Classical Quarterly 56.2 331–348 (2006) Printed in Great Britain
doi:10.1017/S000983880600036X

DELPHI AND THE *HOMERIC HYMN TO APOLLO*

The Pythian part of the *Homeric Hymn to Apollo* tells the story of the founding of the Delphic oracle, and is in several ways a problematic account.[1] It focuses at length on stories that are hardly mentioned elsewhere: Apollo's encounter with the spring Telphousa and his hijacking, in the form of a dolphin, of a shipload of Cretan sailors to be priests for his oracle.[2] Both these stories end in the foundation of a cult: he sets up an altar to himself as Telphousios, and tells the Cretans to set one up to him as Delphinios, since he appeared to them in the form of a dolphin. The hymn's third etymology, of the title Pythios, is based on a more familiar myth, Apollo's killing of the Delphic serpent, later known as Python. Thus the hymn can be seen as an aetiology for three cult titles of Apollo, each story ending with an explanation of the title. Yet it would be mistaken to see the stories as simply justifications of an etymology: they are too long and detailed, and also raise the question 'Why these three titles? What is the poet showing about Apollo and Delphi by these choices?'

Since I shall be discussing whether some aspects of Delphi as it is familiar to us may postdate the hymn, I shall first consider the date of the Pythian section. Here I shall consider only the date of the Pythian hymn, and not that of the Delian hymn or the combined whole.[3] It is hard to date the hymn by linguistic methods. Janko's study of the language of the hymns is the most important here:[4] his methods tell us more about relative than absolute chronology, as he is aware, but he does make tentative suggestions for the dates of the hymns. The Delian hymn (DAp) he dates to around 655, and PAp to the early sixth century. The latter date, however, is based on historical, not linguistic, grounds; PAp is particularly inconsistent in the results it produces, leading Janko to explain this by invoking the debatable concept of 'false archaism'.[5] The linguistic evidence provides some pointers, but cannot establish a secure date for either part or for the hymn as a whole.

The Pythian hymn has often been dated with confidence to the period just after the First Sacred War, on the basis of its closing lines. In this passage Apollo warns the Cretans that

[1] Though I believe that the Pythian and Delian sections are originally separate hymns, the question of unity makes no difference to my arguments in this article. For discussions of the issue, with earlier bibliography, see K. Förstel, *Untersuchungen zum homerischen Apollonhymnus* (Bochum, 1979), 63–165; A. M. Miller, *From Delos to Delphi: A Literary Study of the Homeric Hymn to Apollo* (Leiden, 1986); J. S. Clay, *The Politics of Olympus: Form and Meaning in the Major Homeric Hymns* (Princeton, 1989), 18f.

[2] I intend to discuss the story of the Cretan sailors, and its links with the cult of Apollo Delphinios, in a separate article.

[3] It is possible that the combined hymn was created for a festival on Delos held by Polycrates in 523/2 B.C. The festival would have been both Delian and Pythian in obedience to a Delphic oracle. For this suggestion, see W. Burkert, 'Kynaithos, Polykrates and the Homeric Hymn to Apollo', in *Arktouros: Hellenic Studies Presented to Bernard M. W. Knox* (Berlin, 1979), 53–62; R. Janko, *Homer, Hesiod and the Hymns: Diachronic Development in Epic Diction* (Cambridge, 1982), 112–15; A. Aloni, *L'aedo e i tiranni: ricerche sull' Inno omerico a Apollo* (Rome, 1989).

[4] Janko (n. 3).

[5] Janko (n. 3), 93f. See A. Hoekstra, *Mnemosyne* 39 (1986), 162f. for some reservations about the concept of false archaism.

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ἠέ τι τηΰσιον ἔπος ἔσσεται ἠέ τι ἔργον
ὕβρις θ', ἡ θέμις ἐστὶ καταθνητῶν ἀνθρώπων,
ἄλλοι ἔπειθε ὑμῖν σημάντορες ἄνδρες ἔσονται,
τῶν ὑπ' ἀναγκαίῃ δεδμήσεσθ' ἤματα πάντα. (540–3)

This has generally been seen as a *post-eventum* prophecy referring to the events of the war.[6] The traditional account of this is that the Crisaeans were controlling Delphi, and possibly charging pilgrims visiting the sanctuary. To remove Delphi from their control, a coalition of Thessalians, Athenians and Sicyonians under Cleisthenes destroyed Crisa and placed Delphi under the control of the league known as the Amphictyony.[7] The 'other masters' could then refer to the Amphictyons, and the hymn should be dated to soon after 591/0, the traditional date for the war's end. However, there are various objections to this theory. The whole story of the war is obscure, and Robertson has even argued that it never took place.[8] The story suggests that Crisa was quite powerful in the archaic period, but archaeologists, in spite of many attempts, have yet to find a site fitting this description.[9] There is no mention of the war before the fourth century, and then it is used by supporters of Philip as a useful parallel to the Third Sacred War. Whether or not the war took place, it seems clear that many details of the usual account were later elaborations, and so it is dangerous to read into Apollo's obscure words here a reference to a war we know very little about.

[6] This is the view of, among others, U. von Wilamowitz-Möllendorf, *Die Ilias und Homer* (Berlin, 1916), 441; id., *Pindaros* (Berlin, 1922), 73f; F. Altheim, 'Die Entstehungsgeschichte des homerischen Apollonhymnus', *Hermes* 59 (1924), 449; F. Dornseiff, *Die archaische Mythenerzählung: Folgerungen aus den homerischen Apollonhymnus* (Berlin, 1933), 14f.; J. Humbert, *Homère, Hymnes* (Paris, 1936), 77, 10l, n. 1 (with some hesitation); S. Eitrem, 'Varia, 87: Ad Homericum Hymnum in Apollinem', *Symbolae Osloenses* 18 (1938), 133f.; M. Guarducci, 'Creta e Delfi', *SMSR* 19–20 (1943–6), 86; W. G. Forrest,'The First Sacred War', *BCH* 80 (1956), 34–44; P. Guillon, *Le bouclier d'Héraclès et l'histoire de la Grèce centrale dans la période de la première guerre sacrée* (Aix en Provence, 1963), 87, 95f.; A. Frolikova, 'Ein Beitrag zur Frage der Zweiteilung des homerischen Apollonhymnus', *Listy Filologické* 89 (1966), 4–6; Janko (n. 3), 119–21, 127f.; id., 'The *Shield of Heracles* and the legend of Cycnus', *CQ* 36 (1986), 38–59; G. Zanetto, *Inni Omerici* (Milan, 1996), 256.

[7] On the war, see J. Jannoray, 'Krisa, Kirrha et la première guerre sacrée', *BCH* 61 (1937), 33–43; M. Sordi, 'La prima guerra sacra', *RFIC* 31 (1953), 320–46; Forrest (n. 6); H. W. Parke and J. Boardman, 'The struggle for the tripod and the First Sacred War', *JHS* 77 (1957), 276–82; H. W. Parke and D. E. Wormell, *The Delphic Oracle* (Oxford, 1956[2]), 1.99–112; N. Robertson, 'The myth of the First Sacred War', *CQ* 28 (1978), 38–74; G. A. Lehmann, 'Der "Erste Heilige Krieg" – eine Fiktion?', *Historia* 29 (1980), 242–6; F. Cassola, 'Nota sulla guerra crisea', in *Miscellanea E. Manni* (Rome, 1960), 2.413–39; J. K. Davies, 'The tradition about the First Sacred War', in S. Hornblower (ed.), *Greek Historiography* (Oxford, 1994), 193–212; J. McInerney, *The Folds of Parnassos: Land and Ethnicity in Ancient Phokis* (Austin, 1999), 165–72, 310–12; P. Sanchez, *L'Amphictionie des Pyles et de Delphes: recherches sur son rôle historique dès origines au IIe siècle de notre ère* (*Historia* Einzelschriften 148) (Stuttgart, 2001), 58–80.

[8] Robertson (n. 7); *contra*, Lehmann (n. 7).

[9] Recently Despina Skorda has suggested that Crisa should be identified with the site of Aghia Varvara in the Pleistos valley, which is situated on the probable route from the port to Delphi (D. Skorda, 'Recherches dans la vallée du Pleistos', in J.-F. Bommelaer (ed.), *Delphes, centenaire de la 'Grande Fouille'* (Leiden, 1992), 50–3, 62–5. McInerney (n. 7), 309–12 argues that it occupied roughly the same site as the modern village of Chrisso. See further Jannoray (n. 7); L. Lerat, 'Krisa', in *Mélanges Charles Picard* = *RA* 31–2 (1948), 621–32; Sordi (n. 7); L. Dor, J. Jannoray and M. van Effenterre, *Kirrha: étude de préhistoire phocidienne* (Paris, 1960), 13–16; Robertson (n. 7), 40–8; R. Hope Simpson and J. F. Lazenby, *The Catalogue of the Ships in Homer's Iliad* (Oxford, 1970), 41; Förstel (n. 1), 202–9; E. Visser, *Homers Katalog der Schiffe* (Stuttgart, 1997), 382f.

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The Amphictyonic campaign was supposed to liberate Delphi from Crisa's tyranny, yet the new masters are portrayed as oppressors, *σημάντορες ἄνδρες τῶν ὑπ' ἀναγκαίῃ δεδμήσεσθ' ἤματα πάντα*. Forrest argues that the war was fought against Delphi, whose priests were in league with Crisa, rather than to liberate Delphi. Could then the description come from the disaffected Delphic priests? Yet the lines are no more flattering about the defeated priests, stating that their downfall is the result of their own misbehaviour (545f.). Forrest has to resort to the weak suggestion that 'the author of the hymn, in writing his justification of the amphiktionic usurpation, was still too near the events to falsify or accept a falsification of the public facts'.[10]

The warning is addressed to the priests, not to the Crisaeans, and may well refer to some change in the internal organisation of the oracle rather than its external control. Certainly the lines do not support the usual view of priests liberated by the war from Crisaean oppression. J. S. Clay suggests that the reference is to the priests known as *Hosioi*;[11] but little is known of them, and the suggestion is no less conjectural than the link to the Sacred War.

In fact Apollo's words seem deliberately vague, perhaps appropriately oracular, and may not even refer to any definite event. Given this vagueness and the paucity of our knowledge of Delphi's early history, it seems futile to attempt to link the prophecy to any particular historical event. The most sensible view of the Sacred War is that of Morgan, that 'If the war did not take place, it was necessary to invent it in order to cover the disjunction between the demands of regional and sanctuary activity.'[12] Delphi certainly changed from a local to an inter-state sanctuary, and this change may not have occurred without conflict. Such a conflict may lie behind the ending of PAp, but we cannot be sure.

Some have preferred to date the hymn before the Sacred War. West sees it as 'a warning in time of imminent danger' rather than a *post-eventum* prophecy. Defradas and Förstel argue from the prominence of Crisa in the hymn that it must predate that city's destruction.[13] It certainly seems unlikely that Crisa would be used as the name of the region if the city had been destroyed and its territory devoted to Apollo, as happened after the war. Yet we should bear in mind that the poet cannot use the names Pytho or Delphi since he is describing a time before they existed. Wade-Gery agrees with Defradas and Förstel about Crisa, but suggests that the last lines of the hymn were added after the war.[14] Up until Apollo's closing speech, there have been promises of continual honour for the priests, and thus the threat at the end is surprising. In fact in the text as it stands Apollo's words are more than a threat—they are a statement of what will happen.[15] This makes the change of tone still more marked. When we add to this the fact that at 539f there is either a lacuna or the text is corrupt, it suggests that the idea that these lines were added to the hymn deserves

[10] Forrest (n. 6), 46.

[11] Clay (n. 1), 90f.

[12] C. Morgan, *Athletes and Oracles*: *The Transformation of Olympia and Delphi in the Eighth Century BC* (Cambridge, 1990), 135.

[13] M. L. West, 'Cynaethus' Hymn to Apollo', *CQ* 25 (1975), 165, n. 2; J. Defradas, *Les thèmes de la propagande delphique* (Paris, 1954), 55–85; Förstel (n. 1), 200ff.

[14] H. T. Wade-Gery, 'Kynaithos', in *Studies in Greek Poetry and Life: Essays Presented to Gilbert Murray* (Oxford, 1936), 62–8. This is accepted by Parke and Wormell (n. 7), 107f.

[15] The text can be emended by reading *κατ' ἐμὴν ἰθύν γε μάλιστα* (Matthiae) at the end of 539 and *εἴ κέ τι τηΰσιον* (Càssola) or *εἴ δέ τι τηΰσιον* (Reiz) at the start of 540, making the prophecy conditional. This avoids having to posit a lacuna after 539. See F. Càssola, *Inni Omerici* (Milan, 1975), ad loc.; Clay (n. 1), 86, n. 23.

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consideration.[16] This makes it no more or less likely that the event they refer to is the Sacred War, but it is another reason for not using this passage to date the hymn.

Attempting to place PAp in a historical framework has been a popular pastime among scholars, but their efforts are unconvincing. Linking the hymn's ending to the First Sacred War is the prime, but not the only, example of such conjectures. For instance, it is argued by some that the stress on Thebes' non-existence at the time of the oracle's foundation is evidence of an anti-Theban bias;[17] yet the poet is probably just following the usual story, according to which Cadmus founded Thebes after consulting the Delphic oracle. Guillon builds quite an elaborate reconstruction on the basis of this assumption of an anti-Theban bias. He accepts the view that Apollo's final warning refers retrospectively to the Sacred War, and suggests that the hymn is designed to stress that the Apollo cult did not reach the region until the founding of Delphi. Thebes did not exist, and from the older Boeotian cults, for example, Telphousa, Apollo meets only hostility. According to Guillon, the hymn may come from the region of Orchomenus which was hostile to Theban ambitions; it describes Onchestus in order to show that this, and not Thebes, is Boeotia's religious centre.[18] The poet is a supporter of the Delphic Amphictyony against Theban pretensions. All this relies on deducing a great deal from brief references in the hymn and trying to fit this into our sketchy knowledge of the history of Central Greece at this time. Guillon and others also advance historical interpretations of the Hesiodic *Shield of Heracles* and the story of the struggle for the tripod between Heracles and Apollo. It is no doubt true that these myths were used for propaganda by different groups, but we lack knowledge of the contexts in which this occurred. The subjectivity of these reconstructions can be seen from the interpretations of Heracles in the legends: according to different scholars he represents the Amphictyons, the Thebans, the Crisaeans or Pisistratus.[19]

Another weak attempt to date the hymn is based on Telphousa's words to Apollo at 270f, where she says that at Crisa Apollo will not be disturbed by the noise of horses and chariots. It has often been argued that this must predate the introduction of chariot races at the Pythian games in 582 B.C.[20] There are several objections to this. The argument can be turned round, as is shown by Forrest, who comments: 'The Telphousa episode was surely written after not before the introduction of the chariot race in 582. It would be an odd coincidence that races should start where the author

[16] The passage is defended by Janko (n. 3), 120. He argues that the warning fits with the preceding passage about living on the offerings, since this could refer to the dedication of the plain of Crisa after the war. Yet these lines continue the promises of honour for the priests; they will not have to worry about how to live, since there will be plentiful offerings. This is not a warning of what will happen if they misbehave, but the way in which they will be able to dedicate themselves to the god's service.

[17] Defradas (n. 13), 59ff.; Guillon (n. 6), 85ff.; Eitrem (n. 6), 128ff.; Janko (n. 6).

[18] This suggestion had also been made by Defradas (n. 13), 60f. Janko (n. 6) agrees with Guillon's ideas about the poet's origins and anti-Theban bias. On this topic, see also M. Sordi, 'Mitologia e propaganda nella Beozia arcaica', *Atene e Roma* 11 (1966) 15–24; R. Ducat, 'La Confédération béotienne et l'expansion thébaine à l'époque archaïque', *BCH* 77 (1973), 59–73. Clay (n. 1), 88f., attacks all these attempts at historical interpretation of PAp.

[19] Sanchez (n. 7), 66 rightly comments that 'Toutes ces interprétations sont séduisantes, mais aucune ne saurait être préférée aux autres, et cela pour une raison très simple: une même légende peut, selon le lieu et la date de sa mise en forme, se prête à pratiquement n'importe quelle interpretation.'

[20] See e.g. T. W. Allen, W. R. Halliday and E. E. Sikes, *The Homeric Hymns* (Oxford, 1936), 185; Humbert (n. 6), 76f.; Wade-Gery (n. 14), 62, n. 1.

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had made Telphousa insist they would never happen (270–1), whereas it would be quite natural after 582 to look back to a time when they did not happen. After all, the whole point of Telphousa's prophecy is that it is false.'[21] It has also been pointed out that the races took place in the plain below, not at the sanctuary. This line of argument is unnecessary, since Telphousa is referring to the regular traffic at a watering-place on a main road, not the noise of games at a festival in the god's honour, which in any case was held only every four years.[22]

At 299 Apollo's temple is said to be ἀοίδιμον ἔμμεναι αἰεί. Some argue that this must predate 548 B.C., when the temple was burnt down; but the poet says that the temple will be sung of for ever, not that it will stand for ever.[23]

Another possible dating criterion is the description of the building of the temple, with its λάινος οὐδός. According to Morgan, there is no evidence for a temple at Delphi before 650 B.C. at the earliest. If this is correct, it gives us a *terminus post quem* for the hymn.[24] Overall there appears to be no reliable way of dating PAp, but a date in the second half of the seventh century or the early sixth seems plausible.

The hymn is interesting not just for what it contains, but also for what it omits. This aspect of it was vividly stressed in an article by Verrall,[25] who comments disapprovingly, 'Can we suppose that it was the habit of the poets who celebrated Pytho . . . to say nothing whatever, not one syllable, about the solemn days of consultation, the inquiring crowds from every part of the world, the invitation of the prophetess, the lots and the sacrifice, the conclave, the interview and the oracular voice?' As if this were not enough, a page later he produces another catalogue of the poet's sins of omission:

> for the chasm and its vapours, or the tripod over it, for the stone, earth's centre, and the mysterious pair which stood by it, for the sacred bath and the familiar doves, the dateless tomb and the inexplicable letter, nay, for the prophetess herself, agent and means of the whole oracular proceedings, the poem may be searched in vain. In short, you could scarcely learn from it that there was or ever had been anything in the place worth going to see.[26]

Certainly anyone who reads the poem with the usual picture of Delphi in mind will be surprised at such omissions. A partial explanation can be found in the genre of the hymn. Like the other major Homeric hymns, it is explicitly aetiological. In the case of the Pythian hymn the author's purpose is to tell how Apollo sought a site for an oracle, and found it at Delphi. He then built a temple and hijacked a shipload of Cretan sailors to serve as his priests. The major hymns relate stories that show how the god came to acquire particular honours or functions, or how a particular cult came into being.[27] The most fundamental aetiology is the story of the god's birth,

[21] Forrest (n. 6), 34, n. 1.

[22] See Defradas (n. 13), 57; Càssola (n. 15), 102; West (n. 13), 165, n. 2; Clay (n. 1), 88f.

[23] This is pointed out by West (n. 13), 165, n. 2.

[24] Morgan (n. 12), 132–4. On the dating of the temple destroyed in 548 B.C., see A. Jacquemin, 'Répercussions de l'entrée de Delphes dans l'amphictionie sur la construction à Delphes à l'époque archaïque', in J. des Courtils and J.-C. Moretti (edd.), *Les grands ateliers d'architecture dans le monde egéen du VIe siècle av. J.C. (Actes du colloque d'Istanbul, 23–5 mai 1991)* (Paris, 1993), 217–25.

[25] A. W.Verrall, 'The Hymn to Apollo: an essay in the Homeric question', *JHS* 14 (1894), 1–29.

[26] Verrall (n. 25), 8.

[27] See J. Rudhardt, 'A propos de l'hymne homérique à Déméter', *MH* 19 (1978), 39–64; Clay (n. 1), 8–16; R. Parker, 'The *Hymn to Demeter* and the *Homeric Hymns', G&R* 38 (1991), 1–17; C. Calame, *MH* 52 (1995), 1–19.

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which occurs in many of the hymns, both long and short, and is the theme of the Delian part of the hymn to Apollo. The hymn to Demeter explains mainly the origin of the Eleusinian mysteries, and many of its narrative elements have been seen as aetiologies for particular aspects of Eleusinian ritual.[28] The hymn to Hermes recounts his birth and invention of the lyre, which he later gives to Apollo in exchange for the gift of a particular type of divination; he also steals Apollo's cattle and becomes a god of herds, invents a method of kindling fire, founds a sacrificial ritual in honour of the twelve Olympians and by his exchange with Apollo shows he will 'establish bartering among men throughout the fruitful earth' (515–16). The hymns reveal not only the gods' particular functions, but their nature and place in the structure of the Olympian pantheon. In the words of Robert Parker, '[the hymns] tell how gods came to be what mortals know them as'.[29] The hymn to Delian Apollo, after narrating his birth, foretells his future roles: 'May the lyre and curved bow be pleasing to me, and I shall prophesy to men the infallible will of Zeus' (131–2). Between them the Delian and Pythian hymns tell how Apollo came to occupy his two greatest sanctuaries; and both open with a scene of Apollo exercising power among the gods on Olympus, showing how he fits into the Olympian order.

Because of the aetiological nature of the hymns' narratives, the course of events is in broad outline predetermined. Leto may wander over many islands seeking a place to give birth, but we know she will finish up on Delos: Apollo may go through many places searching for a site for his oracle, but he is bound to choose Delphi in the end, even though the poet presents him as having a free choice and even at first choosing the site of the spring Telphousa. Since the purpose of the narrative is to tell how the god came to have some of his present functions, the structure is often determined by this rather than by what we would consider logically or psychologically motivated reasons. Hermes does many things in the hymn to him, but these mostly have no narrative connection. The poet merely says 'And then Hermes decided to do so and so'—the connection between the events is that they are all aetiologies for some function of the god or aspect of his developed nature. The same is true of the other major hymns. Parker puts this well in his analysis of the hymn to Demeter, which contains, for instance, no explanation of why Demeter goes to Eleusis. He comments: 'In a "theogonic" and aetiological poem, the reader can indeed make sense of the narrative, but in terms less of motives than of results … The "cause" of the event lies partly in the inscrutable mind of the god, more clearly in the consequence', or again: 'The attentive reader of a poem such as this quickly realizes that he is being led through a world of mysteries, because gods are gods, not men, because Olympus is hidden from mortal eyes. Demeter would cease to be Demeter if she had to explain herself to Wilamowitz.'[30]

All this is relevant to the hymn's treatment of Delphi, as the subject is sometimes approached without taking into account the type of poem we are dealing with. We need to ask what genre it belongs to, and what we might expect to find in a poem of this genre. Now an aetiological myth need not account for every aspect of the cult practice at a sanctuary. For instance, the Delian part of the hymn makes no reference to familiar elements of Delian cult such as the Hyperborean maidens, and the altar of

[28] For details, see N. J. Richardson, *The Homeric Hymn to Demeter* (Oxford, 1974); Rudhardt (n. 27).
[29] Parker (n. 27), 2.
[30] Parker (n. 27), 11.

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horns, since they are not relevant to the story of Apollo's birth.[31] We should not expect in the hymn a comprehensive account of the origins of everything important at Delphi. The hymns are selective in what they treat, and their versions of myths are very individual. It would hardly be possible to construct a narrative explaining everything to do with the oracle; nor is this the hymn's purpose. The hymn is in honour of Apollo, not Delphi, so we should not be surprised that it explains three cult titles of the god, not three aspects of Delphic ritual. Though everything is linked to the story of Delphi's founding, the altars to Apollo Telphousios and Delphinios are not directly Delphic at all. The hymn may show in mythological terms how nearby shrines came to be swallowed up by the increasing fame of Delphi.[32] Apollo is the centre of attention throughout the hymn: other characters only enter the story as they affect him. He does everything himself: chooses the site, lays the foundations of the temple, selects his own priests and brings them to the sanctuary. The episodes of Telphousa, the dragoness and the Cretan sailors all in their own way show Apollo as a powerful and dangerous god whom it is perilous to cross; but also a benefactor of mankind, slayer of monsters and founder of oracles.

Yet, even taking all this into account, we must admit that there is something in what Verrall says. We might not expect to find everything he lists in the poem, but we might expect something a little closer to the picture we have of Delphi. I have argued that not everything could be or indeed should be put into the story; but the poet could have included a scene showing the sanctuary as it is in his own time, as does the poet of the Delian part. In particular, one might expect a mention of the very heart of the oracle as we know it, the Pythia seated on the tripod through whom the god spoke.[33] Instead only the Cretan priests are mentioned, and the only allusion to the oracle's functioning runs: 'Cretans from Minoan Knossos, who make sacrifices to the god and announce the decrees of Phoebus Apollo, whatever he speaks as an oracle from his laurel tree below the hollows of Parnassus' (393–6). Why should the poet ignore the Pythia, the most famous feature of Delphi, and devote so much space to the arrival of the Cretan priests, a story scarcely mentioned in later Delphic mythology? Verrall's answer to the question is that the oddities of the poet's account are explained by his writing from an anti-Delphic standpoint.[34] There is no need to discuss in detail the particular arguments he puts forward in support of this, because the whole idea is so implausible. A hymn to the Pythian Apollo could hardly be anti-Delphic, and the poem itself refutes the idea. Take for instance the speech Apollo makes on arriving at Delphi (287ff.):

> Here I intend to build a glorious temple to be an oracle for men, and here they will always bring perfect hecatombs, both they who dwell in the rich Peloponnese and the men of Europe and from all the wave-washed isles, coming to question me. And I will announce to them all infallible advice, giving oracles in my rich temple.

Or again, he says to the Cretan sailors: 'here you shall keep my rich temple that is greatly honoured by men, and you shall know the plans of the deathless gods, by

[31] In contrast, Callimachus' hymn to Delos deals with all these things, as well as Apollo's birth, since it is a hymn to Delos, not Apollo.

[32] Some see these stories as Delphic propaganda, stressing Delphi's primacy over other shrines in the area. See especially Defradas (n. 13), 55–85; Guillon (n. 6), 84–101.

[33] The *Hymn to Demeter*, which also narrates the foundation of a cult, refers to quite a few aspects of the later ritual.

[34] Verrall (n. 25).

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whose will you shall be honoured continually for all time' (483–5). These passages clearly imply that at the time of the hymn's composition Delphi was a wealthy and famous sanctuary, attracting pilgrims from the whole of Greece.

Another obvious explanation for the absence of many familiar aspects of Delphi is that they did not yet exist when the hymn was composed. The usual view of this is that it may be true for some things, but surely not for everything that Verrall lists.[35] The reluctance of scholars to believe this stems largely, I think, from the potency of the traditional image of Delphi.[36] The chasm and vapours, the Pythia, the tripod and the *omphalos* have a strong hold on the imagination, making it hard to believe that Delphi could ever have been without these things; but in fact many elements of this picture have been proved fictitious or at least cast into doubt.

For instance, excavations have long shown that there can never have been a real chasm or fissure in the rocks under Apollo's temple, and certainly no intoxicating vapours issuing from the earth.[37] The story is not attested before Diodorus Siculus in the first century B.C., and looks like a rationalising Hellenistic account, since it provides a natural explanation for the Pythia's frenzy. Strabo, for instance, says: 'They say the oracle is a deep cave, whose opening is not very wide; a *πνεῦμα ἐνθουσιαστικόν* rises from it; above the mouth is placed a high tripod, on which the Pythia sits and receiving the *πνεῦμα* gives oracles in verse and prose.'[38] Diodorus tells a story of the oracle's origin: one day some goats passed over a fissure in the ground, and every goat that approached began to leap about and make strange noises. The goatherd approached to take a closer look, became inspired and began to predict the future. Word of this got around, and many came to see the place and had the same experience. But some in their excitement fell into the hole, and so it was decided that one woman should pronounce oracles for all, and they placed a tripod over the hole for her to sit on.[39] Whatever the truth of traditions about the chasm and vapours, this is clearly a rationalising account which provides a mechanical explanation of the

[35] See for instance Allen, Halliday and Sikes (n. 20), 197f.

[36] S. Price, 'Delphi and divination', in P. E. Easterling and J. V. Muir (edd.), *Greek Religion and Society* (Cambridge, 1985), 128f. quotes the description of the Blue Guide to Greece to show the persistence of the traditional picture in popular sources, 'After purifying herself in the Castalian fountain and drinking of the water of the Cassotis, and munching a laurel leaf, she took her seat upon the tripod, which was placed over the chasm in the adyton. Intoxicated by the exhalations from the chasm, she uttered incoherent sounds, which were interpreted in hexameter verse by a poet in waiting. The interpretation, which was always obscure and frequently equivocal, was handed over to the enquirer, who not seldom returned more mystified than he had come.'

[37] This was first demonstrated by A. P. Oppé, 'The chasm at Delphi', *JHS* 24 (1904), 214–40, but has recently been cast into doubt by some geologists, who have found evidence of faults in the area (L. Piccardi, 'Active faulting at Delphi, Greece: seismotectonic remarks and a hypothesis for the geologic environment of a myth', *Geology* 28 (2000), 651–4; J. Z. de Boer, J. R. Hale and J. Chanton, 'New evidence for the geological origins of the ancient Delphic oracle (Greece)', *Geology* 29 (2001), 707–10. The vapours may have been hydrocarbon gases such as ethylene, which can have an intoxicating effect. However, even if this is so I would argue that intoxicating gases are not necessary to explain the Pythia's possession, as such states occur in many cultures (and probably at other Apolline oracles) without the use of any drugs. For earlier discussions, see E. Will, 'Sur la nature du pneuma delphique', *BCH* 66 (1942), 161–75; P. Amandry, *La mantique apollonienne à Delphes : essai sur le fonctionnement de l'oracle* (Paris, 1950); E. R. Dodds, *The Greeks and the Irrational* (Boston, 1951), 73f.; Parke and Wormell (n. 7), 1.19–24; R. Martin and H. Metzger, *La religion grecque* (Paris, 1976), 34–8; G. Roux, *Delphes: son oracle et ses dieux* (Paris, 1976), 110–17; J. E. Fontenrose, *The Delphic Oracle, its Responses and Operations, With a Catalogue of Responses* (Berkeley, 1978), 197–203.

[38] Strabo 9.3.5.

[39] Diodorus Siculus 16.26.

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oracle's origin and functioning—it would be hard to imagine a greater contrast with the hymn's foundation myth. So there is nothing surprising in the absence of the chasm and vapours from the hymn.

The truth is that the picture the Blue Guide gives is not found in all its details in any ancient source: it is a patchwork taken from various sources. Our knowledge of how the oracle functioned is very scanty, especially for the early period. Few ancient writers have anything to say on this, and nobody seems to have thought it worth their while to give a detailed account of the oracle, perhaps because everyone knew about it. The most information we get is from Plutarch, who was a priest at Delphi; but of course he is relatively late, and even he gives no systematic account of the oracle's functioning.[40]

We need not then assume that the oracle must always have functioned as it did in the historical period. There is little information to go on; and in fact the hymn is much the earliest and longest document we have. We must be careful in using it as evidence, remembering that its peculiarities may be due to the type of poem it is; but this, I feel, is not why writers on the Delphic oracle have tended to undervalue its importance, or almost dismiss it. The real cause is that its account of Delphi is very different from the 'canonical' picture of the oracle and its history, itself largely a modern construction. So strong is the power of the image we have of the oracle in historical times that it is often assumed that if the hymn does not mention the Pythia or the *omphalos*, the poet must have had reasons for omitting them.

This tendency can be seen in discussions of the hymn's treatment of the Python myth.[41] The slaying of the dragon Python was one of the most celebrated parts of Delphic myth: it was the subject of the Pythian *nomos* performed at the Pythian games, and the *aition* for the Septerion festival.[42] Its importance in Delphic myth and cult is clear, and one would expect an account of the combat in a poem about the oracle's foundation. The hymn's version is surprising in several respects, when compared with later accounts.[43] The description of the actual combat is brief: we are merely told that Apollo killed the snake with his bow, and more space is devoted to the description of her death throes and Apollo's boastful speech over the corpse. The brevity of the description may stress the ease of Apollo's victory. The etymology of the name Pytho is emphasized (Apollo's speech begins *Ἐνταυθοῖ νῦν πύθευ* and ends *ἀλλὰ σέ γ' αὐτοῦ πύσει γαῖα μέλαινα καὶ ἠλέκτωρ Ὑπερίων*). Here, though, as with the other etymologies, this should not be seen as the only purpose of the narrative.

[40] Plutarch wrote three 'Pythian dialogues': *De E Delphico* (*Moralia* 384c–94c); *De Pythiae Oraculis* (ibid. 394d–409d); and *De Defectu Oraculorum* (ibid. 409e–438d).

[41] On the Python myth see T. Schreiber, *Apollon Pythoktonos: Ein Beitrag zur griechischen Religions– und Kunstgeschichte* (Leipzig, 1879); H. von Geisau, 'Python', *RE* 24.606ff.; F. Dornseiff, *Die archaische Mythenerzählung: Folgerungen aus dem homerischen Apollonhymnos* (Berlin, 1933), 16–29; J.E. Fontenrose, *Python: A Study of Delphic Myth and its Origins* (Berkeley, 1959), 13–22 and 77–93; L. Kahil, 'Apollon et Python', in *Mélanges Michalowski* (Warsaw, 1966), 483–90; id., *LIMC* 7.1.609–10 s.v. Python.

[42] On the Pythian *nomos*, see D. Kolk, *Der pythische Apollonhymnus als aitiologische Dichtung* (Meisenheim, 1963), 41–7; Defradas (n. 13), 95–7. It is described by Strabo (9.421) and Pollux (4.84). On the Septerion: L. R. Farnell, *The Cults of the Greek City States* (Oxford, 1907), 4.293–5, 425f.; Defradas (n. 13), 97–102 (97, n. 1 for further bibliography); Fontenrose (n. 41), 453–61; W. Burkert, *Homo Necans* (Berlin, 1997²), 144–7; I. Rutherford, *Pindar's Paeans* (Oxford, 2001), 200–5.

[43] Cf. the remarks of Wilamowitz (n. 6), 74; 'Was der Hymnus erzählt, ist welt entfernt von der Fülle wirksam Motive, die uns aus der späteren Vulgata geläufig sind'.

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The theme of the snake's defeat is introduced in an almost casual way; the only explicit link with the preceding account of the construction of the temple is that the snake's spring was nearby.[44] This apparent lack of connection with the foundation of the oracle is the most significant difference between the hymn and later versions. In these the dragon combat is bound up with another important part of Delphic mythology, the myth of the previous owners.[45] According to this, Apollo took over the oracle from an earlier goddess, Gaia and/or Themis. The snake becomes either the guardian of Gaia's oracle, or itself oracular. The connecting of the snake and the previous owners is first attested in Euripides' *Iphigenia in Tauris* (1234–83), where Apollo is described as killing Pytho while still a baby in Leto's arms.[46] Another unusual aspect of the hymn's version is that the snake is female and has no name.[47] It is not the guardian of an oracle of Gaia, but merely a menace to local people and their flocks. Apollo needs no purification after the killing, but such purification was an important feature of later Delphic mythology, supposedly commemorated in the Septerion festival.

So is this merely the earliest form of the Python myth, or did the poet know of, for instance, the snake's connection with the previous owners, and choose to suppress it? Many adopt the latter alternative,[48] showing the difficulty scholars find in accepting that Delphi and Delphic myth may have been different at the time of the hymn's composition. Parke, for instance, believes that the story was known earlier, and is implicit in the hymn's account, in which the female dragon may be an embodiment of the earth goddess. It is of course only implicit if one approaches the hymn with the myth of the previous owners in mind: the text of the hymn provides no support for this. Roux, after discussing the various versions of the myth, claims that: 'À travers la diversité des interpretations . . . nous devinons une tradition legendaire très homogène.'[49] Different versions have chosen to emphasize or suppress different elements, but they all knew the same myth. This rests on the mistaken idea that there is some 'Platonic' version of the myth which has no actual existence, but lies behind all the particular versions we know. In fact, the myth only exists in its various embodiments, and the conclusion one should draw from the changes in these versions is that the myth changed and developed over time; and even at any particular time the myth no doubt existed in many forms, not in one canonical version known to everybody.

The belief that the hymn's composer must have known of the previous owners' myth rests to a large extent on the widespread opinion that this myth reflects historical reality, that is, that the cult of Apollo was in fact preceded at Delphi by that of an earth goddess, and that therefore the story of Apollo's takeover must have been known from an early period. The historicity of the myth has for a long time been

[44] Cf. F. Jacoby, 'Der homerische Apollonhymnos', *Sitzungsberichte der preussischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, Phil.-Hist. Klasse* 15 (Berlin, 1933), 742f.; Förstel (n. 1), 256f.; Miller (n. 1), 82.

[45] See C. Sourvinou-Inwood, 'Myth as history: the previous owners of the Delphic oracle', in J. Bremmer (ed.), *Interpretations of Greek Mythology* (London, 1987), 215–41, and her notes for bibliography.

[46] Apparently Pindar related that Apollo overcame the snake by force, for which Gaia wanted to throw him into Tartarus (Pindar, fr. 55 SM).

[47] The different versions are discussed in Fontenrose (n. 41), 13–22.

[48] E.g. Defradas (n. 13), 64–7; Parke and Wormell (n. 7), 1.7; Roux (n. 37), 43–9; Clay (n. 1), 63f.

[49] Roux (n. 37), 48f.

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generally accepted, for instance in standard works like Parke and Wormell and Roux;[50] but there have always been sceptics, and the theory has been convincingly refuted by Sourvinou-Inwood.[51] Her basic argument is that the only evidence for the historical truth of the previous owners' myth is the myth itself, and that other data—in particular the archaeological evidence for Mycenaean cults at Delphi—only support this if approached with the myth already in mind. The myth, she claims, 'does not reflect cultic history but expresses certain important perceptions about the Delphic Apollo, the oracle and the cosmos'.[52]

So it is possible that this myth developed after the hymn's composition; and therefore the version of the dragon combat found in the hymn may be original, and its connection with the previous owners' myth secondary.[53] The hymn's story makes sense as an example of the motif 'combat with a monster before founding a city', of which the most obvious Greek example is the story of Cadmus. Like Apollo, he wanders in search of a site, and has to defeat a dragon by a spring.[54] Serpents are regularly associated with springs; both rise from the earth and are chthonic powers.[55] Prophecy and divination were from an early period associated with underworld powers and the dead; and so springs too, and the snakes that guard them, were thought to have prophetic powers.[56]

The only connection the hymn makes between the snake and the oracle is that she would have been a menace to the numerous pilgrims who will visit Delphi. Apollo is here the liberator of mankind from a menace, like Herakles and Theseus in many myths. The defeat of a brigand or monster who is terrorising pilgrims is a common feature of Delphic legends, and the Python story may be the original of these.[57]

Clay[58] believes that the hymn deliberately suppresses the previous owners' myth, suggesting that 'the radical revision of Delphic dogma betrays the profoundly Olympian orientation of the hymn'. In 132 Apollo says that he will prophesy to men the will of Zeus, and the founding of Delphi can be seen as a sign of and contributor to the new order founded by Zeus. Therefore, according to Clay, it is depicted in the hymn as a purely Olympian foundation, one of the benefits of the new order brought about by Zeus and supported by his son Apollo. She sees it as a feature of the hymn that it stresses the Olympian and male at the expense of the chthonic and female. She sees this not only in the dragon combat (in which the snake is female, unlike most later versions), but also in the episode of Telphousa and the account of Typhaon's birth from Hera. Moreover, the priests Apollo chooses are male, and there is no mention of the female Pythia.

If right, this theory provides an explanation for the absence from the hymn of some familiar features of Delphic myth and cult. But, as I have argued, the most natural

[50] Parke and Wormell (n. 7); Roux (n. 37).
[51] Sourvinou-Inwood (n. 45).
[52] Sourvinou-Inwood (n. 45), 215.
[53] This is the view of Schreiber (n. 41); Wilamowitz (n. 6), 74; Allen, Halliday and Sikes (n. 20), 245f.; Amandry (n. 37), 213f.; Sourvinou-Inwood (n. 45), 225ff.
[54] See J. Trumpf, 'Stadtgründung und Drachenkampf', *Hermes* 86 (1958), 129–57; F. Vian, *Les origines de Thèbes* (Paris, 1963), 94–113.
[55] See E. Küster, *Die Schlange in der griechischen Kunst und Religion* (Giessen, 1913), 153–7; Fontenrose (n. 41), 545–9; L. Bodson, *IEPA ZΩIA: contribution à l' étude de la place de l' animal dans la religion grecque ancienne* (Brussels, 1978), 68–92; E. Mitropolou, *Deities and Heroes in the Form of Snakes* (Athens, 1977).
[56] Küster (n. 55), 121–6; Bodson (n. 55), 89–91.
[57] See Fontenrose (n. 41), 22–69 (on enemies of Delphi) and 321–64 (on Heracles).

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interpretation of the hymn's account of the combat with the snake is that this is the oldest and simplest form of the myth. There is no need to say that the snake's presence shows that the poet knew the story of the previous owners but suppressed it; the episode makes sense as it stands, and fits mythological patterns: the defeat of a monster by a god or hero; the dragon by a spring, killed by the founder of a city or sanctuary; and the defeat of a brigand or monster that was terrorising pilgrims on the road to Delphi.

Moreover, if the author of the hymn wished to stress the themes that Clay suggests, why do so by such indirect methods? In the dragon combat the emphasis is on the defeat of a potential menace to pilgrims, and on the etymology of Pytho. Though Telphousa may be to some extent a doublet of the dragoness,[59] the hymn does not suggest that her opposition to Apollo has any cosmic significance: it is motivated simply by her desire to keep her glory to herself. The Typhaon episode is not explicitly linked to the story of the temple's foundation. Typhaon, says the poet, was given by Hera to the Delphic dragoness to bring up, *κακῷ κακόν* (354), an evil to an evil. Thus, it is true, the Delphic dragoness, defeated by Apollo, is linked with Typhaon, defeated by Zeus and an enemy of the Olympians. But we can note that Typhaon is male, and so does not fit Clay's equation of female and anti-Olympian. A more obvious way of showing the triumph of the Olympian, male Apollo over the primeval, chthonic female deities who preceded him would be to depict it directly. In Hesiod's *Theogony,* the victory of Zeus is described in detail; there are lengthy descriptions of his battles with the forces of primeval disorder in the shape of the Titans and Typhon. If the poet wished to suppress the story of Apollo's violent takeover of the oracle,[60] why not suppress the dragon combat? If he wanted to show Apollo's victory over the chthonic female deities, why not stress their chthonic nature?

We can see the slaying of the snake as an expression of the theme of Apollo's victory over a chthonic monster without needing to bring in the previous owners. Sourvinou-Inwood argues that the story in *Ap*. is a symbol of 'the establishment of order and the elimination of disorder . . . symbolized by a chthonic monster'.[61] She suggests that the Delphic succession myth was developed to connect the snake with Gaia, who was also the enemy of Zeus, and hence emphasize the founding of the oracle as a symbol of Zeus's new order. It is 'an elaboration of motifs and notions which appear in a simpler (and wilder) form in the Homeric Hymn's dragon slaying'.[62]

In fact there is no evidence for any oracular activity at Delphi before the eighth century B.C,[63] and the fact that the site seems to have been uninhabited from the early proto-geometric period until around the mid-ninth century makes unlikely any continuity between the Apollo cult and previous cults on the site.[64]

In this case, then, we can see that the most likely explanation of a missing element is that the hymn preceded its development, though scholars have been reluctant to accept this. Rejecting Clay's view that in the hymn 'all traces of pre-Olympian

[58] Clay (n. 1), 61ff.

[59] See Fontenrose (n. 41), 366–74.

[60] Or at least of the site; it is possible that there was a previous sanctuary though no previous oracle.

[61] Sourvinou-Inwood (n. 45), 226.

[62] Sourvinou-Inwood (n. 45), 228.

[63] See Morgan (n. 12), 148.

[64] Morgan (n. 12), 107f.; S. Muller, 'Delphi vor Apollon', in M. Maass (ed.), *Delphi: Orakel am Nabel der Welt* (Karlsruhe, 1996), 69–74.

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chthonic and female associations are purged from Delphi in the interests of the Olympian and male' means that we must look elsewhere for an explanation of the Pythia's absence from the hymn. Perhaps a mention of her would be inappropriate in a poem that stresses the power of Apollo and his foundation of the cult himself: it is he who will announce the will of Zeus (132, 252f. = 292f.). Yet the poet does dwell on the Cretan priests, who will serve Apollo and announce his oracles; moreover, the present tense of 394[65] shows that the priests had this role at the time of the hymn's composition. So it is worth considering the idea that the Pythia herself came to Delphi after the hymn's composition.

Probably the first extant mention of the Pythia is in 'Theognis',[66] but this is hard to date as the Theognidean corpus is a collection of poems by various poets.[67] Theognis calls her the *ἐν Πυθῶνι θεοῦ ἱέρεια*; the title Pythia occurs first in Herodotus. This title itself suggests a certain antiquity for her, since the sanctuary was called Pytho before it was called Delphi. The name *Δελφοί* first occurs in h.27 to Artemis, in the phrase *Δελφῶν πίονα δῆμον* (14).

All that the hymn says on the oracle's procedure is that the priests announce the oracles that Apollo speaks, *χρείων ἐκ δάφνης γυάλων ὕπο Παρνησοῖο* (396). The phrase *ἐκ δάφνης γυάλων* suggests that the laurel itself was the source of prophecy.[68] There is an obvious parallel for this in the famous oak at Dodona, which was originally the source of oracles, though we do not know how this worked.[69] In the *Odyssey* the prophecies at Dodona are said to come from the oak, *ἐκ δρυὸς* (14.327–8, 19.296–7); the similarity of the phrase to that in the hymn suggests the procedures may have been parallel.[70] We know from Herodotus that in the fifth century the oracles at Dodona were given by three priestesses.[71] The pattern is similar to that at Delphi: prophecy from a tree at an early period, then a change to a prophetess or prophetesses. That the methods of the two oracles had some similarity is suggested by Plato's pairing of the priestesses at Delphi and Dodona as examples of inspired prophecy.[72] Imitation of one oracle by the other may be involved, since it is fairly clear that there was a rivalry between Dodona and Delphi.[73] Dodona claimed to be the oldest oracle, but Delphi challenged this. Both had legends linking them to the primitive figure Deucalion, who in the Delphic version was the grandfather of Delphus, eponymous founder of Delphi and father of the first

[65] Some MSS have the future here (see Allen, Halliday and Sikes (n. 20), ad loc.) but this does not seriously affect my argument.

[66] 1.807 West.

[67] The mention occurs in a passage addressed to Cyrnus, and so M. L.West, *Iambi et Elegi Graeci ante Alexandrum Cantati* (Oxford, 1971), 212 marks it as the work of Theognis.

[68] Line 293 describes the oracle in a way that sounds more like how Delphi later functioned (I owe this point to the anonymous referee of this article), but this does not invalidate what line 396 clearly says.

[69] See H. W. Parke, *The Oracles of Zeus: Dodona, Olympia, Ammon* (Oxford, 1967), 20–31; R. Janko, *The Iliad: A Commentary. Vol. 4. Books 13–16* (Cambridge, 1992), on *Il.* 16.234–5.

[70] A tree oracle at Delphi is accepted by H. Von Gärtringen, *RE* 4.2 (1901), 2527; O. Kern, *Die Religion der Greichen* (Berlin, 1926), 1.112; Parke and Wormell (n. 7), 3 and 9. Sceptical are: Allen, Halliday and Sikes (n. 20), 254; Amandry (n. 37), 13; Clay (n. 1), 76f. On the laurel at Delphi, see Amandry (n. 37), 126–34; Allen, Halliday and Sikes (n. 20), 254; Sourvinou-Inwood (n. 45), 233ff.

[71] Hdt. 2.52ff. Cf. Parke (n. 69), 52–8.

[72] *Phdr*. 244B. Parke (n. 69), 81ff. is sceptical of this picture of Dodona, but I see no reason to disbelieve what Plato says.

[73] H. W. Parke, *Greek Oracles* (London, 1967), 36–9.

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Pythia.[74] Parke connects the myth of previous owners with this rivalry, seeing in it an attempt to give the Delphic oracle a longer pedigree.[75]

But why the change to a prophetess at all? One long-standing theory connects her arrival with Dionysiac influence at Delphi. This was argued most forcefully in the great works of Rohde and Bouché-Leclercq.[76] They believed that ecstatic prophecy is incompatible with the worship of Apollo; enthusiasm and possession by the god belong to the religion of Dionysus. The Pythia's sex, on this view, is explained by her being in origin a Bacchant, inspired with Dionysiac frenzy. Bouché-Leclerq drew a distinction between 'inductive' divination, based on the observation of signs and omens, and 'intuitive' prophecy, in which the god speaks directly to or through the seer. He claimed that in Homer only inductive divination occurs, and that it is this rational, controlled form of divination that is the domain of Apollo.[77]

The theory of Dionysiac influence on the Pythia rests on the belief that she did prophesy in ecstasy, a belief which has been challenged by Amandry and, more radically, by Fontenrose.[78] Certainly the picture of her frenzy in its most colourful form is only found in late authors, for instance in Lucan.[79] Here we have the chasm and vapours, possession of the priestess by the god, frenzy, incoherent sounds and finally intelligible speech, which is ambiguous and misinterpreted by Appius. This description has been shown to be greatly influenced by Virgil's description of the Sibyl at Cumae[80]; and in general it is no doubt true that perceptions (and possibly performances) of the Pythia were influenced by those of other prophetesses like the Sibyls.

It is noteworthy that in Lucan's description the Pythia eventually speaks sense: there is no support here for the idea of incoherent ravings turned into sense by the priests. Fontenrose is right to reject this theory, which is a rationalising explanation of the oracle's functioning: the responses were produced by priests who made them up to suit their own purposes.[81] In Herodotus, the Pythia is always depicted speaking directly to enquirers;[82] and king Cleomenes of Sparta was accused of bribing the Pythia, not the priests.[83] In fact, no ancient source says that anyone other than the

[74] Dodona and Deucalion: schol. A.T. *Il.* 16.233; *Etym. Mag.* s.v. Δωδωναῖος. Delphi: Parke and Wormell (n. 7), 2, no. 477; Paus. 10.6.2; Plut. *Mor*. 438B. Discussion in Parke (n. 69), 41 ff.

[75] Parke (n. 73), 38. He sees this, though, as a revival of traditions about the earth oracle which in reality preceded Apollo's at Delphi: '[The priests] had seen Delphi's previous occupants as enemies, but now the earth-goddess and her daughter Themis, at least, must be recognized as divine precursors of Apollo.'

[76] A. Bouché-Leclercq, *Histoire de la divination dans l'antiquité* (Paris, 1879), 1.344ff.; E. Rohde, *Psyche: The Cult of Souls and Belief in Immortality among the Greeks*, translated from the 8th German edn. by W. B. Hillis (Ann Arbor and London, 1982), 289–91. Contra: Farnell (n. 42), 190–3; Nilsson, *Geschichte der griechischen Religion* (Munich, 1967), 1.517; K. Latte, 'The coming of the Pythia', *HThR* 33 (1940), 9–13; Dodds (n. 37), 68–70; Parke and Wormell (n. 7), 1.11–13.

[77] The distinction goes back to Plato (*Phdr.* 244), and became common in ancient philosophy: cf. e.g. Cic. *Div.* 1.6: *Duo sunt enim divinandi genera, quorum alterum artis est, alterum naturae.* W. R. Halliday, *Greek Divination: A Study of its Methods and Principles* (London, 1913), 54–8, expresses some reservations about the distinction.

[78] Amandry (n. 37); Fontenrose (n. 37). The Pythia's ecstasy is defended by R. Flacelière, 'Le délire de la Pythie est-il une légende?', *REA* 52 (1950), 306–24 (a response to Amandry); a good criticism of Fontenrose is the review of his book by N. Robertson, *Phoenix* 36 (1982), 358–63.

[79] *De Bello Civili* 5.169–218.

[80] Amandry (n. 37), 21 and 237f.; Fontenrose (n. 37), 210.

[81] Fontenrose (n. 37), 6 and 204ff.

[82] E.g. Hdt. 1.47, 4.156, 5.92.2.

[83] Hdt. 6.66.

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Pythia issued oracular responses.[84] But Fontenrose goes too far in claiming that the Pythia was always calm and in a normal state; that she spoke clearly, in prose and without ambiguity; that she was not thought to be possessed by the god; and that she only gave 'yes' or 'no' answers to the questions put to her. This necessitates rejecting as unhistorical all the famous oracles in Herodotus. One might respond that, even if they are not actual responses, they show what was expected of Delphi. Fontenrose denies even this, claiming that the oracle never had a reputation for ambiguity, and that the oracles in Herodotus are connected with a 'popular tradition' totally unrelated to real Delphic responses. This leaves us with a picture of the Pythia and the oracle's functioning that may be rational, but makes the process of consultation about as exciting and mysterious as telephoning the speaking clock. It ignores the mystery of divination, the difficulties of communication between men and gods, the impenetrability of the future and the inscrutability of the will of Zeus.[85]

The knowledge of the future vouchsafed to men is never clear and unambiguous; it is cryptic, conditional, ambiguous.[86] The most important evidence for the Pythia's ecstasy, and for inspired prophecy in general, is the passage in Plato's *Phaedrus* about prophetic madness.[87] This is one of the four types of madness he distinguishes, and he says that its patron is Apollo (note that it is distinct from ritual madness, whose patron is Dionysus). He says: 'The prophetess at Delphi and the priestesses at Dodona in their madness have done great service to Greece, both to states and individuals, but in their right minds nothing.' There is nothing remarkable about the Pythia herself, as this passage suggests and as Plutarch later stressed; it is only when the god speaks through her that her words are inspired.[88]

On the Pythia's ecstasy, then, it seems best to take a balanced view. She may not have raved in the manner described by Lucan, but she was certainly thought to be possessed by the god and in an abnormal state.[89] We do not know exactly how she prophesied, and Price sensibly remarks: 'I do not feel that it is a worthwhile enterprise to seek to discover some deeper explanation at the level of the mental state of the Pythia.'[90]

[84] This is emphasized by L. Maurizio, 'Anthropology and spirit possession: a reconsideration of the Pythia's role at Delphi', *JHS* 115 (1995), 69–86. The whole article stresses the centrality of the Pythia's role, and criticizes various theories that make her subordinate or marginal in the process of consultation.

[85] Maurizio (n. 84), 81f. points out that in various cultures the utterances of diviners are marked out as special by using unintelligible, poetic or ambiguous language. This helps to guarantee that the words are really from the gods, and not just the diviner's invention.

[86] Cf. e.g. J. S.Clay, *The Wrath of Athena: Gods and Men in the Odyssey* (Princeton, 1983), 148–54. C. Sourvinou-Inwood (*OCD*[3] s.v. 'Delphic oracle') rightly comments that ambiguous responses at Delphi were 'not an attempt to hedge their bets, but a result of the ambiguity inherent in the god's signs and the Greek perception that ambiguity is the idiom of prophecy, that there are limits to man's access to knowledge about the future: the god speaks ambiguously, and human fallibility intervenes and may misinterpret the messages'.

[87] See n. 72 above.

[88] Plut. *De Pyth. or.* 405C.

[89] Dodds (n. 37), 70f. comments, 'The god entered into her and used her vocal cords as if they were his own ... that is why Apollo's Delphic utterances are always couched in the first person, never in the third.' On this last point, see Parke and Wormell (n. 7), 2.xxiif. This is also supported by what Parke and Wormell call 'the mixture of familiarity and contempt with which the god replies to his interrogators'. This is typical of the way gods address mortals – see Richardson (n. 28), 243f.

[90] Price (n. 36), 141.

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It seems unlikely that the Pythia was frenzied in the manner of a Bacchant, and this makes Dionysiac influence less probable. In any case, her prophesying is always linked with Apollo, not Dionysus. Dodds points out that mantic elements are not important in Dionysiac cult. 'Mediumship', he states, 'is the rare gift of chosen individuals; Dionysiac experience is essentially collective or congregational'; and 'the two great Dionysiac techniques—the use of wine and the use of the religious dance—have no part whatever in the induction of Apolline ecstasy.'[91]

Nor is it true that inspired prophecy is incompatible with Apollo. This belief is based on the distinction, drawn most famously by Nietzsche, between the rational, controlled religion of Apollo and the emotional, unrestrained religion of Dionysus.[92] This has no ancient support. In Plato's discussion of divine madness, he says that Apollo is the patron of prophetic madness, and Dionysus of ritual madness. Inspired prophets or prophetesses are found also at the Apolline oracles at Didyma (Branchidae), Claros and Patara (all in Asia Minor),[93] and also at Ptoios in Boeotia.[94] Apollo is also associated with inspired prophetesses such as the Sibyl and Cassandra, whose frenzy is depicted in Aeschylus' *Agamemnon*.

Many of these prophetesses are from Asia Minor, and the Sibyl seems to have originated there.[95] Ecstatic prophecy seems to have been practised from an early date in Western Asia,[96] so it has been suggested that it was imported to Greece from Asia.[97] This is linked, by Latte among others, to the theory of Apollo's Asiatic origins.[98] The inspired priestesses of Apollo may well show some Near Eastern influence; but Apollo's origins are too complex to be traced back to one area, though there are Asiatic elements in his developed personality. It is not certain that he was a latecomer among the Greek gods; he is certainly well established in Homer and may have been a Greek god since Mycenaean times (though his name has not yet been found on Linear B tablets).[99] Robertson, in his review of Fontenrose's book on the oracle, remarks: 'The myth of his sudden advent and conquest should be taken in the same sense as the myths of Dionysus, as illustrating the god's power, not as reflecting historical events.'[100]

Moreover, Halliday and Bouché-Leclerq both believe that intuitive prophecy developed before inductive.[101] If this is so, why should the Greeks have reversed the normal process? Homer's silence is not conclusive: it is well known that Homer

[91] Dodds (n. 37), 69. On Dionysus and Delphi, see H. Jeanmaire, *Dionysos: histoire du culte de Bacchus* (Paris, 1951), 137–98 and 492f.; Amandry (n. 37), 196–200; Fontenrose (n. 41), 374–94; Parke and Wormell (n. 7), 1.11–13; J. S. Clay, 'Fusing the boundaries: Apollo and Dionysos at Delphi', *Metis* 11 (1996), 83–100.

[92] F. Nietzsche, *Die Geburt der Tragödie aus dem Geiste der Musik* (Leipzig, 1872). See Latte (n.76), 9ff.

[93] H. W. Parke, *The Oracles of Apollo in Asia Minor* (London, 1985).

[94] Hdt. 8.135.

[95] Parke (n. 73) 49–55.; H. W. Parke, *Sibyls and Sibylline Prophecy in Classical Antiquity* (London and New York, 1988).

[96] See Dodds (n. 37), 69 and 86, n. 31; W. Burkert, *Greek Religion* (Oxford, 1985), 116.

[97] So Nilsson (n. 76), 1.547, 561; W. Nestle, *Vom Mythos zum Logos* (Aalen, 1966), 60; Burkert (n. 96), 116; id., *Die orientalisierende Epoche in der griechischen Religion und Literatur* (Heidelberg, 1984), 77–9; M. L.West, *The East Face of Helicon* (Oxford, 1997), 46–51.

[98] Latte (n. 76); U. von Wilamowitz-Möllendorf, *Hermes* 38 (1903), 575ff.; Nilsson (n. 76), 1.559–64.

[99] Paean (pa-ja-wo), regularly associated with Apollo, does appear in Linear B.

[100] Robertson (n. 78), 362.

[101] Halliday (n. 77), 55f.; Bouché-Leclerq (n. 76).

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ignores many 'primitive' religious practices. In any case, is it true that, as Nilsson claims, 'Die ekstatische Mantik fehlt bei Homer'?[102] There are certainly cases of prophecy without the aid of signs, notably Teiresias in *Od.* 11. An example of more 'ecstatic' divination is the vision of Theoclymenus (*Od.* 20.350ff.).[103] Another argument against the late development of ecstatic prophecy among the Greeks is the linguistic connection, made by Plato, of μαντική and μανία, which is generally accepted by modern philologists.[104]

So explanations of the Pythia's arrival as connected with the late development of inspired prophecy—Dionysiac or Asiatic—are unconvincing. Parke suggests that the change to a prophetess may have occurred in conjunction with the use of the previous owners' myth to give Delphi a longer pedigree.[105] On this view, the female prophet would suit an earth oracle, and so the Delphic priests could claim that she was a legacy of that oracle. This implies, however, that a female prophet would be seen as more compatible with an earth oracle than an Apolline oracle, which I have already denied.

None of the theories about the Pythia's 'arrival' that I have discussed so far is wholly satisfactory. All of them discuss the development in terms of the Apollo cult; but recent research on the oracle has stressed that it cannot be seen in isolation from the Greek states it served.[106] It was created to serve their needs, and any change in its methods would be due to the fact that the new method was more suited to this. Morgan shows how the oracle arose to deal with the problems which states were facing in the eighth century, a period of rapid change that brought new difficulties for which old methods of problem-solving and decision-making may have been inadequate. This is earlier than the period I am suggesting for the Pythia's arrival, but the sort of changes and problems that Morgan talks about continued throughout the seventh and early sixth centuries. She herself argues that the oracle probably did not exist until the late eighth century, and only a few states consulted it at such an early stage. The main subjects of consultation in the seventh century were colonisation and changes in the political organisation of states, as with the traditions of Delphic involvement in the Lycurgan reforms in Sparta. There are also many recorded oracles relating to the rise and fall of various tyrants.[107] So it is possible that there was originally a tree oracle, as at Dodona, and then the pressure of rapid changes and more widespread consultation of the oracle led to developments at Delphi, most notably the arrival of the Pythia. We do not know how the tree oracle would have worked, but the sort of responses it could give must have been limited—perhaps only 'yes' or 'no' answers to questions. Inspired prophecy, in which the god speaks directly through the prophetess, can clearly offer much more: it shows the superiority of speech over external signs as a means of communication. You need not be a specialist

[102] Nilsson (n. 76), 1.561.

[103] Cf. Dodds (n. 37), 20f.

[104] P. Chantraine, *Dictionnaire étymologique de la langue grecque* (Paris, 1968–81), and H. Frisk, *Griechisches etymologisches Wörterbuch* (Heidelberg, 1960–70), s.v. μάντις both accept this.

[105] Parke (n. 73), 39.

[106] See R. Parker, 'Greek states and Greek oracles', in P. A. Cartledge and F. D. Harvey (edd.), *Crux: Essays Presented to G. E. M. de Ste. Croix on his 75th Birthday* (Exeter, 1985) [now also in R. G. Buxton (ed.), *Oxford Readings in Greek Religion* (Oxford, 2000), 76–108]; Morgan (n. 12), ch. 5; id. in N. Marinatos and R. Hägg (edd.), *Greek Sanctuaries: New Approaches* (London and New York, 1993), 18–44; I. Malkin, 'Delphoi and the founding of social order in archaic Greece', *Metis* 4 (1989), 129–53.

[107] For the history of all this, see Parke and Wormell (n. 7), 1.50–125; Malkin (n. 106).

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to interpret the message—its meaning was open to rational debate, as in the case of the famous 'wooden walls' oracle given to the Athenians.[108]

As I argued above, I am sceptical of the theory that inspired prophecy came late to Greece; but it may have been a relatively late development at oracles. Most oracles, in Greece and elsewhere, work by types of 'inductive' divination from signs, for example the drawing of lots. This type of divination, being more systematized, seems natural for an oracle expected to give responses on a regular basis. Intuitive divination, on the other hand, seems to be the gift of particular individuals, seers like Teiresias or Cassandra. There is something spontaneous and incalculable about it. Yet the Pythia prophesied not as a specially gifted individual but in virtue of her office; she was expected to prophesy whenever the oracle functioned. This 'institutionalising' of intuitive prophecy may have contributed to Delphi's success, and may have replaced an earlier, more basic form of oracle.

So, while there may have been a Pythia at Delphi from the beginning, the Homeric hymn certainly suggests otherwise.[109] Its evidence on this and other points has been undervalued by a tendency not to believe what it says, but to read later developments into it, as when it is claimed that the mention of the dragon-slaying shows the poet knew of the previous owners. Perhaps Delphi did not spring into being fully armed; perhaps at the time of the hymn's composition the Pythia, the story of the previous owners, and some other familiar features of Delphic myth and cult, were still in the future.

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[108] See J.-P.Vernant, 'Paroles et signes muets', in J.-P. Vernant *et al.* (edd.), *Divination et rationalité* (Paris, 1974), 9–25; Parker (n. 106), 301f.; Price (n. 36), 146ff.

[109] Later Greeks certainly attributed the earliest known responses to the Pythia, but may simply have been projecting the system they knew into the past (assuming that these earliest responses are probably not historical). Parke and Wormell (n. 7), 5 comment that 'The *Homeric Hymn* … implied that the method of prophecy used there was similar to that of Dodona: both Aeschylus and Euripides, writing in the fifth century, attribute to primeval times the same methods as used at Delphi in their own day.'

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