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SEEKING ADVICE FROM ZEUS AT DODONA*

The consultation of fixed oracles was a central and well-documented feature of ancient Greek life; Greece ought therefore to be able to contribute important evidence to anyone interested in the function of divination in different cultures. But, although no oracle is more famous than that of Apollo at Delphi, so many central questions about its operations are unanswerable that it provides a very shaky basis for comparison. A few points are secure: not only individuals but also states put enquiries to the oracle; and public enquiries related to matters of religious practice and cult, but also on occasion to colonizing projects, alliances, or declarations of war. Beyond these generalities, however, almost everything is contestable. Even the statement just made about public enquiries requires some hedging. On matters of cult they certainly never ceased: in a religion without revelation and specialized religious institutions, the direct access to divine will supposedly provided by the oracle was indispensable to authorize change, or to suggest ritual remedies in a time of crisis such as plague. But the extent to which public enquiries on military and political matters continued to be made after the fifth century is very uncertain.[1]

A central difficulty in assessing how the oracle operated and was used is the very different picture given by our two main early sources, Herodotus and Thucydides.[2] For Herodotus, Apollo answered enquirers through his mouthpiece, the Pythia, in hexameter verse,

* Abbreviations of classical texts are taken from S. Hornblower and A. Spawforth (eds.), *The Oxford Classical Dictionary*, fourth edition (Oxford, 2012). The tablets cited in what follows are edited by E. Lhôte, *Les Lamelles oraculaires de Dodone* (Geneva, 2006) and S. Dakaris, J. Vokotopoulou, and A. P. Christidis, *Τα Χρηστήρια Ἐλάσματα της Δωδώνης των ἀνασκαφών Δ. Ευαγγελίδη*, 2 volumes (Athens, 2013). I cite responses from these as Lhôte no. X and DVC X. All translations are my own.

[1] Contrast R. Parker, 'Greek States and Greek Oracles', in R. Buxton (ed.), *Oxford Readings in Greek Religion* (Oxford, 2000), 101–5; H. Bowden, *Classical Athens and the Delphic Oracle* (Cambridge, 2005), 152–9.

[2] See above all J. Fontenrose, *The Delphic Oracle* (Berkeley, CA, 1978); for a strong defence of the authenticity of the verse form as reported in Herodotus, see M. Flower, *The Seer in Ancient Greece* (Berkeley, CA 2008), 215–39.

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typically of riddling character. In contrast, the answers given in Thucydides are in prose, and are usually straightforward. Just one is a riddle, but a riddle easy to solve: the Spartans are told to 'bring home the seed of the semi-divine descendant of Heracles', namely to restore an exiled king. Otherwise they would 'plough with a silver ploughshare': that is, suffer famine (Thuc. 5.16.2). The few responses recorded in inscriptions are in unambiguous prose. What is at issue is not just whether the verse form was used or not, but the whole reliability of the portrayal of the oracle in Herodotus. Again, the oracle in Herodotus occasionally responds with spectacular unpredictability: requests from powerful figures are rebuffed, orders are issued that bear no relation to the question asked: Battos comes to Delphi seeking a cure for a stammer, and is told to found a colony in Cyrene (4.155.3). Thucydides' oracle is in the main a much more comfortable institution to have dealings with: states that have decided on a course of action seek and receive from the oracle an assurance that it will turn out well (1.118.3; 3.92.5). (The one exception to this tendency is again the riddling oracle mentioned above: for a certain period, public Spartan enquiries on any matter whatsoever were, it is said, met with the instruction to bring home the seed of the semi-divine descendant of Heracles.)

An account of the oracle based on Herodotus will sound quite different from one based on Thucydides, and a satisfactory via media has yet to be found. Many of the hexameter oracles in Herodotus are manifestly post-eventum fabrications, storytellers having been at work on many of the traditions he records;[3] but it is not easy to suppose that a Greek who knew Delphi as well as did Herodotus could be giving a wholly imaginary account of the oracle's workings. How, then, do we explain the discrepancy from Thucydides? As for the oracle's dealings with private clients, our sources tell us almost nothing.[4]

Fortunately, there is much firmer evidence from a different oracle, that of Zeus Naios at Dodona in north-west Greece.[5] From the sixth to perhaps the mid-second century one mode of consultation required clients to write down their enquiries on lead question tablets, and these

[3] R. Crahay, *La Littérature oraculaire chez Hérodote* (Paris, 1956).

[4] For what can be done, see E. Eidinow, *Oracles, Curses, and Risk Among the Ancient Greeks* (Oxford, 2007), 45–9, 50–3.

[5] See ibid., 56–71. Some Dodona responses also occur in literature, usually suffering from the same narrative elaboration that makes the Delphic material so problematic; for the few that are more reliable see H. W. Parke, *The Oracles of Zeus* (Oxford, 1967), 83–6, 137–43, 149.

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have been found in large numbers in the excavations; a much smaller number of tablets apparently bear answers.[6] This material, too, poses many problems. The tablets, often fragmentary, are difficult to read and to date; many were re-used and contain a jumble of several questions. Some are too elliptical to be clear to us even when perfectly legible.[7] My approach in what follows will be cautious; mere possibilities will mostly be ignored, even if the result is to confine the clients to a somewhat more restricted range of questions than they in fact posed. I shall also ignore questions of chronology; though it is very implausible that preoccupations did not change over four centuries, no patterns have so far emerged. Despite these difficulties, the material from Dodona gives us direct access to the concerns of enquirers entirely free from narrative elaboration; and the great mass of it, consisting of enquiries from private individuals, surely gives a much more accurate picture of the typical business of a Greek oracle than the issues of high politics submitted to Delphi in the pages of Herodotus and Thucydides.

The interest of this material has not gone unnoticed, and was well exploited recently by Esther Eidinow in a study that concentrated, rightly, less on the old problem of how the questions were answered than on the more tractable and more interesting one of the concerns of the enquirers.[8] A quirk of the publication history of the sanctuary, however, has transformed the situation. Tablets were found both in the first excavations at the sanctuary by Carapanos in 1875–7 and, in much larger numbers, in those of Evangelidis in 1928–32, 1935, and 1952–9. Most of Carapanos' finds were soon published, except a large cache which were apparently stolen from him;[9] of Evangelidis' finds, some of the more legible and tempting items were published here and there over the years, but systematic work on a publication

[6] Lhôte (acknowledgement note), 11–15, argues that no tablet postdates the Roman attack and destruction of 167; for Strabo 7.7.10 (327), writing a century and a half after that, the oracle was almost extinct. But *SEG* 28, no. 530, is an iron strigil inscribed with a flattering oracle in verse delivered to the pirate king Zeniketes (died 74 BC); the strigil was presumably dedicated by him at the sanctuary.

[7] A few examples from early in the collection: 'better for me acquiring a wife/woman?' (wife or slave?), DVC 19; 'will the guardianship which I Lykkidas now have be lucky for me?' (guardianship of what?), DVC 31; 'the iron pieces [coins?] of Philotis justly?', DVC 36.

[8] See Eidinow (n. 4), 72–138. Some of the contents of DVC were made available to Eidinow by Christidis in provisional form, but without the drawings that allow some control over readings. On the basis of these I have drawn back from some of Christidis' suggestions that she accepts.

[9] They are now in the Charlottenburg in Berlin, and their condition is so poor that they may be unusable (Lhôte [acknowledgement note], 7); only one has ever been published.

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began only in the 1980s and, tragically delayed by the successive deaths of the three editors, was completed only in 2013. A 2006 edition of the tablets hitherto known contained 167 items; the two volumes and over a thousand pages of the 2013 publication have 4,216.[10] Thus the material far exceeds in quantity that of the questions to oracles in demotic, Greek, and eventually Coptic from Egypt, comparable – and interestingly different – though they are in many ways.[11] The figure of 4,216 is admittedly somewhat misleading, not just because a single tablet may contribute several numbers (if written on both sides and bearing several distinct questions) but more importantly because many, in fact the vast majority, of the new texts are too fragmentary to provide any useful information. All the same, enough and more than enough that is new has emerged to demand fresh study. This study, too, is provisional: most of the finds from Evangelidis' second campaign of excavations (1952–9) and its continuation by Dakaris have still to be published.[12]

The issue to be addressed is that of how clients used, and were allowed to use, the oracle. Though oracular gods supposedly knew everything, individuals and states in antiquity did not in fact consult oracles about every possible fact, event, or problem. In this, as in all other areas of life, behaviour was governed by traditions and unstated conventions, some of which will probably, from time to time, have been insisted on by the authorities in charge of the oracular shrines. Herodotus tells the story of a Spartan who consulted the oracle at Delphi about the possibility of refusing under oath to return money left on deposit with him by a guest friend. Apollo supposedly issued a terrible rebuke, and the family of the unfortunate enquirer was blotted out root and branch. That exemplary story is likely to originate in

[10] See acknowledgement note above.

[11] Demotic: see E. Bresciani, *L'archivio demotico del tempio di Soknopaiu Nesos* (Milan, 1975), nos. 1–12; G. Martin, 'Questions to the Gods: Demotic Oracle Texts from Dimê', in F. Hoffmann and H. J. Thissen (eds.), *Res severa verum gaudium* (Leuven, 2004), 413–26. Greek: L. Papini, 'Domande oracolari: elenco delle attestazioni in greco ed in copto', *Analecta Papyrologica* 4 (1992), 21–7; G. Messeri Savorelli and R. Pintaudi, 'Due domande oracolari in greco', *ZPE* 111 (1996), 183–7, with the corrigendum in *ZPE* 117 (1997), 211–12. Coptic: A. Papaconstantinou, 'Oracles chrétiens dans l'Egypte byzantine: le témoignage des papyrus', *ZPE* 104 (1994), 281–6. For an overview, see G. Tallet, 'Oracles', in C. Riggs (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Roman Egypt* (Oxford, 2012), 398–418.

[12] Also, some published by Evangelidis from the earlier excavations seem not to reappear in DVC, e.g. Lhôte nos. 25 and 27. J. Méndez Dosuna, 'Novedades en el oráculo de Dodona: a propósito de une reciente monografía de Éric Lhôte', *Minerva* 21 (2008), 53, speaks of a total of approximately 8,000.

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policing by the sanctuary of the boundaries of legitimate questioning: oracles would not sanction breaches of fundamental rules of behaviour (Hdt. 6.86). The question 'Who or what is god?', put to the oracle of Apollo at Claros in Asia Minor in the second century AD, is in a different way an extraordinary breach of the conventions that until then had governed oracular consultation. One went to oracular gods with practical questions, not to find answers to the ultimate mysteries of being.[13] Whether such a question in earlier centuries would have been disallowed, or whether it was just understood that one did not ask such things, is not demonstrable, but the fact is clear.

Details of the question formulas that are used need not concern us, but one aspect is relevant. A typical question runs 'Apollodorus asks Zeus Naios and Diona [the gods of the oracle] about trading, whether he would be successful as a shipowner?' (DVC 167). But that could easily have appeared as 'Apollodorus about trading, whether he would be successful as a shipowner?' or even as 'about trading, whether he would be successful as a shipowner?' Such forms are clearly still questions. Many tablets bear a still more abbreviated indication: 'X about Y' or even just 'about Y'. The brevity cannot be due to physical damage to the tablet in every case. Occasionally it is certain that the very brief form is a label indicating the content of a question written more fully on the other side: in one clear case, 'on sheep keeping' is written on one side of a tablet which on the other bears the question 'Kleoutas asks Zeus and Diona whether it is profitable and beneficial for him to keep sheep' (Lhôte no. 80).[14] But often there is ambiguity whether we are faced with a label or an enigmatically brief question. One might think that 'Painless well-being for himself and his brother and his mother' (DVC 1359) and 'Of the well-being of his child, himself, his wife' (DVC 1093) should be mere labels, since the questioner is not identified; but there is no trace of a fuller question, nor of an associable name, on the other side of either tablet. The belief that explicitness was not necessary because the god would know without it is occasionally attested at Dodona, as in other oracular contexts: 'By praying to what god would he accomplish what he has in mind?'

[13] Lhôte's rendering of a fragmentary tablet (his no. 31) '[est-il bon pour Untel] de rechercher ce qui est vrai' ('[is it good for such and such a person] to enquire about what is true') will therefore be viewed with scepticism. For the question at Claros, see R. Lane Fox, *Pagans and Christians* (Harmondsworth, 1986), 168–77, 191–6.

[14] For other clear cases, see Lhôte nos. 84, 103 (and his discussion, p. 354); DVC 35 with 37.

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(Lhôte no. 67).[15] Or perhaps a priest took note of the person submitting the tablet; we know almost nothing of what happened to the tablets after they were written except that they were available for re-use.

I turn to the questions posed. Plutarch (*De Pyth. or.* 28, 408c) cites as typical of the humdrum enquiries put to the oracle at Delphi in his own day 'Should I marry, should I sail, should I lend money?'[16] His examples illustrate the crucial general principle that one normally consulted an oracle when faced with an important decision, not as a way of peeling back the veil from the future. Questions of the form 'Will I fare well if I do such and such?' are formally questions about what will happen, but in practice relate to and guide a decision. A slight modification is needed for enquiries that seek advice on what god or hero to honour in order to fare better or to continue to fare well. That form of question is extremely common both from individuals and communities; indeed the two main forms of question can be tagged as 'To what god or hero…?' and 'Should I/will I succeed if I…?'[17] 'To what god or hero?' is sometimes asked in relation to specific problems or issues (to have offspring, to get well), but quite often more vaguely: 'the Corcyraeans and Oricians ask Zeus Naios and Diona what god or hero they should sacrifice and pray to in order to live in their city best and most securely and in order to have fair crops and abundant crops and enjoyment of all the good crops' (Lhôte no. 2), or, at the individual level, 'God. Luck. Euklis has come to consult the oracle about the health and well-being of himself and his household and his property, by sacrificing and praying to what god would he fare better?' (DVC 2242). There is still in these cases a decision to be made by the enquirer, about the appropriate divine powers to honour, but not one arising immediately from the processes of everyday life. Several such enquiries are preserved from Corcyra (Lhôte nos. 1–4), and it is plausible that states routinely made them from time to time to ensure that their ritual system was in order. The same may have been true of individuals, though it is obviously possible that such enquiries were also sometimes a product of particular periods of difficulty or crisis in

[15] See also Lhôte nos. 53Bb(?), 135; DVC 123, 3661(?). Cf. Hdt. 5.43; Xen. *Hell.* 3.1.6.

[16] More fully in *De E apud Delphos* 4, 386c: 'Will they marry, will they win, if it's beneficial to sail, farm, go abroad'. In portions of the *Theophaneia* surviving in Syriac, Eusebius accuses pagans of asking only about marriage, travel, blindness, disease (Euseb. *Theophaneia*, 50.12–4, in *Die Theophanie*, ed. H. Gressmann [Leipzig, 1904], 103), run away slaves, lost pots, land deals, trade, marriage and such like (Euseb. *Theophaneia* 52.28–31 in ibid., 104).

[17] So Lhôte (acknowledgements note), 336.

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individual lives. We can note these attempts to secure ritual reassurance as partial exceptions to the general rule that oracular consultation was part of a process of decision-making. Some other exceptions will appear below.

Public enquiries

Before the publication of the new corpus, private enquiries outnumbered public by a factor of 9 to 1 (150 to 17), and the disproportion is now even greater: just 32 of 4,216 enquiries in the new material are tentatively seen as public.[18] These statistics mean very little, since it is possible that a vehicle other than the little lead tablet was used to put major public enquiries to the oracle. The only valid conclusion is the positive one that oracular consultation was highly important in the lives of individuals. The public enquiries attested in literary sources tend to come from the big players of Greek history, Athens and Sparta. None such has yet appeared on a tablet found at the site, and it will be doubly surprising if the editors are right to associate a new tablet (DVC 3160), which they read as 'Of lord Dareios' (a label?), with Dareios II, great king of Persia from 424–405 BC: the evidence for Persian consultation of Greek oracles in general is thin, of Dodona in particular non-existent, and it would be strange to find a question from the most powerful man of his day inscribed on a scrap of lead and then thrown away.[19]

The most frequent consultants are the local community, the Dodonaians: a question 'the Dodonaians ask Zeus and Diona whether it is because of some man's impurity that the god is causing the storm' (Lhôte no. 14) shows that they could turn to the oracle about immediate and short-term problems (though perhaps with a view to preventing the recurrence of 'storms' by eliminating the pollution).[20] The same phenomenon is observable at Delphi. Far from being cynical about their oracle, the residents of the place are its most enthusiastic clients. What also emerges from the tablets is the regional importance of the oracle for other communities of northern Greece: we now have public enquiries from the 'community (*koinon*) of the Mondaiatai' and Pherai

[18] See the commentary on DVC 191.
[19] Equally doubtful is the identification of the Tharyps of 2148 with a Molossian king.
[20] Other instances are DVC 268(?), 295, 1089, 2425, 2519, 2952.

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in Thessaly (Lhôte no. 8b; DVC 2940), from about nine Illyrian or Epirote communities or collectives,[21] from Corcyra (Lhôte 1–4), and even from Tarentum across the Adriatic (Lhôte 5).

A majority of the public enquiries are of the 'ritual reassurance' kind discussed above. Once the Corcyraeans refocus the familiar request by asking 'how they might be of one mind for the good' (Lhôte no. 3); but the answer that they wish for the political problem is still in terms of 'by sacrificing to what god or hero?' Two questions seek sanction for transactions concerning property of gods, [22] and several concern 'signs';[23] among these the most remarkable is the one quoted above which suggests a connection between bad weather (a kind of sign or portent) and human pollution. 'The goddess chooses Oreandra as attendant' (DVC 70) implies that the choice of religious personnel could be referred to the oracle, doubtless from a short list. A few questions are more directly political: an unknown community asks whether it would be safe to enter into political union with the Molossians (Lhôte no. 9) ; more dramatically, 'the Dodonaians ask the god whether it is safe to stay [where they are] for themselves and their property' (DVC 2425). We have no clue as to the danger that provoked this drastic though not unprecedented suggestion for relocation.[24] Another fragmentary tablet reads 'Gods. The –esmaioi ask whether there is [ ] to their own (land)'. If we supply the missing word as 'return', as the run of the phrase strongly suggests, we will have the converse of the previous question (unless, slightly differently, the –esmaioi are an exiled sub-group within a city). Most appealing of all to the imaginative is a fragmentary tablet of the mid-fourth century, possibly written in a Thessalian dialect, which speaks of a 'plot of Philip' (DVC 191). Demosthenes never tired of denouncing the 'plots' of the great Philip II, father of Alexander; but we have no certainty that this question was posed by a city at all.

[21] Kassopaioi(?) DVC 363; Genoaioi(?) DVC 1042; Thronion DVC 1184; Bulliones DVC 2364 = Lhôte no. 7; Chaones Lhôte no. 11; Phanote DVC 3822; the Epirotic league(?) DVC 3977; Athamanians DVC 4016; Molossians DVC 4195. There are also the –esmaioi (Lhôte no. 13) and perhaps an otherwise unknown community of Dexaireatai (DVC 1070).

[22] Lhôte no. 8b, about lending a goddess' money; Lhôte no. 11, about moving a temple.

[23] DVC 268, 1089, 1834(?), 2519.

[24] N. H. Demand, *Urban Relocation in Archaic and Classical Greece. Flight and Consolidation* (Bristol, 1990); Lhôte no. 12 is apparently similar. John Ma points out to me that the situation might be one in which the Dodonaians have already withdrawn with their property to a stronghold and are wondering about staying there: see also H. Müller, 'Φυγῆς ἕνεκεν', *Chiron* 5 (1975), 129–56.

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One enquiry is put by what is apparently a board of officials, *Diaitoi* ('arbitrators'), presumably from within Dodona (DVC 1368 = Lhôte no. 16). It has something to do with the just use (in the past) of public money, thus hinting tantalizingly at an unexpected role for the oracle in public audit, but it remains isolated. (The *Diaitoi* appear also in an obscure question in the new collection (DVC 548), but it is probably posed by an individual about them, not by them; individuals also seem to ask whether they should seek arbitration [DVC 1015 = Lhôte no. 159, 2284(?)]).

Private enquiries

I cited above Plutarch's characterization of routine oracular business as 'Should I marry, should I sail, should I lend money?' Doctors' surgeries occasionally contain notices that restrict patients to enquiries about a single ailment per visit, but, if any such restriction existed at Dodona, it was not always observed. One of the new tablets (DVC 2367) runs:

God. Good luck. Epilytos asks Zeus Naios and Diona by doing what he would be successful and by sacrificing to what god and whether I should practice the trade which I was trained in or turn to another and whether I will get it if he attempts it[25] and whether I should take Phainomena as wife or another woman and whether indeed I should take a wife (now) or wait.

A Boeotian couple ask (DVC 313):

God. Good Luck. From Boukolos and Polymnaste. By doing [? here = 'sacrificing'] what would they have health and offspring and male offspring and a son who would survive and guarantee [?][26] of their property and enjoyment of what they have?[27]

Those two questions cover most of the commonest preoccupations of enquirers: profession/business activities (often involving travel), marriage, health, offspring, property and its preservation. Two of the commonest labels probably indicating the content of questions are 'about σωτηρία', literally 'safety, salvation, being kept safe' but in fact a very broad concept perhaps best rendered 'well-being', and 'about

[25] Such fluctuations between first and third person are common in the tablets. What 'it' is here is unclear.

[26] ἐπιγγ[ύ]ασις, a strange word in this context.

[27] Lhôte no. 52 is another multi-purpose question.

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παμπασία', a word meaning etymologically 'total possessions' which is little known outside Dodona but pervasive there: whether it has a more specific force is uncertain, but the reference is certainly broadly to property.[28] Banal and predictable everyday concerns, therefore, but the tablets bring precision, shading, and some unexpected perspectives.

Plutarch's 'Should I marry?' question, posed by men, is extremely common.[29] A potential bride is sometimes named (the polite Greek convention that respectable women should be spoken of anonymously did not apply in this context), sometimes not.[30] How often in the latter case the enquirer had a particular woman in view is unknowable;[31] Epilytos in the complex question quoted above asks both whether a particular woman is the one and more generally whether the time is right, while another asks 'whether it will be better and more advantageous for me if I marry *now*' (DVC 210; similarly 2223). A question 'and will I have offspring?' is sometimes added.[32] There is just one possible instance of a timid 'Will I get her if I ask [her father, presumably]?' (DVC 2474). No enquiry by a potential bride survives, unless one is implied by two enigmatic questions: 'the other?', 'another?' (both male; DVC 544, 1072). But at least two fathers ask about marriage for their daughters, again with or without identifying a potential husband; one adds a question about offspring.[33] Less clearly there may also be one or more such questions by mothers about their daughters.[34]

The many questions that run simply 'Another (woman)?' or 'Shall I/should he seek another (woman)?' are also problematic.[35] In the

[28] See the commentaries to DVC 24 and 203 for lists. For the related word παγκλαρία ('whole portion', of property), see the note on DVC 45.

[29] The note on DVC 1 lists more than a hundred possibly related questions.

[30] Questions where the bride is named: e.g. Lhôte no. 22 Ba; DVC 165, 208, 449 (with splendid brevity: 'Archedamos [to wed] Timokleia, better?'), 999, 1127, 2052 (the Epidamnian woman), 2470. Questions where the bride is not named: e.g. Lhote nos. 22 Bb, 25; DVC 328 (combined with a question about property), 1352, 1356, 2506, 3487 (combined with a question about 'going home'). The gender of the enquirer of DVC 244 ('Should I cohabit or not?') is unclear.

[31] Except in Lhôte no. 53 Bb, if rightly supplemented to give 'the woman I have in mind'; cf. perhaps Lhôte nos. 26 (note the article) and 135.

[32] DVC 2387; cf. DVC 4161: 'If I marry, will I get a male child who will survive?'

[33] DVC 2508 and Lhôte no. 39 (on which see Méndez Dosuna, 'Novedades en el oráculo de Dodona', 62). To these could possibly be added Lhôte no. 53 Ac and DVC 1302.

[34] DVC 1208: 'Pitthis. Would it be better if she [betrothed] Thebais her daughter. . .'; this is a probable example, though 'Thebais' is wrongly written in the nominative instead of the accusative case. See also perhaps DVC 2413, 3113.

[35] Lhote nos. 29, 30 (= DVC 1), 33–34; DVC 1407 and 2322 are clear and apparently complete instances. DVC 465, 1033, and 2539 may be fragments: they do not look like labels, because they are introduced by an interrogative particle.

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question quoted above, Epilytos asked 'whether I should take Phainomena as wife or another woman?' (see also probably DVC 1618), and perhaps we are dealing with an alternative way of posing that question: the enquirer submitted two tablets for the god to choose from, one naming a potential wife, one reading simply 'another?'.[36] On the other hand, the same method could have been used to pose a question about divorce, and two questions show that a change of wife was certainly a possibility that could be put to the god: 'With the wife he has now or another?' (DVC 314) and 'Would I succeed if I took another (woman)?' (DVC 1406).[37]

Lack of children or lack of sons would typically have been the motive for such questions. We have noted that the prospect of children was already sometimes mentioned in pre-marriage questions; after marriage, male enquirers ask what god they should pray to in order to secure (male) offspring,[38] or whether, and by praying to what god, they will have offspring if they stay with their wife (Lhôte no. 48) or simply 'about offspring to inherit, from my present wife' (DVC 5 = Lhôte no. 45, as read by DVC).[39] One adds 'and will the offspring live?' (DVC 2493), a perennial concern.[40] 'Is the one (feminine) I have lucky (τυχαία) for me?' (DVC 221) is probably a variant. There is probably one answer to such a question: 'Cherish/put up with the one you have' (DVC 200 = Lhôte no. 32).

A possibility only revealed by the new publication is that women, too, could pose such questions: 'living (feminine) with my partner (*symbios*) as now?' (DVC 325); 'Would Leukis fare better staying with Lykon?' (DVC 353; see also 2410 and possibly 257); 'God. Kleunika requests Zeus Naios and Diona for a child to come to her from another man and what god should she worship to get children' (DVC 2552: this blend of question and request is quite common).[41] Unfortunately, we do not know whether the women in question were citizens, metics, or

[36] See also p. 89 below.

[37] See also perhaps DVC 1463, and possibly Lhôte no. 36, where it is clear from the new evidence that the last word comes from the verb ἐFάω, 'let go' (Méndez Dosuna, 'Novedades en el oráculo de Dodona', 67–8).

[38] Lhôte no. 41, 'useful offspring in addition to what I have'; Lhôte no. 47, male offspring; Lhôte nos. 46A, 50 Aa; DVC 2050. DVC 1391 asks what god to pray to in order to secure the permanence of the 'coming generation'.

[39] See also Lhôte no. 44, DVC 497, 3034, 3554 (male offspring from the present wife).

[40] See also e.g. 251, 1391, 2768 ('profit of my children'), 4161. Lhôte no. 52 lays bare the issue: 'children to rear me in old age'.

[41] The fragmentary DVC 4115 is supplemented to give a less drastic alternative: 'Will I get offspring by dedicating (feminine) to a different goddess?' Juvenal satirically imagines a lower-class

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slaves, nor how they anticipated reacting if the oracle counselled change (such as walking out, or an approach to their legal guardian). Another woman seeking control of her own affairs is Myrta, who seems to ask 'whether she would succeed as a widow' (DVC 3320), namely probably 'without re-marrying'.

An isolated and problematic question is 'and whether I should live with one who is my sister, myself and my wife?' (1193). The words 'myself and my wife' are written on a different line and muddy the sense; if we suppose that they belong to a different question, then 'live with' acquires its usual sense of 'have sexual relations with' and the original enquiry is about marriage between siblings (surely condemned) or half-siblings (perhaps uneasily tolerated).[42] This would be a rare case of the oracle being enlisted as a moral arbiter.

Plutarch's 'Should I sail?' is a special form of the questions about ways of making a living, and the often related issues of travel and residence, which are probably the largest category, already very well represented in the old corpus. There are questions about keeping sheep (Lhôte no. 80 and often),[43] rearing ducks(?) (Lhôte no. 82), breeding horses (DVC 2434), 'practising his ancestral trade as a fisherman' (Lhôte no. 83), 'exercising the copper worker's trade' or 'the 'chef's trade' (Lhôte no. 84; DVC 2421), 'trading copper in the harbour' (DVC 3008), buying land (DVC 305, 2589), owning a ship (Lhôte no. 93; see also 94 and 96 ['sharing a ship]; DVC 302, 1005, 1182, 2365), and, repeatedly, trading (Lhôte nos. 89 [but simultaneously 'practising his trade'], 98 [= DVC 3], 99),[44] or trading by sea (Lhôte nos. 90 [= DVC 86], 91 and 92), perhaps with a named partner (DVC 1313, 2261), or trading by both land and sea (Lhôte no. 95). Disappointingly, a particular cargo appears to be mentioned only once, a little insecurely: luxury Coan fabrics(?) to Carthage (DVC 1363). A few questions relate to specific projects: 'Will I do well if I buy/rent the pond beside the precinct of Demeter?' (Lhôte no. 109); 'about the well, whether digging it he would have abundant water in summer and winter within twelve fathoms?' (DVC 1441 and

woman at Rome asking a fortune-teller whether she should 'abandon the innkeeper and marry the clothes-seller' (*Satire* 6.591).

[42] See Eidinow (n. 4), 83 and 85 no. 10, reporting Christidis' view that two questions are involved.

[43] See DVC's note on 8.

[44] I give a small selection; for a long list see the commentary to DVC 3.

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see also 159);[45] 'Alkinoos asks…if it is better and more advisable that Nikeas builds the workshop' (Lhôte no. 85 = DVC 357)'; 'Should I trust X?' (DVC 959). At least one enquirer pins his hopes on the perennial fantasy of the ancient world, treasure trove: 'Aischytas asks about treasure (θησαυρός) whether there is any in the house and by praying to what god he would find it' (DVC 194).[46]

The need for mobility often emerges: 'Would I succeed if I went abroad for my trade?' (Lhôte no. 88); 'Is it good for me to work with Diotimos in Megara?' (Lhôte no. 86); 'Will he do better if he departs to Alyzea?' (Lhôte no. 63);[47] should the questioner sail or go to this or that place (Lhôte nos. 100, 102; DVC 3220), or is it better to stay where one is? (DVC 7, 303, 1234); 'Will return home be profitable?' (DVC 2018); 'Will I succeed if I leave my hearth and home?' (DVC 377); 'Should I sell my land and move to Corinth in the forthcoming year before the Aktia, and will I be safe living abroad there?' (DVC 3220). That last is one of several questions about settling in a new place,[48] sometimes with apparent reference to a known colonial foundation;[49] Ariston cautiously asks if he can 'sail to Syracuse to the colony later' (Lhôte no. 103).[50] (But questions such as 'Will the children of Eurynos do better if they move out of the house/home?', 'Should he go home to his brother?', or 'Is it better if he stays at home?' may relate rather to inter-family dynamics and tensions.[51]) The risks of travel are little emphasized, but it was probably assumed that the god had them in mind in making his response. There is one question (DVC 2024) asking to whom a third party should pray in order to get home safe from Thessaly (to which is piously added 'and then bring a gift to the

[45] The editors quote a law of Solon whereby anyone not finding water within ten fathoms should rely on a neighbour (Plut. *Vit. Sol.* 23.6).

[46] There are several further references to θησαυροί (see DVC's note on 126), but the word is ambiguous (it can mean strong box or store room) and the force unclear.

[47] Taken by Lhôte as put by a manumitted slave with the right of free movement: possible, but not certain.

[48] Lhôte no. 54 = DVC 1380; Lhôte114 = DVC 24–25; Lhôte 131; possibly DVC 190, 524, 552.

[49] Lhôte no. 130 and DVC 463: Pharos; Lhôte no. 133: Sybaris; DVC 3109 concerns an unnamed colony (ἐποικία).

[50] The dating is problematic: its content would suggest Timoleon's panhellenic appeal for new colonists in the late 340s (Diod. Sic. 16.82.5), but the spelling appears to push it earlier (see Lhôte ad loc.).

[51] Respectively Lhôte no. 55 = DVC 354 (DVC wonder whether Eurynous is the questioner and is thinking of exporting his children in a time of crisis); Lhôte no. 56; Lhôte no. 57 =DVC 3472 (DVC 993 is similar from a woman).

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god'). Mobility entailed issues about citizenship and non-citizenship: 'To whom should I sacrifice and would I succeed if I became a resident alien(?) in Chalkis?' (DVC 3304); 'Should I become enrolled in Tarentum from Herakleia?' (Lhôte no. 132 = DVC 3111); 'Should he exercise citizen rights here [or depart]?' (DVC 1209);[52] 'Being a metic as now?' (DVC 329). Men also asked, predictably, about undertaking military service, sometimes in a particular role or with, or against, a particular figure.[53] But this impression of a hyper-mobile world is now counterbalanced by a flood of questions in the new publication (usually very short or fragmentary, but clearly recognizable) on the theme, almost absent hitherto, of 'Should I farm the land?': the editors list about fifty as reasonably secure.[54] As restored, one question conforms to the common notion that in antiquity one speculated only in order to achieve landed security: 'Materina asks Zeus Naios and Diona if there is safety (for her husband) if he sails for two months and…to Pharos…thereafter farming' (DVC 2762). But a lot here is owed to the editors. As for the 'Should I farm?' questions, what is perhaps surprising is that they even needed to be asked so often.

The social level of these, as of other consultants, is indeterminable except by guessing from the professions they enquire about. One with ambitions is revealed by what is perhaps the gem among the new questions: 'God. With good luck, and Zeus Pronaios and Diona. Porinos son of Euandros from Kyme asks the god whether it will be better and more advantageous for him to cultivate[55] the satrap and hyparch': this aspirant courtier presents himself, unusually, with patronymic, ethnic, and good spelling (DVC 35; the reverse bears a clear 'label': 'Porinos [*in the nominative case*] satrap [*in the accusative*]'). On the fragments of what was evidently a similar enquiry we read 'Mardaspas…hyparch' (DVC 3188). Phanostratos' question whether he should 'discuss with Iphicrates what I have in mind and make him a friend' (DVC 123) may be similar, particularly if Iphicrates is here the well-known Athenian general.[56]

Plutarch's third standard question is 'Should I lend money?' Just that is now attested at Dodona (DVC 2297; see also, perhaps, 1346), and

[52] Lhôte no. 52 may be about resuming citizen rights at Athens.

[53] Lhôte no. 127 ('on land?'); Lhôte no. 128 (against Antiochos); DVC 471 (παρὰ τὸν βασιλῆ, 'with the king[?]'); DVC 2981 (as cavalry); DVC 3648 (going to Pyrrhos); more vaguely DVC 2625, 3811.

[54] See the commentary on DVC 57, a plain 'Should I farm?'

[55] Probably: but Eidinow (n. 4), 95, notes that the verb can also mean 'treat medically'.

[56] As Angelos Chaniotis has suggested to me.

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several further questions, unfortunately seldom clear, relate to loans or debts.[57] Some perhaps reflect unease about whether a loan will be repaid (DVC 206, 1195(?), 1989); two enquirers asks whether they should repay the debt now or wait (DVC 223, see also 3036); one wonders whether he and his ship will be saved if he pays his debts (Lhôte no. 94.4–5); one whether in obscure circumstances relating to debt he would be 'true to his oath' (DVC 1312); two simply ask whether they should give back the money (DVC 1800, 2384; see also perhaps 2421.3–4). With the last formulation we are perilously close to Glaukos' supposed question at Delphi about denying a deposit, the question that, by floating the possibility of violating a fundamental moral rule, caused the obliteration of the questioner's whole stock. Was Zeus of Dodona more relaxed about issues of financial probity than Apollo of Delphi? Or was Glaukos' proposal to deny a deposit under oath a worse offence than simple non-payment of debts? If these questioners were in fact seeking exemption from conventional moral standards, the case would be unique.

A routine subject of enquiry not mentioned by Plutarch is that of health and healing. Questions about eye diseases predominate; whether that is through chance, a speciality of the oracle, or a characteristic local susceptibility is unclear.[58] The question normally has the 'to what god?' form, but two ask whether they should have one Paiania/Paionia lay hands on the patient (magical healing of some kind?), one 'whether I should use doctors?' (DVC 3009, and probably 1587), one conversely whether 'he would get health from the diseases he has in his body by entrusting (the case) to the gods' (DVC 2517).[59]

'Propitiating what god would it be better, and will I ever be free?' (DVC 1395) and 'Will Kittos get the freedom from Dionysios that Dionysios promised(?) (ἔθετο) him?' (DVC 1411) are two among several questions that reveal what now emerges as another routine subject of enquiry, the question 'about freedom'.[60] Though slaves perhaps sometimes put it in the 'To what god should I sacrifice to become free?' form (DVC 574 and 2428, as supplemented), the two examples

[57] See the note on DVC 206.

[58] Lhôte nos. 71, 72, DVC 556 (apparently hereditary). Other health enquiries e.g. Lhôte nos. 46 Ba, 66 (individuals); 65, 68, DVC 2242 (whole families); Lhôte no. 73 (a son).

[59] DVC 2549, 3174. On the healing touch, see Herodas 4.18 with the note of W. Headlam in his edition (Cambridge, 1922), ad loc. Lhôte no. 50 Ab is taken as a question about paying for the treatment of a son.

[60] For a list, mostly very fragmentary, see the note on DVC 287.

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cited show that it could also simply be 'WiIl I become free?' This then is an exception, but a comprehensible one, to the general rule that questions relate to a decision that has to be made: in relation to freedom, slaves hope but do not decide. Many freed slaves were subjected to the requirement of *paramone* ('staying'), continued residence with or near the former master and provision of services to him; manumission documents specified that those not so tied could 'go away wherever they chose'. We would very much like to gain a sense of what options a slave aspiring to manumission felt to be available and in what circumstances which was desired. The DVC editors detect possible allusions to *paramone* in almost thirty fragmentary inscriptions,[61] and traces of freedom from it have also been seen, but the reference is almost never secure, or its force clear if allowed. When Leukis asks if she 'would fare better staying with Lykon?' (DVC 353), she is just as likely to be a wife or concubine as a slave; a man who asks about 'going away to Alyzea' need not be an ex-slave thinking of exercising his full freedom.[62] Somewhat better candidates are the fragmentary '...working (plural) having chosen shared *paramone*' (DVC 1675) and 'Rhazia asked whether there would be separation and departure from Teitycus *during his lifetime*' (DVC 73), where the last phrase may echo the regular stipulation that *paramone* continues for as long as the ex-owner lives. If the reference is accepted in both cases, *paramone* appears as a condition which could be both desired and chafed at. But this is still little from which to gain more than a very general sense of the hopes of slaves.

Slave-owners also predictably asked questions under the general rubric (apparently sometimes used as a label) 'about slaves' (DVC 412, 2132). Whether to buy (unnamed) slaves (DVC 853, 1591) and, less clearly, whether to manumit particular slaves (DVC 76, 3609) are concerns; one owner rather mysteriously enquires what god or hero he should pray to concerning his (lost? ill? insubordinate?) slaves (DVC 2287). Very mysterious too is 'Timokrates, (about) the slaves who are thus running away, having bought them, and also a guest friend in common' (DVC 170). The editors suppose that Timokrates has bought runaways and is acting as their patron ('guest friend'), but this is institutionally bizarre: the only flight by slaves that was socially tolerated

[61] See the note on DVC 73.

[62] Lhôte no. 63, and see also 62 and 64, with the comments of Méndez Dosuna, 'Novedades en el oráculo de Dodona', 59. The isolated phrase 'go away free' in DVC 3356 does not help.

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was the seeking of temporary sanctuary in a shrine as a protest against gross ill-treatment. It is more likely that Timokrates and an unnamed associate from elsewhere are concerned about a lost investment. There is no sign that slaves would have been allowed to pose a question found in a late antique oracle book 'Will my running away go undetected?'[63] A question which puns on the name Parmonos (literally 'Stayer') has been taken as reflecting an owner's anxiety as to whether an ex-slave would observe his obligation of *paramone*: 'How might Stayer prove most staying (παρμωνότατος), learning a trade?' (DVC 3276). But words from the same 'stay' root are used for the survival of children, and both name and question might rather reflect parents' anxiety.

In the old collection, questions about ritual problems came almost exclusively from communities. Central though decision-making by the cities always was to the religious life of individuals, it was never plausible that individuals should not have needed advice in this area too, and a good number of individual questions have now emerged. Most are too obscure to be helpful, but no fewer than five of the more legible concern trees and the sacred: two are about removing trees growing in (or on) hero shrines, one more vaguely about 'the trees in the hero-shrine', two about cutting oaks, a tree of especial sanctity at Dodona.[64] A tree in a sanctuary might be out of place, or overgrown, but it was a god's property, and a pious person would scruple to tamper with it without special sanction.[65] It is doubtful whether 'Should they use Dorios the soul-raiser?' (that is, the summoner-up of the spirits of the dead) (DVC 172 = Lhôte no. 144) is to be accounted a question about ritual: it may be a question about Dorios' competence, or its relevance to a particular problem, more than one about the propriety of the skill he professed. An approach to a 'soul-raiser' would have been for information; in that sense, the question is like 'to consult a different oracle?' (seek a second opinion).[66]

Individuals asked, of course, about the gods to sacrifice to in order to succeed in this or that enterprise. Unease about past ritual

[63] G.M. Browne (ed.), *Sortes Astrampsychi. Vol. I* (Leipzig, 1983), question 89.

[64] For oaks, see DVC 1108, 2951; see also the public enquiry of the Dodonaians (DVC 2519), 'is there a sign in the oak?' On hero shrines, see DVC 80 (this, too, is an oak: the questioner asks if it should it be dedicated in a temple after removal), 2432 (possibly an answer), 3838.

[65] A ruling on the subject forms part of the religious rules sought from Apollo of Delphi by Cyrene: P.J. Rhodes and R. Osborne, *Greek Historical Inscriptions, 403–323* (Oxford, 2003), no. 97 A 8–10.

[66] DVC 2128. There was no inhibition about this: Archephon in Lhôte no. 94 refers in a question to Zeus to a ship he has built 'on the instructions of Apollo'.

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performance – indeed, about past behaviour of any kind – is by contrast very rare. In particular, we seldom find an attempt to trace diseases to past offences. 'For Xenon about his eye. Is (the disease) from a goddess or not?' (DVC 118), the question 'whether a disease struck' an individual for a particular reason (now lost) (DVC 481), a woman's suggestion that her eye disease may be due to 'neglect' (of a deity presumably) (DVC 3907) are all unusual, and the latter two not certain. The dominant ethos was to seek a cure and not admit fault.[67]

Questions about the future and the past

Slave questions 'about freedom', we have seen, go against the general principle that questions relate to an impending decision. The new material has produced further exceptions but nothing that can count as unfocused curiosity about the future: questions of this kind concern impending events (less often more distant prospects) in which the questioner has a heavy emotional investment. 'Will I win my court case?' (DVC 2521), 'What to expect about the court case?' (DVC 3022), 'Will Libusabos give evidence against Chorias?' (DVC 2254) reveal the same intense anxiety that so often caused litigants to make use of curse tablets.[68] Individuals also sought advice, in the more normal way, about whether to litigate or what god to pray to win the case.[69] The other area in which questions of this type cluster is athletics (this, too, a regular context for binding curses): 'Will I win the footrace?' (DVC 1389) or 'Will I win easily [*this cocky word is uncertain!*] at Olympia?' (DVC 2986).[70]

There is also a scatter of questions about the future in other areas, almost always the same as those that generate 'by praying to what god?' enquiries: recovery from disease (Lhôte no. 73), crops (DVC 2319), survival of offspring to maturity (DVC 251), recovery of loans (DVC 206, 1989). The editors suppose several enquirers to have asked whether they would become priests or priestesses.[71] Such a

[67] See R. Parker, *Miasma* (Oxford, 1983), 254, on 'turning the fair side outwards'.
[68] See also DVC 224. Simple labels 'about a/the court case': DVC 423, 747, 1124.
[69] Whether to litigate: DVC 142, 192, 1447(?), 1681, 2186, 3132; what god to pray to: DVC 436. DVC 2284 possibly asks whether to seek arbitration or to go to court.
[70] See also DVC 825, 2089. DVC 1993 and 2036 apparently ask 'how/by praying to whom?' athletic victory can be achieved.
[71] See the note on DVC 70. DVC 1397 reads 'and about priesthood whether…', but the question is lost.

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preoccupation would be a little surprising, but no question of this supposed form is preserved whole. The editors also ascribe to one enquirer a question that violates the principle that an oracle is not a crystal ball – 'Will he die at home or abroad?' (DVC 1417) – but that rendering is linguistically problematic.[72] A small number ask whether particular projects will succeed: 'Will X get the ovens/the wood?' (DVC 1376, 1462); 'Will X return to Caria on the terms he desires?' (Lhôte no. 129).[73] 'Will he get the ancestral property?' (DVC 4019) is an isolated occurrence; there is also perhaps one question about division of property (DVC 3017).[74] The whole topic of legacies is otherwise absent, unless it is wrapped up within the vague questions about 'whole property'.[75] Even though fixed rules of inheritance made the process less unpredictable, the virtual silence on a subject of such pressing interest is very surprising.

A different exception to the norm of 'Should I do x?' questions is when enquirers ask about the present and past, but these questions, too, arise from pressing present concerns. 'Lysanias asks Zeus Naios and Diona whether the child Annylla is pregnant with is not his' (Lhôte no. 49) is a particularly drastic example of a kind of question that would have been very difficult, one might have thought, for an oracle to deal with; but several such factual questions were already known in the old material, and the total has greatly increased with the new.[76] An anxious family ask 'Is Aristonymos dead? Should his wife and children do the customary rites for him as being dead?' (DVC 2980).[77] There are questions about the facts of past business transactions (DVC 2481, 2482, 2976), about lost property (DVC 1415), and about lost goats (DVC 1199); more dramatically, there are enquiries as to whether persons had been subject to poisonings/

[72] The verb which this word is taken to come from and which is translated 'die' in fact means 'kill'; it is possibly a noun, 'death', and the question is whether a person has died, as in DVC 2980.

[73] On Lhôte no. 129, Méndez Dosuna, 'Novedades en el oráculo de Dodona', 76. I cannot classify DVC 1153: 'Will there be any penalty?'

[74] If one takes the new verb attested there, δατεύω, as synonymous with δατέομαι ('I divide').

[75] See perhaps DVC 328, 'about "whole property" (παγλαρία) whether it will occur/come to him and should he take a wife?' All instances of παμπησία and παγκληρία in the literary sources can be taken as referring to an inheritance, inherited property, or the ancestral territory of a people (παγκληρία). But questions from Dodona about παμπασία, when not completely vague, seem to be about the acquisition of new wealth (by praying, trading, buying), not inheritance (DVC 261, 998, 1484, 2110, 2593, 2802); none of those about παγκλαρία is decisive either way.

[76] Cf. now DVC 3550, 'Is Tata child of Iphinoos?' For a famous legitimacy question at Delphi, see Hdt. 6.66.

[77] Cf. DVC 115 (= Lhôte no. 124) and perhaps DVC 1113.

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bewitchments (the suspected attackers could be named)[78] and whether named individuals were responsible for thefts (in good number),[79] enslavement (Lhôte no. 123), or deaths (DVC 84, 2047). 'Was it fated for him to die?' (DVC 461) may be the alternative to one of these last types of question.

Answers

One can envisage an oracle which refused to accept questions as specific and as sensitive as many of these are. But Dodona allowed them, and one must ask how it could deal with them. The issue is in part that of the oracular mechanisms, though it goes beyond it. One mechanism was hitherto known only from a single anecdote in a literary source, though one credibly set in historical time: when the Spartans consulted the oracle before the battle of Leuctra in 371 BC, the pet monkey of the king of the Molossians accidentally overturned the urn in which the lots were held, and the horrified priestess warned the consultants that they should now be asking not about victory but about preservation.[80] Several of the new texts refer to 'lots', and an expression which occurs in three or four – 'If x is the case, pick up this one'[81] – seems to prove that a technique familiar from the 'ticket oracles' of Ptolemaic and Roman Egypt was also used at Dodona: the consultant submitted two tablets (or more, in cases of suspected theft?) containing alternatives, from which the god in the person of the priestess chose one. But questions of the form 'To what god or hero should we sacrifice?' required different treatment, and a small number of what are apparently written responses survive.[82] There are lists of gods in the dative which presumably respond to such questions.[83] There are also a few tablets

[78] The Greek word φάρμακον combines the senses of poison and bewitchment. Whether poisoning/bewitchment has occurred: DVC 272, 452 (= Lhôte no. 125b); naming of a suspect: DVC 1028 (= Lhôte no. 125) and perhaps 'Lyson' of DVC 452 (= Lhôte no. 125b); 'about poisoning/bewitchment': DVC 962. On charges of poisoning and magical attack in funerary epitaphs, see the studies cited in *SEG* 60, no. 2024.

[79] See the references in the commentary on DVC 33; Lhôte nos. 119–22.

[80] Cicero from Callisthenes: Cic. *Div.* 1.76, 2.54, 2.69 = *FGrH* 124 F 22(a) and (b).

[81] DVC 1170, 1410, 2222. See also R. Parker, 'The Lot Oracle at Dodona', *ZPE* 194 (2015), 111–14. On the ticket oracles, see n. 11 above.

[82] Cf. Lhôte (acknowledgements note), 355–7; Eidinow (n. 4), 123–4; the list attached to DVC 42: many even of the few cases the editors adduce are doubtful.

[83] Lhôte nos. 141 Ba, 142; DVC 2393 and perhaps 1122; with single divine names: DVC 585, 1045, 1299; Lhôte no. 166c.

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where the two sides of a tablet seem to bear question and answer; the answers in such cases are usually curt, and endorse one of the options stated or implied by the question.[84] One goes a little further, in telling a man asking what god to sacrifice to for the health of his family to 'travel to Hermion', presumably to exploit the healing spring there (Lhôte no. 68); another seems to deploy knowledge of the client's affairs not contained in the question, telling him to 'lease out' or 'give up' a stake in a trading vessel that he has not mentioned.[85] 'Cherish/put up with the one (feminine) you have' (DVC 200 = Lhôte no. 32) was cited above as a probable reply to the many enquirers pondering a change of wife.[86] But the prior process that generated these written responses – or a declaration such as 'The goddess chooses Oreandra as her attendant' (DVC 70) – is unknown. Various more or less credible techniques other than the lot are reported in the literary sources,[87] but a variant of the lot could have created almost all the responses on tablets, and some of the few reliably known from literature – 'What god or hero?' questions, for instance – were probably answered by picking a few divine names from a larger number in the urn.

The issue of mechanism is only part of the problem anyway. The prior issue is the oracular authority's need for relevant knowledge. Appeal to an oracle in cases of theft or suspected witchcraft and the like is far from unparalleled. Oracles delivered verdicts on such matters in Egypt under the Pharaohs, the Ptolemies, and the Romans,[88] as diviners did in early modern Europe and have done in many other places.[89] But if the institution was to retain credibility there had to be a way of

[84] DVC 24–25 = Lhôte no. 114; DVC 107–8 = Lhôte no. 127. Other possibilities include Lhôte nos. 12B and 35Bb; DVC 2432.

[85] Lhôte no. 95. There are problems of interpretation here, however. Lhôte gives the received interpretation (see especially F. Salviat, 'Timodamos et son gaulos: oracles et marchands à Dodone', in P. Cabanes (ed.), *L'Illyrie méridionale et l'Epire dans l'antiquité II. Actes du IIe Colloque international de Clermont-Ferrand, 25–27 octobre 1990* [Paris, 1993], 61–4): according to this, the first side contains a question with a subsequent interlinear modification (clear, in fact, on the photo); the back, in the same hand, contains two responses, one to the first question and one to the modification, the second of which reverses the first. But such a passing of the tablet to and fro between consultant and oracle is very puzzling.

[86] A. Wilhelm, 'Orakelfragen und Orakelantworten', *APF* 15 (1953), 76–7, likewise plausibly interpreted Lhôte no. 45 as '(Answer) to Kleanor about offspring to inherit. From your present wife'.

[87] Eidinow (n. 4), 67–8. On the responses in literary sources, see n. 5 above.

[88] See e.g. J. Černý, 'Egyptian Oracles', in R. A. Parker, *A Saite Oracle Papyrus from Thebes in the Brooklyn Museum* (Providence, RI, 1962), 35–48; Tallet, 'Oracles', see n. 11 above.

[89] See e.g. K. Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic* (London, 1971), index s.v. divination, and the works he cites.

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ensuring that the verdicts were, if not correct, at least plausible and socially acceptable, to the enquirer and to the community. Either the divinatory technique had to involve a group and allow a consensus to emerge, or the diviner had to know what was expected and be in sufficient control of the mechanism to produce, in a good proportion of cases, an outcome in accord with expectations.

What is unknown is how either of these conditions was met at Dodona. We assume that in the temple-dominated society of Egypt priests knew every detail of local affairs, but such is not the typical image of the Greek priest's or priestess's role. We do not know what scope there was for informal interaction between priest and client before the question was submitted; the answer mentioned above, which seems to show knowledge not contained in the question, is the only clue. Two of the new tablets suggest that the system whereby the priest(ess) simply picked one of two or more tablets submitted to the god could be used even in cases of theft: one reads 'If Parmonis stole the money, let him/her [*probably the priestess*] pick up this one', the other 'but if none of them stole, this one' (DVC 1170 and 2222). Could the authorities of the oracle obstruct frivolous accusations? Could they influence the outcome of the sortition? Or did they, in fact, place absolute trust in the lot as giving access to the mind of all-knowing gods? These questions are tantalizingly unanswerable.

The tablets have revealed in splendid detail the preoccupations of the questioners: we see how they worried about things such as marriage, divorce, birth and survival of children, travel, business plans, repayment of loans, health and healing, military service, purchase and management of slaves, prospects of manumission, forthcoming court cases and athletic events, supposed poisonings, and actual thefts in the past. But how the oracle dealt with the most delicate among these enquiries, and thus how it functioned as a social institution, remains largely obscure.

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