accusative dual, we may translate, 'If he comes for the sacrifice of two cakes', realizing that the rest of the sentence is lost and that the meaning of this clause must remain obscure; for we know almost nothing about the details of daily worship at Delphi. The text of the following clause is very incomplete, and the reading *χρηστήριον* is at best

²⁴⁸ Euripides, *Ion*, 907 – 910.

²⁴⁹ Plato, *Republic*, 617c – 617e.

²⁵⁰ Xenophon, *Anabasis*, 3.1.6.

²⁵¹ Σουίδας, *Suidae Lexicon graecae et latine* 1853: 891, Πυθώ.

²⁵² Amandry 1939: 184.

²⁵³ Johnston 2008: 55.

²⁵⁴ Amandry 1950: 32 – 36.

uncertain». If correct, it is translated as ‘victim’, meaning the sacrificial goat. Thence, this inscription does not constitute strong evidence about the practice of the drawing lots.²⁵⁵ Thence according to Fontenrose, the Pythia gave the oracular response directly to the enquirer, unless she was asked to give prophesy by drawing lots or beans or by pointing to an urn.

Also, Amandry mentions that it is probable that at some point Apollo himself gave prophesy by drawing lots. In fact, he claims that «lot divination was used far more frequently at Delphi than scholars usually imagine, and that it may have provided some of the answers that we usually assume were delivered by an enthused Pythia». ²⁵⁶ Moreover, he adds that Herodotus and later ancient authors used for oracular speech the verb *αναρπείν* which, on some occasions, is translated as ‘to cast a lot’.²⁵⁷ But Fontenrose mentions that in some other sources Herodotus used the same verb for Apollo’s pronouncements, the content of which does not seem to be the result of drawing lots. He also adds that this verb may have the broader meaning of ‘speaking oracularly’ from a previous form of divination by lots or from the continuous use of lots in the mantic mechanism of Delphi. On this occasion, it means ‘ordain’ or ‘proclaim’, a meaning that comes from the ‘taking up lots’.²⁵⁸

The fact that archaeologists have not found any hard evidence on the existence of a lot Oracle at Delphi made some of the modern scholars reject Amandry’s observations. However in my opinion, probably the enquirer’s question was submitted orally or was written on a perishable writing material hence in both occasions there were no traces left. As Parke and Wormell mention, the silence of ancients about this issue should not prevent us from making speculations,²⁵⁹ based on particular phrases that exist throughout ancient sources; phrases that might point not only to the existence of this special form of divination, but to how frequently this method was used. Besides, choosing a bean from an urn or a jar is not that prestigious for the ancient literature to make a record of it; there were more fascinating subjects that an author would choose to describe in his work.

Moreover, it is interesting to take into account the analysis Robbins provides about that fact that on some vases the Pythia or the god Apollo are depicted to hold a *φιάλη*, a vessel which was believed to contain beans. He claims that the bulk of ancient Greek history along with some forms of art, such as sculpture, is enough evidence for this topic; perhaps further and cautious investigation of objects that have come down to us and which depict Apollo holding the *φιάλη* could be interpreted more carefully and confirm the theory about the lot Oracle.²⁶⁰

To sum up, cleromancy was used as an alternative to inspired divinatory method and was a way of restricting the possible oracular response, something that is confirmed by the example of the Thessalians. In particular, the men whose names were on the lots were carefully chosen in advance. The name of Aleuas was secretly put in the jar by his uncle and he was eventually chosen by the Pythia. The Thessalians thought

²⁵⁵ Fontenrose 1978: 223.

²⁵⁶ Johnston 2008: 53. See also Amandry 1950: 29 – 36.

²⁵⁷ See Amandry 1939: 184 – 185, Amandry 1950: 28, 245 (no. 16), 84 – 85, 232 – 233.

²⁵⁸ Fontenrose 1978: 220, oracular responses Q109, 144, 160.

²⁵⁹ Parke and Wormell 1956: 18 – 19.

²⁶⁰ Robbins 1916: 278 - 292.

that there must have been a mistake and so, they asked Apollo to elucidate and he confirmed the Pythia's act of choosing.

Taking everything into account, there is no doubt that a lot Oracle existed at Delphi and that indeed this practice was used more often than modern scholars think, contrary to the enthusiastic way of prophesying. This makes sense, especially if one is to consider the limited availability of the Oracle. For an Oracle so famous and powerful like this one, it could not have persevered successfully its long history when consultation days were so limited; hence an alternative method of consultation had to be involved.

EPILOGUE

Following this analysis about divinatory methods that were practiced at Delphi, I hope that with this paper I contribute to the scientific field of ancient history with my special approach of presenting and analyzing various methods of divination at Delphi. A snapshot of different divinatory practices enables us to have a better and clearer view of what eventually happened there. Everything considered, Delphi was not only all about the Pythia. We think by default that Delphi is inextricably linked to the Pythia and her mysterious or ambiguous oracular statements but it seems, everything considered, that necromancy and cleromancy were alternative methods when the rest, like the Pythia being possessed by the god, were not available. The Pythia, ghosts or spirits of the dead and cleromancy constitute a combination that is only found at Delphi. And this is what makes the Oracle unique; its special way of functioning. Delphi was attractive to people in antiquity because it offered alternative ways to deal with the problem of restricted availability of consultation days.

Different methods of divination were also used at Dodona. Cleromancy was also practiced there, where people wrote their questions on lead tablets, many of which have survived due to the imperishable material of lead foil. These questions were usually phrased in a way that an answer of 'yes' or 'no' would fit. Next, these lead tablets were put in a jar. In another jar there were beans or pebbles that were coloured or marked to indicate 'yes' or 'no'. The priestess drew a tablet from one jar and a bean or pebble from the other and after that, was able to reveal the god's will.²⁶¹ However, it is nowhere implied that specific methods were used when others were not available, although consultation days at Dodona were limited as well.²⁶²

As far as Didyma is concerned, Fontenrose mentions that Delphi was the basic model on which Didyma organized its operation and structure. The mouthpiece of Apollo was a woman, who was inspired – not possessed - by the god but her ecstasy did not reach the stage of frenzy and so, her utterances did not have to be interpreted by priests or poets of the sanctuary.²⁶³ However, Fontenrose does not describe any other methods of divination or alternative ones that were used when for example, the prophetess was not available. Furthermore, he observes that there were no ambiguous oracles at Didyma (apart from a doubtful prophesy in R4)²⁶⁴, which makes me think

²⁶¹ Johnston 2008: 68 – 70.

²⁶² For more about Dodona see Johnston 2008: 60 – 75, Nicol 1958: 128 – 143.

²⁶³ Fontenrose 1988: 84.

²⁶⁴ Fontenrose 1988: 173.

that probably no lot Oracle operated on the site in order to restrict ambiguity or uncertainty.

To sum up, it is obvious that other important Oracles in antiquity did not function the way Delphi did. The combination of the three elements (the Pythia, necromancy and cleromancy) is to be found only at Delphi and this is what makes it unique, interesting and attractive to people not only in antiquity but in contemporary times as well.

Last but not least, it has been mentioned that another element of my contribution is related to the emic – etic distinction that I present throughout my paper, in an attempt to untangle ancient and modern sources that are usually fused. Regarding this distinction, I have extracted some conclusions that are presented below.

CONCLUSION

In an emic approach, theories and observations are put aside so that ancient sources can ‘speak’ on their own and help us create a snapshot of what happened in antiquity whereas from an etic point of view, existing theories or concepts made from researchers are examined and compared by modern scholars, allowing each of them to extract their own conclusions on the same topic, as with the gaseous vent theory for example. Consequently, regarding the topic of this paper about the different methods of divination at Delphi, from an emic point of view we see that people in antiquity thought of the Pythia as Apollo’s medium and mouthpiece. They trusted her because they knew that every time she uttered oracles, it was in fact Apollo speaking who had possessed her spirit. The same idea is expressed for all divinatory methods at Delphi; Apollo was the source of everything, whether this was just to deliver oracles or to mediate between the living and the dead.

Moreover, the fact that there are not many sources available about the way the Pythia prophesied leads me to present three theories:

Theory no. 1 says that the ancients did not know how the prophetess was inspired. On the other hand, theory no. 2 states that the process was so commonly known that none of the ancient authors considered it important to mention it in their work. Theory no. 3 indicates that there was no interest in the process; all they wanted was to take confirmation of their deeds and decisions from Apollo. In any case, for ancients what was happening there was all Apollo’s doing and this was enough. In the final analysis ancients explained phenomena based on religion and on the powers of the supernatural, in the sense that gods, deities, ghosts, dead were the answer to anything beyond common human sense.

On the contrary, modern scholars’ conclusions and theories are usually based on results coming from scientific research. This makes sense, since tools of scientific investigation have improved and become more effective, allowing us to examine topics in depth by combining various scientific fields, like geology, religion, archaeology and chemistry. Science has evolved over the years, human mentality has changed and people are interested in questioning and researching everything before simply accepting or attributing something to the God or the supernatural. Hence, most of the above mentioned modern theories aim to reject the spiritualism based idea

about the Pythia being possessed by Apollo, mostly because it cannot be explained logically or scientifically.

Everything considered, I suggest that another main difference between emic and etic in this paper is that, on one hand ancients used to attribute strange or obscure situations to the supernatural while on the other hand, scholars nowadays use scientific research as reference point in order to provide rational explanations and theories.

The aim of all the above mentioned chapters is to help us realize that, as Scott puts it, we need to conceive the way Delphi functioned not as a system providing information about the future, «but rather as a ‘sense-making mechanism’ for the individuals, cities, and communities of ancient Greece. Alternatively as Heraclitus said in the quote that opens this chapter, ‘the oracle neither conceals, nor reveals, but indicates’. Delphi was, as one businessman once remarked to me, something of an ancient management consultant. It was an adviser, albeit one with powerful authority». It was a well set - up business, a clever way to increase the wealth of the sanctuary, by providing its customers every possible method of divination. The Pythia and the whole consultation procedure were perceived as an information developing centre.²⁶⁵ It was a powerful system which, by using the god’s authority, could make people’s lives easier by consulting them almost about everything, eliminating uncertain situations. And it was a system well approved by the ancients, exactly because they thought that all this was given by the gods and their almighty authority. From my perspective, what the Pythia offered was a chance for the mortals to unscramble situations that, at first sight, seemed difficult to resolve.

The Oracle’s reputation is owed for the greatest part to ancient sources and the way ancient authors chose to make use of Delphi and its oracular pronouncements as a part of their stories. We are lucky nowadays to even have the opportunity to have some information on how the Oracle evolved, formulated and on some occasions «fabricated as part of the rich tapestry of literary, philosophical, theatrical, historical, religious, and polemical thought, argument, and writing that spanned the ancient world, and, as a result, ensured that the Delphic oracle became diffused, to various degrees at different times, into almost every branch of ancient life and understanding». ²⁶⁶ It is more than obvious that its influence expanded beyond the Pythia’s oracular statements.

Delphi is one of the most important and interesting chapters of ancient history. Its way of operating continues to intrigue even today because, as already mentioned throughout this paper, investigating what happened there gives us every time a better insight into the way people thought and made decisions back then on various matters (politics, religion, morality). According to the *vox populi*, Greek culture has been used as a means of questioning the current values of society.²⁶⁷ In my opinion, getting to know Delphi and the mysteries surrounding it make us calibrate our own current position in society, our expectations and progress. Hence, I hope that this paper contributed towards the completeness of our knowledge over the methods of divination at Delphi, although there are many aspects yet to be analyzed and

²⁶⁵ Scott 2014: 29 – 30.

²⁶⁶ Scott 2014: 285 – 286.

²⁶⁷ See also Taplin 1989: 33.

investigated. Delphi has been studied and investigated for centuries and in my observation, it will continue to occupy every kind of scientist for a very long time. There is always more to say, not only because our methods and techniques of investigation keep meliorating giving us the chance to understand the issue in more depth but because there are Delphic enigmas that still need to be resolved. Therefore, adopting the idea of Scott, «it seems to me not only inevitable, but also welcome and important that Delphi continues to occupy, inspire, and surprise us for generations to come».²⁶⁸

²⁶⁸ Scott 2014: 284.

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