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FINDING THE PYTHIA

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## ABSTRACT

As a historical figure, Pythia, the Delphic oracle, that mysterious mouthpiece of the Greek god Apollo, has largely escaped public attention. Though her words live on in the writings of the ancient authors Aeschylus, Herodotus, and Plutarch, to name of few, the person behind the famous utterances is all but forgotten. In fact, there are only four named Pythias that are known to modern scholars, and beyond their names, not much more can be said of them. However, through the examination of the Delphic oracle as an example or descendant of the earlier practice of spirit possession, I make connections and postulate theories that may further explain the origin, mindset, and influences of these tripod-perched women. In furtherance of this aim, I examine the possible presence of hallucinogens, especially ethylene gas, and the way these substances may have influenced and formed Delphic practices. Looking to literary figure of Cassandra and possible connections to Earth goddess worship, I hope to further find meaning for the peculiarities and mysteries surrounding Apollo's oracular cult at Delphi.

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## Chapter 1

### Introductions

High in the snowy hills of Mount Parnassus, looking down over the glittering Gulf of Corinth in Greece, lays the sacred sanctuary to the oracular god, Apollo Pythius. Considered the center of the world by ancient Greeks, Delphi was famous for its oracular consultation in which tripod-perched prophecy-givers, called oracles or Pythias, relayed the words of the god Apollo to those who sought divine answers. In Classical times, beginning specifically around 586 BCE, Delphi also hosted Pan-Hellenic games in accordance with the games at Olympia, Isthmia, and Nemea, held every fourth year.<sup>1</sup>

However, the site of Delphi was first settled much earlier, around 1500-1100 BCE, in the late Bronze Age. Excavations in the area exposed a Mycenaean cemetery and, in the temple to Athena Pronaia, votive clay and bronze statues, which were uncovered alongside a Minoan-style rhyton.<sup>2</sup>

Although Delphi did not reach its Classical religious significance until 800 BCE, the first temple to Apollo was constructed there in the seventh century BCE. This temple was Doric in style and destroyed by fire in 548 BCE. A temple to replace it was completed in 510 BCE, also in Doric style, with significant financial aid from the Athenian Alcmeonid family. Similarly to the first, this temple was destroyed, but instead of by fire, an earthquake leveled it in 373 BCE. The temple, which remains today, was the third temple in this location, completed in 330 BCE. Made of stucco-coated porous stone, this temple measures sixty by twenty-four meters with six columns spanning the temple's face and fifteen lining the sides.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The information that precedes this footnote is from the following source: Cartwright, Mark. "Delphi: Definition." *Ancient History Encyclopedia*. 22 February 2-13. Web. 21 March 2014. <http://www.ancient.eu.com/delphi/>.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

Weathering attacks from the Persians in 480 BCE, as well as the Gauls in 279 BCE, Delphi eventually submitted to Roman domination in 191 BCE. Oracular consultation, worship of the god Apollo, and the Pythian Games, however, continued their significance until the decree by Theodosius in 393 CE, which put an end to all sanctuaries that were not Christian in nature<sup>4</sup>. Indeed, by the time the Emperor Julian consulted the Pythia in 362 BCE, her response, the final prophecy given at Delphi by the Pythia, was:<sup>5</sup>

*Tell the emperor that my hall has fallen to  
the ground. Phoibos no longer has his house  
nor his mantic bay nor his prophetic spring;  
the water has dried up.*

Following several centuries of Christian occupation, the oracle site of Delphi was abandoned by the early seventh century. It waited nearly twelve hundred years, until the 1880s CE, for a team of French archaeologists to rediscover it and begin the first modern excavations.<sup>6</sup> As the ancient temple was exposed once again to the light of day, modern interest and curiosity about Delphi and its rich history were stirred. Though subsequent excavations of the area have exposed more of Delphi's secrets, one topic that remains widely unexplored is the Pythia, Apollo's mysterious mouthpiece and most preeminent priestess.

In the paper that is to follow, I will endeavor to seek out this fascinating female figure by examining her origins, looking at her role in the larger sanctuary to Apollo at Delphi, as well as specifically through consultation and the role that narcotic gases and oral performance play here. I will also discuss named Pythias and the circumstances surrounding them, the similarities Pythian consultation shares with ethnographic research of spirit possession, and the link between the Pythia and the literary figure of Cassandra. Through this study, I hope to better understand the Delphic Pythia and the peculiar mysteries of Apollo's oracular cult here.

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Thomas, Carol G. *Paths from Ancient Greece*. Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1988. pg.47

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

## Chapter 2

### Classical Origins: The Homeric Hymn to Apollo

*Shall I sing how at the first you went  
about the earth seeking a place of  
oracle for men, O far-shooting  
Apollo?*

*(Homeric Hymn to Apollo, beginning line 214)*

To found the site that would become his seat of prophetic power in the Ancient world, the link between the will of the gods and the actions of mankind, Apollo set out in search of the premier location. Traveling far across the land, he came first to Telphusa, a sweet flowing stream on whose banks he sought to lay the foundations for his temple and plant his wooded grove. But Telphusa was clever and she did not want to be cast aside by the young god and the establishment of his cult, so she persuaded Apollo to leave and build his temple elsewhere.

Taking her advice, Apollo voyaged next to Crisa, a mountain ridge comprising, in part, Mount Parnassus. Here he began again to lay his temple foundations. But Telphusa, whose suggestion the spot at Crisa had been, was crafty. In an effort to rid herself, permanently, of this male usurper, she deliberately neglected informing the young god that Crisa was already inhabited by Python, a “female serpent, a well-fed, great, fierce monster, which kept working many evils against the men of the land” (*Homeric Hymn to Apollo*, line 301-303). But the god was not frightened and filled Python with arrows, striking her down as she attacked him.

*And the holy strength of Helios made her rot away there;  
wherefore the place is now called [Pytho](#), and men call  
the lord Apollo by another name, Pythian; because on  
that spot the power of piercing Helios made the monster  
rot away.*

*(Homeric Hymn to Apollo, line 371)*

Apollo went back to Telphusa and punished her for her deception, even though she was only trying to protect her right to her own territory. She had hoped that Python would be able to

defeat Apollo, but her miscalculation led to her downfall. Apollo, in his struggle to tame the female forces that came before him, left a trail of destruction in his wake.

Regardless of the hurt he caused and the death that marked his place at Delphi, Apollo continued the site of his sanctuary there. He kept, too, the name Pythian, which, though the myth does not mention it, he would later bestow upon his sacred priestesses, the oracles of Delphi, the Pythia.

Additionally, the Greek word “pytho” as used in the Homeric Hymn above, means “to rot,” with the implication that unpleasant smells are a byproduct. Pausanias, the second century A.D. traveler and writer, in his *Description of Greece* 10.6.5 (translated by Jones), described the situation this way:

*The most widespread tradition [for the naming of Pytho] has it that the victim of Apollon's arrows rotted here, and that this was the reason why the city received the name Pytho. For the men of those days used pythesthai for the verb 'to rot'.*

Implied in the word “rot,” is the association with certain smells, which bring in the possibility and the controversy surrounding the stories of volcanic gases in the area, which would produce aromas that could have been explained by the story of Apollo and the rotting corpse of his victim.<sup>7</sup> This theory will be discussed in more detail further on, and evaluated for its relevance and likelihood. However, what is of particular interest in this part of the Homeric Hymn to Apollo is the way in which the verb ‘to rot’ provides etymological understanding for the epithet “Pythian.”

Interestingly, Python can provide valuable insight into the role gender plays in this particular narrative. For instance, in the tale it is the male god, Apollo, son of the king of the gods, Zeus, who must overcome his enemy and claim the right to the prior holdings of this individual, and in so doing found his own sanctuary at which to be worshiped. In this particular case, it is the defeat of the female entity, or the representative therein, which marks his ascension to power.

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<sup>7</sup> Graf, F. *Apollo*. New York: Routledge, 2009. pg. 70



To support this statement, the language surrounding Python can be examined. Python is a female serpent and the child of Gaia. However, she is connected to the Olympian Hera as well, in that Python served as nursemaid to Typhaon, a dragon created by Hera in a jealous fit against Zeus. Python's connection to Typhaon supports her position, in this case more by proxy, as an opposer to male rule, a monster to be slain, and feminine individual to be dominated.<sup>8</sup> Also in this Homeric Hymn, Telphusa, the stream who tricks Apollo and is punished, offers insight into the gendered issues surrounding Apollo's dominance in the area. Telphusa is depicted as a liar, a manipulator, self-interested, and ultimately put in her place, though she was only trying to maintain her dominance in an area that was hers by right. When connected to the defeat of the she-serpent Python, it is interesting to speculate whether or not these stories metaphorically relate to the founding of the site by worshipers of Apollo when his cult reached this area between 700 and 900 BCE.<sup>9</sup>

Additionally, although Python is seen as a female serpent, she also represents further female forces that Apollo must overcome. According to the second century A.D. mythographer Pseudo-Apollodorus in *Bibliotheca* 1.22 (translation by Aldrich):

*[Apollon] made his way to Delphoi, where Themis gave the oracles at that time. When the serpent Python, which guarded the oracle, moved to prevent Apollon from approaching the oracular opening, he slew it and thus took command of the oracle.*

In this case, Python is the protector of the goddess Themis and not just a monster who dwelt on the ridges of Mount Parnassus. If Python's death marks Apollo's capturing of the oracular site, then Themis's defeat is also implied or else she would not have stepped down from her role as oracle-giver at the time.

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<sup>8</sup> Anonymous. *The Homeric Hymn to Apollo*. Trans. Hugh G. Evelyn-White from *Hesiod, Homeric Hymns, Epic Cycle, Homeric*. Loeb Classical Library Volume 57. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1914. Web. 10 February 2014. <http://www.theoi.com/Text/HomericHymns1.html#3>. line 305.

<sup>9</sup> The dates here are from Graf, pg. 57.

In other versions of the story, Themis is not named as sitting in offering of prophecy, but Python remains at the spot. Pausanias, in *Description of Greece* 10.6.5 (translated by Jones), says of the matter:

*The poets say that the victim of Apollon was a Drakon posted by Ge to be a guard for the oracle.*

Similarly, the Roman poet Ovid, in his *Metamorphoses* 1.434 (translated by Melville), says:

*Indeed Tellus (the Earth), against her will, produced a Serpens (Serpent) never known before, the huge Python, a terror to men's new-made tribes, so far it sprawled across the mountainside.*

In both of these cases, Python is the child of Earth, who here is also called Ge or Tellus. As an appointed guard by Gaia, Python represented her at Delphi, and so the death of snake was a direct assault upon the Earth goddess. In this particular account, he is unchallenged and defeats her monster, relegating her to passivity and submission to masculine control.

However, in Euripides' *Iphigenia in Tauris* (trans. Potter, lines 1259-1269) he describes Gaia's revenge on Apollo, not for the killing of Python, but for the eminence and station he stole from Themis, Gaia's daughter. He says:

*But when he came and sent Themis, the child of Earth, away from the holy oracle of Pytho, Earth gave birth to dream visions of the night; and they told to the cities of men the present, and what will happen in the future, through dark beds of sleep on the ground; and so Earth took the office of prophecy away from Phoebus, in envy, because of her daughter.*

Apollo desired preeminence over the prophetic arts and so appealed to his father Zeus to end Gaia's retribution. Zeus agreed, and Gaia's wrath was suppressed.<sup>10</sup> Very much like Euripides overarching theme of *Iphigenia in Tauris*, justice, which in this case is embodied by Zeus, ends the feud between Earth and Apollo, in that Apollo is allowed to retain his claim by his father's

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<sup>10</sup> Euripides, *The Trojan Women*. Trans. Gilbert Murray. pg. 51

decree. The female deities, Themis and her mother Gaia are pushed aside. In this particular case, we can extrapolate that justice and order as presented by Euripides in this play, are resultant from male control and domination.

Aeschylus, however, provides another alternative for Apollo's occupation of the site of Delphi. In his play, *Eumenides*, he discusses a less combative and more judicious passing of the oracle site through its different overseers. He says:

*First, in this prayer of mine, I give the place of highest honor among the gods to the first prophet, Earth; and after her to Themis, for she was the second to take this oracular seat of her mother, as legend tells. And in the third allotment, with Themis' consent and not by force, another Titan, child of Earth, Phoebus, took her seat here. She gave it as a birthday gift to Phoebus, who has his name from Phoebus.... Zeus inspired his heart with prophetic skill and established him as the fourth prophet on this throne; but Loxias is the spokesman of Zeus, his father.*

(Aeschylus, *Eumenides*, trans. Smyth, beginning line 1)

What is interesting here between Aeschylus' and Euripides' versions of events is that both deal with the issue of justice and order, separating Apollo from the violence and entropy implicit in his killing of Python to win the oracle site, and establish him firmly within divine and judicial right to occupy the area. While Euripides' account still contains a hint of the role gender plays in justice and order, Aeschylus' passing from prophet to prophet abandons this distinction. Aeschylus, additionally, provides an etymological understanding for Apollo's epithet 'Phoebus' in this account, which the other stories fail to do. Even still, it is not impossible that Aeschylus' and Euripides' deviations from the earlier Homeric Hymn reflect the changing Greek political landscape and the importance of democracy and justice in the Athenian state.<sup>11</sup>

Furthermore, the Homeric Hymn, Aeschylus' *Eumenides*, and Euripides' *Iphigenia in Tauris*, all share the same transition from female dominance in the area to male dominance. As was aforementioned, in the Homeric Hymn to Apollo, Python was appointed by Gaia to guard the

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<sup>11</sup> Parke, H. W. and D. E. W. Wormell. *The Delphic Oracle*. 2 vols. Oxford: Blackwell, 1956. pg. 4, 7.

oracle, Themis. Similarly Euripides' and Aeschylus' accounts describe Apollo taking and being gifted, respectively, the oracular site from Themis, or in the latter version, her successor, Phoebe. The consistency of the tales, therefore, suggests, aside from the possibility that all three draw from the same original myth and in their retellings chose not to stray from this particular point, that there may be something beneath the myth. By this, I mean that there may be a historical root for the passage of the site from female-domination to male-domination. If a cult existed at Delphi to an Earth goddess, possibly the Classical Greek Gaia or another deity that was later combined with this goddess, the memory and recognition of her sovereignty may have made its way into the mythology surrounding the area. In addition, a previous cult based in female ascendancy may explain some of the peculiarities at Delphi, including the reason for a female acting as the mouthpiece of a male god, which is unheard of in other Greek sanctuaries, save those that are modeled after Delphi, like the oracular site of Didyma.

To leave this point for the moment and continue with the Homeric Hymn to Apollo, after the god punishes Telphusa for tricking him, he then searches for priests to serve him in his newly-founded sanctuary. His attention is immediately caught by a Cretan merchant ship from Knossos and he chooses these men for the task. Boarding their ship in the form of a dolphin, the young god directs their vessel straight to the shores near Crisa and the slopes of Mount Parnassus. Apollo reveals himself to the Cretans and explains that he has chosen them to serve him and keep his temple, which they agree to and instantly obey, although they have been plucked from their old lives and their families. Interestingly, Apollo goes on to explain the etymology of the name Delphi for the area. He says:

*“In as much as at the first on the hazy sea I sprang upon  
the swift ship in the form of a dolphin, pray to me as  
Apollo Delphinus; also the altar itself shall be called  
Delphinus and overlooking forever.”*

*(Homeric Hymn to Apollo, lines 493-496)*

Finally, it is important to note that none of the mythology surrounding Delphi's origins mentions or explains the presence of the Pythia. Etymologies are given, passages of ownership and initial population explained, but no reference to one of the most important features, the Pythia, Apollo's instrument of divine pronouncement, is made. This is a very curious omission. Why did ancient authors feel the need to explain every part of the Delphic tradition except what is arguably the most important? Is it possible that this particular instatement of a female mouthpiece was a holdover from a more ancient cult? Did embarrassment or a desire to forget somehow play a role in what is explained and what is simply accepted? The true origins of the Pythia and the reasons for her absence from Delphic mythology may be lost to the passage of time, the void of forgotten stories, and the loss of history, but a possible explanation will be postulated and evaluated in the following section.

### Chapter 3

## Earth Goddess Origins

According to the Brill online Atlas of the extent of Mycenaean culture in the Aegean area from the 17th to the 11th century BCE, there were both Mycenaean settlement and grave sites at Delphi. If this map is indeed accurate, though field notes for the excavations that would have provided this information evaded my ability to locate, then then Mycenaean occupants of this site were probably religiously influenced by Minoans or at least engaged in trade of goods and ideas with them. This interconnectedness may have resulted in Earth goddess worship and a tie to the prophetic, possibly due to the ethylene gas and the trance-like states achieved here and interpreted as prophecy-giving. Then, the established cult would later be echoed by Gaia worship in Classical Greece. When the followers of Apollo came and took over, much of this original Earth goddess worship was probably thrown out, but of what remained, it melded with the cult of Apollo and resulted in the peculiarity of the Delphic cult to Apollo, including that most prime peculiarity: the female mouthpiece of the male god, the Pythia.

To examine the connections between Delphi and a previous cult, I will take into account two distinct possibilities and endeavor to bridge them. The first of these ideas is the supposition that, prior to the cult of Apollo at Delphi, the site was dominated by the worship of a prophetic Earth goddess. To substantiate this claim, I will expand my examination of the nearly universal mythical agreement that Gaia founded the site of Delphi, the parallels between Delphi and cult worship of Gaia elsewhere in the Classical world, and, finally, the connections between Delphic Python and snakes. I will then aspire to connect Crete and Minoan Potnia Theron worship to the aforementioned topics. Evidence that will be examined to corroborate these ideas includes archaeological deposits in the form of a lion-headed rhyton and the links between Potnia Theron worship and lions, as well as the additional material from the cleft of Castalia found in temple to Athena Pronaia.

To begin, the *Homeric Hymn to Apollo*<sup>12</sup>, Aeschylus' *Eumenides*<sup>13</sup>, Euripides' *Iphigenia in Tauris*<sup>14</sup>, Ovid's *Metamorphoses*<sup>15</sup>, and Pausanias' *Description of Greece*<sup>16</sup>, which were examined in some detail in an earlier part, all share the same passage from the preeminence of a female in the area to that of a male. For instance, in the Homeric Hymn to Apollo, as well as in the *Metamorphoses* and *Description of Greece*, Gaia installed Python as a protector for her daughter, the oracle Themis. Then, in Euripides' and Aeschylus' versions, Apollo takes Delphi from Themis by killing Python, or is gifted it by her successor, Phoebe, respectively.

In all of these accounts, Apollo is described as an invader, or at the very least, a newcomer. He never simply arrives at Delphi to find it empty and sets up shop. Instead, there is always some kind of previous occupation, somehow relating to Gaia, that he defeats, ousts, or receives the site from so that he has a right to the area. H.W. Parke says, on the matter, "it is sufficient for our purpose to take him as the Homeric Hymn represents [Apollo] – a northern intruder – and his arrival must have occurred in the dark interval between Mycenaean and Hellenic times. His conflict with Ge for the possession of the cult site was represented under the legend of his slaying the serpent."<sup>17</sup>

Additionally, there is a distinct possibility that all five authors draw their understandings from a single mythological account, altering it to serve their particular purpose. This would lend to the assumption that this original myth holds some kind of particular authority for all five authors to draw from in turn and not create an entirely new conception or to draw inspiration from elsewhere. The consistency of the stories could be interpreted that, regardless of a central

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<sup>12</sup> Homeric Hymn to Apollo, beginning line 371

<sup>13</sup> Aeschylus, *Eumenides*, trans. Smyth, beginning line 1

<sup>14</sup> Euripides' *Iphigenia in Tauris*, trans. Potter, lines 1259-1269

<sup>15</sup> Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, beginning 1.434, translated by Melville

<sup>16</sup> Pausanias, *Description of Greece*, beginning 10.6.5, translated by Jones

<sup>17</sup> Parke, pg. 3-7

original myth, there may be some kind of historical basis for the story. It is possible that a cult existed at Delphi previous to Apollo and that this cult belonged to an Earth goddess. With that in mind, it is possible that the Classical Greek Gaia or another deity that was later combined with this goddess. The memory and recognition of her sovereignty, then, may have made its way into the mythology surrounding the area.

To this understanding, Parke says that, “the foundation of Delphi and its oracle took place before the times of recorded history. It would be foolish to look for a clear statement of origin from any ancient authority....” However, he goes on to give his opinion anyway, adding, “Delphi was originally devoted to the worship of the Earth goddess whom the Greeks called Ge, or Gaia.”<sup>18</sup>

In addition, a previous cult based in female supremacy may explain some of the peculiarities at Delphi, including the reason for a female acting as the mouthpiece of a male god, which is unheard of in other Greek sanctuaries, save those that were modeled after Delphi.

To better understand some of these Delphic particularities, it may be useful to examine the worship of an Earth goddess in other areas of the Ancient Mediterranean to see if any parallels can be made between them that may solidify the origin of Delphi as a site of Earth goddess worship, or at least provide insight into unique Delphic practices.

In Aegira in Achaëa, for example, priestesses would descend into a cavern to be prophetically inspired by Gaia. Through her descent into the cavern, the priestess was veritably enveloped in Earth, and thus as close to the Earth goddess as it was possible for her to be in a physical sense. Though the Delphic Pythia did not enter down into a cavern to be inspired, she did sit on a tripod atop a chasm that was thought to lead directly down into the earth. This fissure, which had been described in ancient times as well as has been recently supported by archaeological excavation, would also bring the Pythia closer to the Earth goddess. The absence of caverns and fissures at other prophetic sites, even those belonging to the cult of Apollo, makes

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<sup>18</sup> Parke, pg. 7



this an element unique to Delphi. Additionally, the controversial vapors that caused the Pythia to enter her trance, as are attested in some ancient accounts and have been examined by modern scientists to contentious results, would have arisen from the Earth. If the vapor did so, then it is natural to suppose that the prophetic power also arose from Earth. Therefore, if a prophetic cult existed there before Apollo, it stands to reason that the Earth would have been worshiped as the cause and not another deity.<sup>19</sup>

Gaia can also be linked to Delphi through the connection between Earth and snakes and the role that snakes play in the mythological origins at Delphi. In Greek mythology, snakes were thought of as chthonic, meaning “of or pertaining to the deities, spirits, and other beings dwelling under the earth.”<sup>20</sup> Gaia was not only under the Earth, but she was the very goddess of the Earth itself<sup>21</sup>. Additionally, her child, Python, was a she-serpent who originally guarded the site of Delphi prior to Apollo’s occupation of the area. This Earth-representative serpent plays an important role in Delphic origin myth, because, with her defeat, so is Ge subsequently defeated, and Apollo can take control. If a previous Earth-worshipping cult existed at Delphi prior to the arrival of Apollo’s cult, it is possible that the symbolism employed to show the divine right of Apollo’s followers to the site, was to demonize the previous cult, representing them as the images that they worshipped. It is not impossible to suppose that an Earth-worshipping cult would represent Earth as a snake, and that this snake would become the enemy of Apollo to be killed when his cult gained dominance.

Furthermore, snakes play an important role in the story of Helenus and Cassandra of Troy in that both received their gifts from snakes. If it can be supposed that Cassandra is a literary equivalent to the Delphic oracle, then the link between prophecy and snakes, which may reflect older associations of Earth goddess worship, was probably tied to Apollo when his worshipers

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<sup>19</sup> Parke, pg. 10.

<sup>20</sup> <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/chthonic?s=t>

<sup>21</sup> Dr Alena Trckova-Flamee Ph.D., *Minoan Snake Goddess*. Encyclopedia Mythica, 22 December 2002. Web. 23 February 2014. [http://www.pantheon.org/articles/m/minoan\\_snake\\_goddess.html](http://www.pantheon.org/articles/m/minoan_snake_goddess.html)

took over the cult. If this theory holds any merit at all, then it stands to reason that these associations may have given rise to this facet of the story.

To better understand the origin of the snake Python in story of Apollo's conquest, Cretan Minoan religion can be consulted. Much of what is known of Cretan religion comes from palace sites like Knossos, though wall frescoes like those found at Akrotheri on the island of Thera, as well as other Minoan artistic depictions at this palace structure and others. Though a complete understanding of Minoan worship is far from achieved, the evidence of Potnia Theron worship greatly impacts current thinking on the topic.

To better understand the Potnia Theron, the Linear B texts, especially those from Pylos, can be consulted. Po-ti-ni-ja or Potnia, according to Yves Duhoux and Anna Morpurgo Davies, means "Mistress or Lady." They identify the word as Indo-European, possibly referring to multiple goddesses, and that it may describe a kind of "pre-Greek Mother Goddess."<sup>22</sup> Additionally, she was worshipped in grottoes as a goddess of the natural cycle of vegetation and in relation to birth and death. In the Minoan palace structures, it was thought that she protected and bestowed authority upon kings. She was also worshipped on mountain peaks, and thought of as an apotropaic force, that warded off evil.<sup>23</sup>

In addition to the written record, depictions of the Potnia Theron surrounded by animals, and especially snakes, strengthens the supposition that snakes and Potnia Theron worship are linked. If the goddess worshipped at Delphi prior to the cult of Apollo was a Minoan-style Potnia Theron or a similar deity, it is possible that snakes were used in conjunction with her or to represent her in art and architecture. When the Hellenic Greeks moved into the area or the culture was adopted by the Delphic inhabitants, the snake may have become a stand in for the Earth

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<sup>22</sup> Duhoux, Yves, Anna Morpurgo Davies. *A Companion to Linear B: Mycenaean Greek Texts and their World. Vol 2.* Walpole: Peeters Louvain-la-Neuve, 2011. pg. 234-235

<sup>23</sup> Rutkowsky, Brogdan "Minoan Cults and History: Remarks on Professor B.C. Dietrich's Paper". *Historia: Zeitschrift für Alte Geschichte*, Bd. 20, H. 1, 1st Qtr., 1971. pg. 8.

goddess and her worship by extension. As the cult of Apollo won out, stories described the victory as that of the god over a giant snake, given the name Python by the Greeks.<sup>24</sup>

Additionally, connections to the Minoan-style worship of an Earth Goddess, are solidified not only by the Greek mythological view, but also by remains discovered in the cleft of Castalia. A Minoan-style rhyton made of limestone in the shape of the head of a lioness was discovered here and is thought to be used in the pouring of libations or in liquid sacrifice.<sup>25</sup> The fact that the rhyton is in the shape of a lioness is intriguing because a famous seal discovered at Knossos, shows a mountain on which a female figure, holding a scepter or a spear is standing. On both her left and right, a lioness appears, flanking and supporting her. To the side of the image, a man stands in only a loin cloth, who is significantly smaller than the goddess, but still large, indicating his above human standing. There is also the facade of a building near the edge of the scene, thought to indicate “the sacred character of the scene.”<sup>26</sup> The appearance of the lionesses with the goddess strongly suggests that these animals were sacred to her or at least of considerable religious importance. Additionally, lionesses play an important role as the sacred animal to the Greek goddess Artemis, who was later interpreted as a Potnia Theron.<sup>27</sup> The Knossos goddess in particular, qe-ra-si-ja, given also as K<sup>w</sup>herasia probably meant “Mistress of wild beasts” or “Mistress of Hunters” or even just “Mistress of Thera,” which is the island on which the site of Akrotheri is located, seems to have a link to Artemis, who was the Classical Greek goddess of the hunt.<sup>28</sup> The connection between qe-ra-si-ja and the Mistress of Hunters is a strong indication that Artemis, though not an oracular deity, may have been linked at some point to the Potnia Theron, though Artemis is also mentioned separately in the Linear B.

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<sup>24</sup> Parke, pg. 7

<sup>25</sup> Parke, pg. 5, 9.

<sup>26</sup> Rutkowsky, pg. 10.

<sup>27</sup> Lawler, Lillian B. “A Lion Among Ladies (Theocritus II, 66-68)” *Transactions and Proceedings of the American Philological Association*, Vol. 78, (1947), pg. 88

<sup>28</sup> Duhoux, 234-235

What I think is further interesting about the Linear B tablets is that Apollo is not mentioned and actually appears to be a rather late addition to the Olympian pantheon. His attachment to Artemis, that he becomes her twin, may reflect some kind of link between Artemis, the Potnia Theron, the Delphic cult, and that of Apollo's seizure of the site of Delphi. This connection would strengthen the argument that either a cult to a Potnia Theron existed at Delphi prior to the cult of Apollo, or that an equitable proto-Gaia cult existed here that led to later Greek myth of Apollo claiming dominance.

Another interesting link between Delphi and the Minoan Potnia Theron involves Delphic consultants' pre-consultation rituals and the popularity of the goat as a sacrifice. A seal stone, currently in the Louvre in Paris, depicts a woman with wings holding a goat in either hand by the tail.<sup>29</sup> Because her wings place her in a supernatural realm, this woman has been interpreted as a Potnia Theron figure. For this female to be holding two goats shows that they were of some importance to her, probably in a ritual or sacrificial fashion. If the goddess whose cult occupied the site of Delphi prior to Apollo was a Potnia Theron-type figure, then it is not beyond the realm of possibility to suggest that goats were also ritually important in the religious practices surrounding her. When Apollo's followers took control of the area and integrated his cult with the previously existing one, it is possible that, if a ritual sacrifice of a goat prior to consultation was a part of pre-consultation rites to the Earth goddess, this particular aspect was carried over.

Before moving on to discuss the Pythia in greater detail, I think it is important to acknowledge that these links between the peculiarities surrounding the Delphic oracular cult and those of Minoan Potnia Theron worship are my own theories. While it is intriguing to imagine Minoan connections and therefore a link to the Potnia Theron, there could be any number of reasons for the appearance of Minoan art at Delphi. Trade, visitation, or the later uncovering of some type of Minoan burial ground in the area, are all plausible explanations for the rhyton and

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<sup>29</sup> Paris, Louvre AO.11238, bought in Aleppo. BL; ridge carination. Woman with two wings holding two goats inverted. This might be Greek. <http://www.beazley.ox.ac.uk/gems/scarab/scarab35.htm>

other Minoan elements in the temple of Athena Pronaia. However, this is not to say that there are not some surprising links between the Delphic sanctuary and Minoan Earth Goddess worship. Classical Greek myth seems to agree that there was some kind of occupation at Delphi of an Earth goddess cult prior to that of Apollo. Archaeological evidence shows that a Mycenaean site and burials are located at Delphi and the connections between Mycenaean and Minoan cultural ideas allow that it is not beyond the realm of imagining to suggest Potnia Theron-style worship. Further archaeological evidence of a Minoan style rhyton and other materials in the cleft of Castalia further link Minoan worship to the site of Delphi. Additionally, if the Potnia Theron can be tied to the later worship of Gaia in the ancient world, then there are also significant affiliations between other prophetic sites of Gaia and that of Delphi. And finally, there is also a strong association between the mythical stories of Python and that of the Potnia Theron's connection to snakes. This being said, I think the connection between the Pythian peculiarities at Delphi and Minoan-style Potnia Theron worship can be sensibly made with the understanding that Earth Goddess worship in the area was absorbed into Apollo's cult, creating a new and unique style of prophetic consultation.

## Chapter 4

### Nameless Pythia

From here, the selection of the Pythia can be examined. The Pythia was not selected from any particular family line, nor was she the product of a specified training doctrine. To reduce the Pythian prestige, later Christians liked to argue that, when she was not upon her tripod, the Pythia was essentially indistinguishable from other women.

It has been suggested that the appointment of the Pythia to her post was gained through long term service to Apollo in his temple at Delphi, indicating that these women, while perhaps starting at a young age, would have to have been older to be chosen as Pythia. This service may have culminated in the tending of the eternal fire on the hearth within the temple, which would have been kept alight with wood of pine and laurel. Evidence for this is that the Pythian station was held by “women who had ceased from marital relations.”<sup>30</sup> It was most likely from these eternal fire tenders that as many as three Pythias would be chosen at the height of Delphic popularity, though even single oracles probably had successors in mind.

In later imperial times, the Pythian post was often filled by a woman from one of the prominent Delphic families. Rich and powerful familial groups probably provided the women that would gain the illustrious position of Pythia and, therefore, increase the prestige and power of the family through association. Though this was not always the case, the idea that mediumship was hereditary was probably the basis for the acceptance of these prominent families to the allotment. However, familial ties lasted only so long as the Pythia gained her station, because following this she was kept in relative isolation so as to be uninfluenced by the interests of those who came seeking consultations.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Parke, pg. 35.

<sup>31</sup> Graf, pg. 65.

Additionally, the Pythia was probably also selected on her propensity for medium-like behavior or a susceptibility to the divine. While there may have been tests for this, no evidence for any survives. Children are often thought to have a greater propensity for accessing the divine and had “acted as medium in many private oracular cults in antiquity.”<sup>32</sup> Though children were not directly consulted in historical Delphic record, ancient sources do tell us that the post of the Pythia was originally held by a young maiden. Following the rape of a particularly young and beautiful Pythia by a brute named Echekrates, it was decided to eliminate the possibility of this occurring again. To this end, the woman who would fill the role of Pythia would be post-menopausal and would dress as a maiden in memory of the youthful Pythias of the past.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid, pg. 53.

<sup>33</sup> Connelly, J. B. *Portrait of a Priestess: Women and Ritual in Ancient Greece*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007. pg. 43-44.

## Chapter 5

### Named Pythia

Having established how a Pythia may have been chosen, it is now possible to talk about the few named Pythia whose memory has survived since antiquity. Aeschylus, in the *Eumenides*, gave the name of Apollo's first Pythia, said to be called Pemonoe, whose name means "speaker of thoughts," and who was the first to speak oracle in hexameter verse.<sup>34</sup> Pausanias mentions Pemonoe in his *Description of Greece*. He says:

*The Delphians besought Apollon to keep from them the danger that threatened them. Pemonoe, the prophetess of that day, gave them an oracle verse:-- 'At close quarters a grievous arrow shall Apollon shoot at the spoiler of Parnassos; and of his blood-guilt the Kretans shall cleanse his hands but the renown shall never die.'*

(Pausanias, *Description of Greece* 10. 6. 5 (trans. Jones))

Lucan additionally named Pemonoe, but as presiding as Pythia in 48 BCE, much later than the mythical Delphic origins. However, this can be explained as this later Pemonoe being named after the first, highlighting the importance of tradition, in this case important traditional names, and the illustrious Delphic past.<sup>35</sup>

Following Pemonoe, the next name is given to us by Herodotus. Aristonike was the Pythia consulted in 480 BCE prior to the battle at Salamis. It was her prophecy referring to wooden walls that enabled Themistocles to suggest a sea battle against the Persians leading to a Greek victory. What is interesting about this story is that this was not the first oracle she delivered on the subject of the Persian invasion to the Athenians. They had previously consulted her and she had told them that the Persians would kill them all unless they fled that very moment. The Athenians did not like this prophecy and so sent a representative back to Delphi to consult again.

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid, pg. 73-75.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid, pg. 73-75.



One would think that Apollo would not have changed his words, but when Aristonike consulted him again, she spoke this to the Athenians:

*Pallas has not been able to soften the lord of Olympus,  
Though she has often prayed him, and urged him with excellent counsel.  
Yet once more I address thee in words than adamant firmer.  
When the foe shall have taken whatever the limit of Cecrops  
Holds within it, and all which divine Cithaeron, shelters,  
Then far-seeing Jove grants this to the prayers of Athene;  
Safe shall the wooden wall continue for thee and thy children.  
Wait not the tramp of the horse, nor the footmen mightily moving  
Over the land, but turn your back to the foe, and retire ye.  
Yet shall a day arrive when ye shall meet him in battle.  
Holy Salamis, thou shalt destroy the offspring of women,  
When men scatter the seed, or when they gather the harvest.*

(Herodotus, *Histories*, 7.141)<sup>36</sup>

This oracle is perhaps the most famous given at Delphi, which may be why Herodotus provided Aristonike's name. Additionally, her role in the events showed that she did in fact have some power over Athenian politics. When she spoke something that allowed for a bit of hope, Themistocles jumped on it and used it to his political advantage. Her initial statement to flee did not provide that, so there was some push back from the Athenian people for her to change her prophecy. Upon doing this, she offered a vague and hopeful enough response that action could be taken that fortunately resulted in a Greek victory at Salamis.

In addition to Aristonike, Herodotus also provides the name of a second Pythia, Periallus. According to Herodotus, she was discharged from duty because she took a bribe from Kleomenes to pronounce the illegitimacy of the Spartan king as a ruler so that Kleomenes could become king. In the *Histories*, Herodotus tells the story this way:

*At Cleomenes' instigation this was revealed to the Pythia. He had won over a man of great influence among the Delphians, Cobon son of Aristophantus, and Cobon persuaded the priestess, Periallus, to say what Cleomenes wanted her to. When the ambassadors asked if Demaratus was the son of Ariston, the Pythia gave judgment that he was not. All this came to light later;*

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<sup>36</sup> This whole story of the Athenians and the Persians is from Herodotus' *Histories* 7.138-144. My translation is from <http://www.thelatinlibrary.com/historians/herod/herodotus10.html>

*Cobon was exiled from Delphi, and Periallus was deposed from her position.*

(Herodotus, 6.66.2-3)

Of particular interest in this story is that she must have had at least some control over what oracles she delivered, or else she could not have manipulated the circumstances for her own gain.

Additionally, the Pythia Themistoclea, whose name is not provided by Herodotus, but does call to mind the Delphic occupation by Themis, is famous for foretelling the birth of Pythagoras. In fact, Pythagoras' name means "spoken by Pythia" and he studied under her. Diogenes Laertius, a biographer of Greek philosophers living in the 3rd century CE, says in his *Lives of Eminent Philosophers*, Book VIII, Chapter 1, that:

*Aristoxenus says that Pythagoras got most of his moral doctrines from the Delphic priestess Themistoclea.*

This statement is corroborated by John C. Malone in his book, *Psychology: Pythagoras to Present*. He says, "Interestingly, a woman may have supplied the ethical portion of the Pythagorean philosophy."<sup>37</sup> Themistoclea, he says, could very well have been Pythagoras' sister. When Pythagoras was in need of guidance, he would go to Delphi to consult his sister and the god Apollo, "receiv[ing] many of the ethical principles that he espoused."<sup>38</sup> After Pythagoras termed the word "philosophy" to mean lover of wisdom, Themistoclea was the first woman to be given the title of philosopher, due to her strong connection to Pythagoras and the work she did with him.<sup>39</sup>

The Pythia Xenokleia is yet another example of a named Pythia, famous, possibly due to the illustrious men with whom she interacted. In this case, Xenokleia was said to have refused to consult Apollo for the mythical hero Herakles.<sup>40</sup> Apollodorus tells the tale this way:

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<sup>37</sup> Malone, John C. *Psychology: Pythagoras to Present*. Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2009. Print. pg. 22.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Connelly, pg. 81.

*But being afflicted with a dire disease on account of the murder of Iphitus he went to Delphi and inquired how he might be rid of the disease. As the Pythian priestess answered him not by oracles, he was fain to plunder the temple, and, carrying off the tripod, to institute an oracle of his own. But Apollo fought him, and Zeus threw a thunderbolt between them. When they had thus been parted, Hercules received an oracle, which declared that the remedy for his disease was for him to be sold, and to serve for three years, and to pay compensation for the murder to Eurystus.*

(Apollodorus, *Library*, 2.6.2 (Trans. Frazer))

While Apollodorus does not mention Xenokleia by name, he does mention a Pythia, and her name is attested to by other ancient authors. Pausanias, for example, provides her name and tells the story slightly differently. He says:

*The Delphians say that when Heracles the son of Amphitryon came to the oracle, the prophetess Xenocleia refused to give a response on the ground that he was guilty of the death of Iphitus. Whereupon Heracles took up the tripod and carried it out of the temple. Then the prophetess said:  
Then there was another Heracles, of Tiryns, not the Canopian. For therefore this the Egyptian Heracles had visited Delphi. On the occasion to which I refer to the son of Amphitryon restored the tripod to Apollo, and was told by Xenocleia all he wished to know. The poets adopted the story, and sing about a fight between Heracles and Apollo for a tripod.*

(Pausanias, *Description of Greece*, 10.13.8 (Trans. Jones))

Finally, the only “historical” priestess to Apollo, meaning that she was not named in literature, but is attested to in the archaeological record, is Theonike. The name was provided by a post-third century CE inscription, which named Theonike on a memorial to the granddaughter of priest and “Pythia of the god.”<sup>41</sup>

When discussing named Pythia, it is important to question why these particular Pythia were named, when countless others were stripped of their individual identity. Indeed, Herodotus’ accounts hardly speak to the Pythia at all and instead focus on her pronouncements or speak of the oracles in terms of their relativity to the god Apollo. When Pythias are named, he does not go

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<sup>41</sup> Parke, pg. 36.

into much information on them or why he has selected names for these few. This being said, there seems to be no clear reason for their naming. Pemonoe is called the first Pythia, which is a place of honor, but Periallus is named because of her disgrace and expulsion from her post. Aristonike may have been named due to the import of her oracle for the Greeks in the dispersion of the Persians. Additionally, Xenokleia and Themistoclea were probably named for their connection to the famous Greek figures of Herakles and Pythagoras. If this line of thinking is correct, then Pythia are only named in connection to something famous they have pronounced or someone famous with whom they have come into contact. However, there are many other famous Greek heroes and figures of whom Herodotus speaks, like King Croesus, who consult a nameless Pythia, so this logic falls apart somewhat. Due to the scarcity with which Pythias are named and the variable circumstances under such naming, it is difficult to state a common reason that cannot be discounted by lack of information in other like circumstances. Even still, the naming of the Pythia makes her an individual with distinction. It may be that the Greek mindset did not often consider her thus, regardless of the enormous power her station would have allotted her. This will be further explored in the next section in relation to spirit possession.

## Chapter 6

### Spirit Possession

On the opening page of her article, *'It's All to do With Words': An Analysis of Spirit Possession in the Venezuelan Cult of Maria Lionza*, Barbara Placido says, "what remains unheard is what spirits and humans talk about during possession episodes."<sup>42</sup> This tantalizing knowledge would undoubtedly cast out the mysteries surrounding the Pythia, throw light upon her personality, her mindset, and, especially, her relationship to her inspirer, the god Apollo. However, Placido speaks of spirits and humans, not of gods and their divine mouthpieces. I am going to argue that there is not a clear divide between these two things. By connecting Apollo to a possessing spirit and the Pythia to the object of this possession, I think that a greater understanding of the Pythia can be gained as to her role in an oracular consultation and her larger function in the society, politically and socially.

But to make this claim, it must first be accepted that Delphic oracular consultation is a form of spirit possession. Apollo must then be agreed to be a spirit. According to Merriam-Webster, a spirit is "a supernatural being or essence as a malevolent being that enters and possess a human being." Dictionary.com posits that a spirit is: "a supernatural, incorporeal being, especially one inhabiting a place, object, etc., or having a particular character." The first definition is slightly problematic for my purposes because, while Apollo is supernatural, he is not wholly malevolent, although he can be at times. He does, however, enter and possess the Pythia, who is undoubtedly a human being. If one discounts the aspect of malevolence, this definition would fit Apollo nicely enough. The second definition is similar in that it is mostly adequate. The one way in which it does not fit Apollo, is that it mentions the descriptor "incorporeal" and he is not always this way. In the sense of possession at Delphi, he does possess her in a nonphysical

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<sup>42</sup> Placido, B. *'It's All to do With Words': An Analysis of Spirit Possession in the Venezuelan Cult of Maria Lionza*. The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute, (2001): pg. 207

manner, but as a god, is largely thought of as a substantial individual. However, if this incorporeal part is understood as referring to this particular instance, and not uniformly throughout time, then the second definition of a spirit would apply to Apollo in this case.

Next, it is important to examine whether the Pythia can be thought of as a possessed individual. Janice Boddy describes spirit possession as “hold exerted over a human being by external forces or entities more powerful than she....may be ancestors or divinities, ghosts of foreign origin, or entities both ontologically and ethnically alien.”<sup>43</sup> Interestingly, the pronoun she uses to describe possessed individuals is *she*, not *he*. Cross-culturally speaking, the subjects of spirit possession are most often females. There are a number of explanations put forward as to the reason for this preponderance of females in this area. One such supposition is that women in past and “Old World traditional societies,” are the most likely to suffer from nutrient deficiencies due to the likelihood that the needs of men would be taken care of first, and also that pregnant women need more nutrients than do other members of society. Specifically, Kehoe and Giletti link the lack of thiamine, tryptophan-niacin, calcium, and Vitamin D to negative effects on muscles and the central nervous system that “have been recognized...as manifestations of spirit possession and institutionalized as a means of reducing victim’s anxieties and restoring their ability to function normally.”<sup>44</sup> While this theory may make sense on some level, it would not make much sense in relation to Delphi, in that the Pythia, who abstained from sex while in service to the god, would not have been pregnant and so lacking nutrients this way. Additionally, as the chief priestess in the temple to Apollo, the sacred mouthpiece of the god, she would not have been overlooked for a male when it came to the distribution of nutrient resources. The only way this theory would fit to explain why women and not men were the mouthpieces of divine forces at Delphi is if a previous

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<sup>43</sup> Boddy, Janice. "Spirit Possession Revisited: Beyond Instrumentality." *Annual Review of Anthropology* 23 (1994): 407-34. *JSTOR*. Web. 11 Nov. 2013. pg. 407.

<sup>44</sup> Kehoe, Dody H., Alice B. Giletti. *Women's Preponderance in Possession Cults*. *American Anthropologist*, 1981. pg. 549

cult existed here and the nutrient deficiency origins stayed with the cult until it's Classical heyday.

Lisa Maurizio, however, postulates a far more likely explanation for the greater number of women possessed by spirits than men. She says that because social frustrations caused by oppression can be expressed through possession in a way accepted by society at large, women, who are much more likely to be oppressed in patriarchal societies, look to spirit possession as a means of catharsis, making possession a legitimate way to handle and cope with domination. In addition, she states that it may be a way for women to gain access to areas they are otherwise excluded from. Because they were chosen by and act as conduits for the divine, their words cannot to be regulated. They are free to speak on religious and political issues, provide medical cures, and solve social disagreements without reprimand or dismissal, allowing them considerable power in the community.<sup>45</sup>

From this perspective, is the Pythia a subject of possession? She is female and a supernatural being does speak through her. Women in Ancient Greece were certainly repressed by the male dominated society. In Athens, for example, women were largely restricted to the home and uneducated. Marilyn Katz in her *Ideology and "The Status of Women" in Ancient Greece*, says on the topic: "to the man belongs the right to rule, derived from the fact of his physical and intellectual superiority, and to the woman on account of her sense for order and beauty as well as her capacity for detail, belong both the authority and duty to execute the laws set down by man."<sup>46</sup> Though the proximity of Delphi to Athens (according to GoogleMaps it is 110.7 mi or 178 km) is not that great, being in different regions (Delphi is in Phocis, Athens is in Attica) and near to different city-states means that their customs may vary. However, the lack of mention by

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<sup>45</sup> L. Maurizio, "Anthropology and Spirit Possession: a Reconsideration of the Pythia's Role at Delphi" *The Journal of Hellenic Studies*, Vol. 115 (1995), pg 75.

<sup>46</sup> Katz, Marilyn. *Ideology and "The Status of Women" in Ancient Greece*. History and Theory, Vol. 31, No. 4, Beiheft 31: History and Feminist Theory (Dec., 1992) , pp. 74-75

ancient authors of the differences between Athens and Delphi in the role of women, as there was of Sparta, means it is likely that these two cities had similar conceptions of gender dynamics.

By this understanding, the Pythia, as a woman in Ancient Greece, would have been, save for her elevated position, relatively powerless. Barbara Placido describes spirit possession by saying that while individuals who are possessed by spirits are often considered weak or powerless or without agency, spirit possession itself is seen as “a kind of ventriloquism in which mediums acquire a voice more powerful than their own as humans.” She goes on to assert that those who experience possession episodes are “actively engaged in an ongoing conversation with anthropologists, historians, the media, and the state.”<sup>47</sup> Ventriloquism may not be an apt descriptor of the relationship between Apollo and the Pythia, due to the fact that the latter of these seems to have at least retained some of her power in ancient sources, as evidenced, at least, by the story of Periallus in Herodotus’ *Histories*.<sup>48</sup>

Additionally, Boddy links the types of possession, whether or not it was a positive or negative experience, to the gender of the individuals experiencing them.<sup>49</sup> She says that in cases of ancestors or cultural heroes possessing members of the community “to uphold moral order,” the possessed individual is more often male. When the possession was more unpleasant, like an illness for example, the sufferers were usually “women or other marginal or subordinate individuals.” Further on, she reiterates the statements of others that possession can be seen as an instrument through which “consensual beliefs were used by the socially disadvantaged who, in claiming to be seized by spirits, indirectly brought public attention to their plight and potentially achieved some redress.”<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Placido, pg. 207.

<sup>48</sup> Herodotus, line 6.66.

<sup>49</sup> Boddy, pg. 410.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.



Gender also plays a role in possession in other cultures. Sinhalese women, for example, are seen as more closely tied to the human world, but their femininity is thought to leave them inherently more susceptible to attacks from demons. In Papua New Guinea women are “seen as stronger than men, more capable of enduring hardship, taking responsibility, suffering the privations that spirits exact.” In Islamic nations, where interactions with the spirit world are demeaned, men, who must hold themselves to a higher degree of public separation from possession, often deal with instances of possession and exorcism by handling it privately or ignoring it.<sup>51</sup>

In Ancient Greece, men were more often the objects of divine prophetic inspiration, prophesying at sites like Dodona and Olympia. Greece as a whole, then, would not quite fit the trend supported by other cultures where women were more likely to experience possession than men. However, using the model provided by Boddy, the nature of the possession of the Pythia at Delphi was positive, meaning that the possession was enacted by a venerated deity and was not illness-like. With this in mind, it would stand to reason that a male should have been possessed. If this were the case at Delphi, like it is at other Greek oracle sites, then it would fit the Boddy model. However, the Delphic cult falls in a strange place, fitted into the cross-cultural preeminence of women as the primary instruments of possession, but outside of the model that men usually house venerated spirits.

Another link between the Pythia and spirit possession, is that both the Pythia, and the spirit-possessed females of several other cultural groups give up their own well-being, at least in part, for the good of the community. For example, Boddy describes how married kinswomen of the Kalanga of Zimbabwe volunteer to be possessed by “lions,” which are thought of as “capricious, wild, and predatory demons” with the hopes of “thwart[ing] danger and cleans[ing] the domestic domain.” Additionally, in healing temples in Maharashtra India, “women enter [a] therapeutic but painful trance on behalf of their possessed kin, thus shifting to themselves the

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid, pg. 415.

direction of spirit attack.” Korean women practice shamanic rituals which safeguard the family and conciliate the gods of the household.<sup>52</sup>

In the case of the Pythia, her own well-being was neglected in that she was secluded from her family, undergoing, “a long and intense period of conditioning supported by a sisterhood of Delphic women who tended the eternal sacred fire in the temple.”<sup>53</sup> She was then “subjected to perpetual celibacy.”<sup>54</sup> Additionally, though cases of Pythias dying from consulting Apollo were rare<sup>55</sup>, the fact that these cases exist and were circulated, means that the Pythia must have known she could possibly die at any time as a result of mounting the tripod. Still, Pythias throughout the occupation of Delphi continued to do so, placing their own well-being behind that of the community’s need to hear from the god Apollo, strengthening the link of the Delphic cult to the practice of spirit possession.

Can Delphi, then, be tenably interpreted as cult center with the practice of spirit possession? I believe that because of the gendered implications of women as more easily possessed than men, and the possibility of a previous cult at Delphi in which the origins of the female mouthpiece lies, that the Delphic cult can be reasonably understood as an example of spirit possession. The later infusion of the Apollonic cult, may explain the positive nature of the possession, despite the retention of the female pronouncer. The further link between the Pythia and the elevation of community well-being over the Pythia’s own with that of spirit possession and females in other cultures, further solidifies this claim.

With Pythian consultation as an example of spirit possession, it is next important to examine how knowledge of the Pythia can be strengthened by this link. One way that this can be achieved, is by examining how the Pythia of Delphi fit into the sociopolitical schema of Ancient

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid, pg. 418.

<sup>53</sup> Hale, J. R., J. Z. de Boer, J. Chanton, and H. A. Spiller. "Questioning the Delphic Oracle." *Scientific American* 289 (2003): 67-73. [http://news.nationalgeographic.com/news/2001/08/0814\\_delphioracle.html](http://news.nationalgeographic.com/news/2001/08/0814_delphioracle.html)

<sup>54</sup> Connelly, pg. 73.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid, pg. 77-78.

Greece. Based on the evidence examined to this point of the low status of women, the role that spirit possession plays in the extraction from this oppression, and the way in which women in several different cultures similarly neglect their own welfare for that of the community, I believe that the position of the Pythia was an important one indeed. Her status allowed her to comment on war<sup>56</sup>, colonial expansion<sup>57</sup>, and political control of city-states.<sup>58</sup> By her interaction with the divine, her status was high indeed. The veiled nature of her pronouncements, however, does take some of her power away, in that her oracles can often be interpreted in a number of ways. This is made very clear in the examples of Kleomenes and Themistocles, who use prophecy in the furtherance of their own individual goals. Nonetheless, both men went to and consulted the Pythia, allowing her to play an important sociopolitical role and throw some of her own opinion and sway into the issues.

On a smaller scale, the lens of spirit possession to interpret Delphic consultation can also be illuminating. First, in terms of consultation, the intricacies of ethnographic research in the area of spirit possession may be able to provide some light on the oracular performance of the Pythia. Before entering into this discussion, however, it may be profitable to provide a bit of information on the mechanisms of what is known of Delphic consultation.

To begin with, the Pythia only gave consultation during nine months of the year and only then on the seventh day after each new moon. During the winter months, Apollo was thought to leave for Hyperboreans and Dionysos would move in to oversee Delphic affairs.<sup>59</sup> This particular practice was thought to date to the sixth century following the rise of Dionysos to the official Olympic pantheon. The choice of Dionysos to take over proceedings is an interesting one, due to the fact that the followers of Dionysos, called maenads, were described as being maniacs or out of

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<sup>56</sup> Herodotus, 7.140-142

<sup>57</sup> Ibid. 1.55.2

<sup>58</sup> Ibid. 6.66.2

<sup>59</sup> Connelly, pg. 73-74.

control.<sup>60</sup> Often, the Delphic trance that the Pythia fell under during consultations was called “mania.” Even still, the “raging maenads”, who became the Greek model for the possessed, were in juxtaposition to the Pythia who was described as “coherent and articulate, fluent and knowledgeable almost beyond comprehension, when she recites her oracles, some of which were in verse.”<sup>61</sup>

When one wanted to consult the Pythia, he had to first purify in holy water, probably from the Castilian spring, pay for a cake and sacrifice it on the main altar, and then make a sacrifice to the god, usually in the form of a goat or other animal that was first drenched in water. If the animal did not vigorously shake the water from its hide, the god would not speak to that person.<sup>62</sup>

There are several important things to note about this practice. First of all, it is interesting that there are pre-consultation rituals for not only the Pythia who will be invoking the god, but also for the consultant to follow. While the Pythia had to lay a crown of laurel leaves on her head, drink from or bathe in the Castilian springs, offer prayers honoring Apollo, and burn laurel leaves and barley meal on the altar, before taking up a bay sprig and mounting the tripod, the true decision of the god to be consulted or not, lay with the seeker of the information. Apollo would not tell the Pythia he would not consult, but he did make his decision clear to the consultant. If his warning was not heeded, however, disastrous consequences would befall the Pythia, not the consultant. Plutarch, for example, tells the story of a Pythia who did not want to mount the tripod because of unfavorable pre-consultation rites. She was forced to, however, and soon became hysterical, dying within the next couple of days. Lucan gives even more extreme cases of deadly forced prophecy<sup>63</sup>. The question arises then, why did Apollo take out his anger on his servant who

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<sup>60</sup> Parke, pg. 11.

<sup>61</sup> Maurizio, “Anthropology and Spirit Possession: a Reconsideration of the Pythia's Role at Delphi.” pg. 79.

<sup>62</sup> Parke, pg. 65-66.

<sup>63</sup> Connelly, pg. 76-78.

resisted consultation and not on those who forced her? Perhaps views on women would explain this, but even so, it is curious. Mania, again comes to mind in this instance, because it seems that the Pythia is really only manic when she is forced to consult against the signs, unlike the maenads who are manic by definition.

Using this information on the consultation process, we can then try to better understand it, using the lens of spirit possession. One way this can be done is to examine the role of randomizing devices. Janice Boddy describes the *Zar* cult in Sudan.<sup>64</sup> She says:

*Women are responsible for ceremonies and practices ensuring the continuity of social life....the possessed learn a spirit anti-language that metaphorically alters quotidian terms....participants are engaged bodily, emotionally, and intellectually. They are expected to acquire a visceral sense of the spirits' distinctiveness from themselves, yet to recall their experiences during trance and the messages of spirit manifest in other women's bodies. Zar is at once a healing rite and a parodical means to domesticate male and alien powers, an ambiguous meta-commentary on local morality, and a history and anthropology of life in colonial and post-colonial Sudan.*

There are several interesting things to note about the above commentary. First, Boddy says that possessed individuals learn a “spirit anti-language that metaphorically alters quotidian terms.” While not explicitly stating this “anti-language” as a randomizing device, it does fit, at least partially, the criteria. According to Lisa Maurizio’s definition, randomized responses are purposefully difficult to recreate and quantify, which limits access to divinity and inspiration from the spirit world.<sup>65</sup> Having to learn a particular spirit anti-language would certainly limit the number of people who could contact the divine. Those who would be chosen to learn the language would probably have to have shown some kind of propensity for spiritual disposition or have a familial connection to those who were already holders of the sacred knowledge.

This particular model fits with Delphi in that, while it is not entirely known how the Pythia was chosen, it is clear from the early Christian degradation of the temple that the Pythia

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<sup>64</sup> Boddy, pg. 417.

<sup>65</sup> Maurizio, “Anthropology and Spirit Possession: a Reconsideration of the Pythia's Role at Delphi.” pg. 81.

was not chosen from any family, in particular, except in imperial times, and, at least on the surface, appeared no different than any other inhabitant of the city.<sup>66</sup> However, the early Christians probably did not care to explore the cult in detail, and there may have been an elaborate training process, possibly derived from the potential Pythia's stay at and service to the temple of Apollo prior to her selection. In this time, it is quite possible that she was observed by powerful members of the cult for her propensity for spirituality and then trained in some way to prepare her for becoming the mouthpiece of the god. Additionally, though there may have been no familial descent required in the times of the early Christians, it does not mean that this particular requirement did not exist at other points in Delphic history, like during imperial times, or that member of the Delphic community did not believe the gift of prophecy ran in particular bloodlines and were more likely to choose Pythia from these families. To tie this back to the Sudanese model, evidence of a learned language, as was probably also the case at Delphi, shows that there was some manner of selection and then training that went into the prophetic arts.

Boddy goes on to say that possessed individuals are engaged fully in a physical, emotional, and intellectual sense. Maurizio's randomizing devices definition corroborates this engagement in that she speaks of the ways randomizing devices create resistance. She says that, not only are the words of the speaker veiled, but that body language, expressed through posture, tone of voice, the use of unusual or striking clothing, and unusual gestures further obscures the recreation and interpretation of what is being said.<sup>67</sup> The Pythia fits into this model because she was poised on a tripod above a deep fissure into the ground. Her elevation above the consultant and the unusualness of this post would potentially be off-putting for a first-time seeker of divine knowledge. Additionally, though she was an older woman, she dressed as a virginal young bride. This juxtaposition of her actual age and sexual status with that of what her raiment suggested, must have also been striking to Delphic visitors. As to what gestures she made, this was probably

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<sup>66</sup> Parke, pg. 35.

<sup>67</sup> Maurizio, "Anthropology and Spirit Possession: a Reconsideration of the Pythia's Role at Delphi." pg. 81-82.

fairly limited due to her depiction in Greek art as holding a bowl and an olive branch.<sup>68</sup> While she may have moved these around her in the air in some manner, she was probably fairly stationary or else she would have fallen from her elevated seat. Additionally, if the Pythia fits this model of randomizing devices in all other ways, it is not illogical to imagine that she may have also altered her tone of voice in some way, or used some sort of “anti-language,”<sup>69</sup> at least to enter her divine trances, that would have further obscured her access to the divine and the messages she passed from Apollo to those consulting him.

Maurizio further describes spirit possession, specifically the “ecstasy” or trance entered by the possessed individual as “a sleep-like state marked by reduced sensitivity to stimuli, loss or alteration of knowledge of what is happening, substitution of automatic for voluntary activity” and “a condition of disassociation, characterized by lack of voluntary movement and frequently by automatism in act and thought illustrated by hypnotic and mediumistic conditions”<sup>70</sup>. This description would also fit the Pythia in that she was often described in the ancient sources as being clear-headed and sound of mind, while still having access to the divine. If she can be described as a subject of spirit possession of this nature, she can be understood as awake, but not fully conscious. Whether or not this was derived from a sort of self-hypnosis or the presence of some sort of narcotic gases remains a debate that will be further explored in the next section.

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<sup>68</sup> The Delphic Oracle. Kylix by the Kodros painter, c. 440-430 BCE. From the Collection of Joan Cadden. [http://www.coastal.edu/ashes2art/delphi2/misc-essays/oracle\\_of\\_delphi.html](http://www.coastal.edu/ashes2art/delphi2/misc-essays/oracle_of_delphi.html)

<sup>69</sup> Boddy, pg. 417.

<sup>70</sup> Maurizio, “Anthropology and Spirit Possession: a Reconsideration of the Pythia's Role at Delphi.” pg. 73.

## Chapter 7

### The Vapors vs. Oral Performance Debate

To start this section, I would like to begin with another story from antiquity as to the founding of the site of Delphi. In my opinion, this story is a later invention of a masculine-centric culture that seeks to further undermine the Earth goddess connections of earlier stories to the cult of Apollo at that time. However, it does provide some insight into the archaeological argument between self-hypnosis and the presence of vapors in Delphic oracular consultation.

The story is given to us by Diodorus, who tells the story in this way:<sup>71</sup>

*It is said that in ancient times goats discovered the oracular shrine, on which account even to this day the Delphians use goats preferably when they consult the oracle. There is a chasm at this place where now is situated what is known as the 'forbidden' sanctuary, and as goats had been wont to feed about this because Delphi had not as yet been settled, invariably any goat that approached the chasm and peered into it would leap about in an extraordinary fashion and utter a sound quite different from what it was formerly wont to emit. The herdsman in charge of the goats marveled at the strange phenomenon and having approached the chasm and peeped down it to discover what it was, had the same experience as the goats, for the goats began to act like beings possessed and the goatherd also began to foretell future events.*

Rather than undermining the previous understandings of an Earth goddess cult here prior to Apollo, this story can be interpreted to highlight a very interesting aspect of the Delphic cult; the importance of goats in the pre-consultation rites. The aforementioned seal stone from the Louvre in Paris, can be linked directly to this story in that it depicts a woman with wings, interpreted as a Potnia Theron figure, or Mistress of Wild Beasts, holding a goat in either hand by the tail.<sup>72</sup> These

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<sup>71</sup> Diodorus Siculus. *Library of History*. Trans. Charles L. Sherman. Cambridge (Mass.): Harvard University Press, 1952. 16.26.2.

According to Kristin M. Heineman, in whose paper I found the above quote and utilized in my own, this is the earliest mention of a chasm at Delphi, which she calls "suspicious, but not entirely inexplicable." Heineman, K. *The Chasm at Delphi: A Modern Perspective*. Academia.edu. 2010. Web. 1 March 2014. [http://www.academia.edu/284281/The\\_Chasm\\_at\\_Delphi\\_A\\_Modern\\_Perspective](http://www.academia.edu/284281/The_Chasm_at_Delphi_A_Modern_Perspective).

<sup>72</sup> Paris, Louvre AO.11238, bought in Aleppo. BL; ridge carination. Woman with two wings holding two goats inverted. This might be Greek. <http://www.beazley.ox.ac.uk/gems/scarab/scarab35.htm>



goats, due to their prominence in depiction with a goddess, must have held some importance to the Potnia Theron cult, either ritually or, perhaps more importantly for our interpretation at Delphi, in a sacrificial sense. This sacrificial aspect may very well have carried over into Apollo's cult, when his followers moved into the area and took control. The later story of the goatherd and flock discovering the chasm may have simply been a means to disconnect this practice from the Earth goddess's cult and attach it solely to Apollo.

To pull this story into an archaeological discussion, it mentions both a chasm and vapors that create a prophetic effect. This is quite interesting in light of the debate between scholars as to whether self-hypnosis or hallucinogenic gases existed at Delphi. I believe that the site of Delphi can be best understood if we take a middle ground between the two of these, but to do so, it will be important to establish the existence of both at the site and then discuss how they may have interacted to produce a holistic picture of the Pythia and the Delphic cult.

To begin with, the word pytho in Greek means "to rot," possibly arising from the smell of volcanic gases in the area.<sup>73</sup> The presence of gasses may also be explained by recent geological survey. In 1980, the United Nations Development Project mapped active fault lines throughout the country of Greece. Beneath the site of Delphi, the geologists found two intersecting lines, right under where the adyton, or inner sanctum, was located.<sup>74</sup>

When the site was examined by archaeologist John Hale and his team, they discovered that the inner sanctum had sunk and that the sanctuary itself was asymmetrical, due to a feature that is no longer discernible, but caused a break in the internal colonnade. The foundations of the temple housed a complex drain system that was probably used to pass spring water through the Temple itself. The team geologist, DeBoer, identified travertine deposits in this drain, which were caused by the spring water flowing through and depositing calcite from dissolved limestone in the pipes. This limestone, which was identified as deriving from Mt. Parnassos, revealed layers of

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<sup>73</sup> Graf, pg. 70.

<sup>74</sup> Hale, pg. 2.

bituminous limestone on the mountain itself with a content of petrochemicals as high as twenty percent.<sup>75</sup> According to Hale's team, this hydrocarbon enriched limestone was formed about seventy to one hundred million years ago. About every one hundred years following this, earthquakes caused by the separation of the area's tectonic plates, heated the rocks and caused the hydrocarbons to vaporize. While some of these chemicals may have risen from the resulting fissures as gas, it is also possible that some of the chemicals, leached into the nearby spring water. With this in mind, Hale's team tested the Castilian spring and other nearby water sources, and found that there was evidence of ethylene, a narcotic chemical that is described as having a sweet smell and creating floating feelings or disembodied euphoria in those who inhale it. Hale's team postulated that, as more and more of these hydrocarbons were vaporized due to earthquakes and subsequent heating of rocks, the concentration of ethylene was depleted and the Pythian consultation fell into disuse.<sup>76</sup>

Hale and his team's geological research into this area is very exciting and does explain several factors that are not explained by the theory of self-hypnosis which became popular following the French excavations of 1892. For example, the origin of the name Pythia, which comes from "rot," holds sway when one considers that the sweet smell of ethylene may be linked to the smell of things decomposing. Also, the location of the Pythia as sitting over a chasm from which vapors rose, in light of the geological discovery of the intersection of faults under the spot where this would have occurred, seems highly connected. Also, the discovery of ethylene in the limestone and spring makes a strong case for the occurrence of the vapors, especially when one keeps in mind that the ancient authors attest to there being gases present.

However, the problem with these theories is that, due to the very nature of the gases being burned off through the heating of the surrounding rock, there is no way to prove that the ethylene was present in older layers of rock. In fact, there is no way to date the geological layers

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<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

<sup>76</sup> Roach. "Delphic Oracle's Lips May Have Been Loosened by Gas Vapors."

in general, or measure how much ethylene would have been present and if this would have been enough to induce a trance. Because of this, it is possible that, while there is ethylene present today, there was no ethylene in antiquity. Additionally, if there were hydrocarbons present at the time, there is no way to prove that those hydrocarbons were specifically ethylene. For me, however, the theory is a strong one, and a likely explanation for the presence of the cult in that particular location.

However, an understanding of the Pythia and how her consultation worked would be incomplete without also considering that there may very well have been no gases or at least such a low concentration of gases as to be negligible. If this is the case, then oracle consultation can be thought of as oral performance. Oral performance is an interesting way to think of Pythia, because it means that the community is the true author of the oracle, but confers authenticity of the oracle pronouncements on the Pythia during her performances.<sup>77</sup> This would explain why the Pythia speaks in riddles; if her oracles are vague, the individuals consulting can take what she says and apply it to almost whatever they wish. In that way, it is very difficult for the Pythia to be wrong, and so the system can persist. To strengthen this point, Maurizio says in her article “Delphic Oracle as Oral Performance” that metaphorical language can be molded and shaped to any situation and can be seen as “indication of institutional duplicity.”<sup>78</sup> Additionally, Thucydides says that, “people construct as memory to fit the things they endure,” which bridges together understandings of the past, present, and future.<sup>79</sup> This seems to fit the Pythia of Delphi, because consultants would arrive seeking information on the future, and then, when events had come to pass, would stand in the present looking back on what had been said and make meaning from it.

Other evidence for a lack of hydrocarbon gas at Delphi lies in the clarity which would have been needed in the story of Periallus. Had she been under the influence of a narcotic

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<sup>77</sup> Maurizio, Lisa. "Delphic Oracles as Oral Performances: Authenticity and Historical Evidence." *Classical Antiquity* 16 (1997): pg. 317.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid pg. 321.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid. pg. 318.

substance, it would have been extremely difficult for her to invent a story which named the Spartan King illegitimate. The evidence of bribery suggests that the Pythia would have had to be in control of their giving of prophecy, or else it would have been impossible to tell anything but what was perceived as “truth.”<sup>80</sup>

Additionally, the strong possibility that randomizing responses were used at Delphi, speaks to the ability of the Pythia to give prophecy without the use of hallucinogenic gases. Randomizing responses have been observed by cultural anthropologists and documented in cases of spirit possession as being used to set up resistance. They work by obscuring the words of the diviner using language that is nearly unintelligible either through garbling, strange intonation, or highly ambiguous language. Body language can also play a role here through the diviner’s posture, tone of voice, unusual clothing, and strange gestures. Maurizio describes these devices as being difficult to reproduce and measure which makes it challenging for others to take the diviner’s role in society, keeping an “objective system of access to divine knowledge.”<sup>81</sup> These randomizing devices can be linked to the Pythia in several ways. First, it is clear through the oracles that remain, that the Pythia used metaphorical and allegorical language which can be described as highly ambiguous. Unfortunately, not much is known about the Pythia’s body language, garbling, or strange intonation.

Additionally, an individual under the influence of a narcotic gas, while possibly appearing sound of mind, would certainly not be clear-headed. However, if the Pythia was simply an instrument of the god and not a translator of his thoughts, would her state of mind really matter? The question then arises as to whether the god was in control, or was the Pythia, and if the god, then was it from within the Pythia or from without? Ancient authors’ views of this matter differ in some respects. The term *entheoi*, for example, refers to “having the god inside.”<sup>82</sup> *Entheos*,

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<sup>80</sup> Connelly, pg. 78.

<sup>81</sup> Maurizio, "Delphic Oracles as Oral Performances: Authenticity and Historical Evidence." pg. 81-82.

<sup>82</sup> Graf, 63.

however, meaning “filled with the god,” speaks to the god being present in the body, when the “manic wind enters a person through an orifice and can exit again as divine prophecy.”<sup>83</sup> The word “manic” resurfaces here, even though ancient sources all support the idea that the Pythia’s language was serene and clear, as though she were composed and not manic at the time of consultation. To this effect, Plutarch describes the Pythia as translating the god’s thoughts, and not as though the god literally spoke through the Pythia.<sup>84</sup> If this were the case, the Pythia would have to be clear-headed enough to hear the god’s thoughts, interpret them into words that could be spoken, and then pass this information on to the consultant in a logical fashion. This would explain Herodotus’s story of Periallus and how she was able to take Kleomenes’ bribe,<sup>85</sup> whereas, if she was truly a puppet of the gods, she would not have been able to make a choice to lie or give false prophecy.

The most likely scenario, however, is that the Pythia would have been able to learn how to balance a slight high due to a low dose of narcotic gases with additional training in randomizing devices and self-hypnosis. The effect of the narcotic may have lowered her inhibitions and triggered her slip into a self-hypnotic state. This theory would support both the evidence of volcanic narcotic gases and the location of Delphi above an intersection of two fault lines as well as that of the randomizing devices and larger cultural reasons for the practice of spirit possession, alongside possible self-hypnosis. Because we have no direct evidence for the Pythia’s mindset, training, or a detailed consultation, all theories on the topic are going to be extrapolation. To say that only one or the other of these practices, either vapor-induced stupors or self-hypnosis, existed at Delphi is to disregard a large portion of evidence to the contrary and in addition. By taking a view that involves some combination of these two paths, I think that a greater understanding of the workings of Pythian consultation can be gained because all evidence

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<sup>83</sup> Maurizio, Lisa. “Anthropology and Spirit Possession: a Reconsideration of the Pythia's Role at Delphi” pg. 76.

<sup>84</sup> Graf, 67.

<sup>85</sup> Herodotus, 6.66.2.

is taken into account and counted as equally valid and probable. I will continue to evaluate the role of self-hypnosis and narcotic vapors as they relate to the literary figure of Cassandra and other literary representations of the Pythia in the next section.

## Chapter 8

# Cassandra

Of the famous children of the unfortunate Trojan king, Priam, Cassandra is perhaps the most intriguing due to her unique gifts and terrible misfortunes. As a female literary character gifted with foresight by Apollo, she offers invaluable insight into how a Delphic Pythia may have behaved, or at least how she may have been regarded by ancient peoples. Additionally, she can be used as a tool to understand the link between sexuality and prophecy as it relates to the Pythia's relationship to the god Apollo, which will be established further on.

The daughter of King Priam and Queen Hecuba of Troy, Cassandra received her gift as a young child, when her twin brother, Helenus, and she were left alone in the sanctuary of Apollo. When they were discovered by their parents, snakes were wrapped around them, licking Helenus' ears, giving him the ability to hear the voices of the gods, and licking Cassandra's eyes, giving her prophetic visions.<sup>86</sup>

Following this story of the twins receiving their gifts from the god, there is no mention of them again until the Trojan War, save for the story of how Cassandra became cursed by Apollo. The story follows that, as a more mature young woman, Cassandra was approached by the god Apollo, and refused his sexual advances. Angered and shamed, the god punished her by allowing her to continue to see the future and to speak what she saw, but not to be understood by those around her, so that she could not change the course of the events that were revealed. In his *Fabulae*, Hyginus (trans. Grant) tells it this way:

*Cassandra, daughter of Priam and Hecuba, is said to have fallen asleep when she was tired of playing, in the temple of Apollo. When Apollo tried to embrace her, she did not permit him. So Apollo brought it about that she should not be believed, though she gave true prophecies.*

(Hyginus *Fabulae*, 93)

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<sup>86</sup> Graf, pg. 76.

What is illuminating about this interaction is that, though Cassandra's gift was given to her as a small child, it was on a basis that someday Apollo would require payment in the form of sexual relations. When he was denied this payment, he did not revoke his gift, but instead made it terrible, trapping Cassandra in a fate far worse than if her abilities had simply been taken away.

To elaborate, Cassandra's ability to see the future, and Apollo's curse that she should not be understood, both stands to neutralize her gift in that she cannot use it to affect change, and that because of this foreknowledge, especially as it relates to the fall of Troy and her own encroaching doom, only stands to further Cassandra's suffering. For example, when the Greeks gifted the Trojans with the famed wooden horse, Cassandra warned the city against admitting it, but she was disregarded since none believe her words. Similarly, in Lycophron's *Alexandra*, a male slave of Priam reports Cassandra's prophesying to her father, which is an interesting reversal of the gender roles involved in the female Pythia speaking the words of the male god Apollo. In *Alexandra*, Cassandra uses language that is hooded and she references much that will come to pass, including her own death and the events following the Trojan war. She ends her speech by acknowledging the reality of her situation and bemoaning it this way:

*Why, unhappy, do I call to the unheeding rocks, to the deaf wave, and to the awful glades, twanging the idle noise of my lips? For Lepsieus [Apollo] has taken credit from me, daubing with rumor of falsity my words and the true prophetic wisdom of my oracles, for that he was robbed of the bridal which he sought to win. Yet will he make my oracles true. And in sorrow shall many a one know it, when there is no means any more to help my fatherland and shall praise the frenzied swallow (a type of unintelligible speech).*

(Lycophron, *Alexandra*, lines 1451-1460 (trans. Mair))

Here, Cassandra is clearly acknowledging that what she says will not be heard or understood, yet she has just given a long and full prophecy of the events that will come to pass. She even asks herself why she has spoken at all, and yet she will continue to, without explaining this particular point. Additionally, she mentions Apollo and how her fate, to know what is to come, but have no way to "help [her] fatherland," is only sorrow for her.



Her curse is also bemoaned by her countrymen. Aeneas, in book II of Virgil's *Aeneid*, calls to mind the incident of the Trojan horse and how Cassandra was not believed or heeded in her foretelling of the doom to come. He said:

*O Ilium, home of gods, and you Dardan battlements,  
famed in war! Four times at the gates' very threshold it  
halted, and four times from its belly the armour clashed;  
yet we press on, heedless and blind with rage, and set the  
ill-omened monster on our hallowed citadel. Even then  
Cassandra opened her lips for the coming doom – lips at a  
god's command never believed by the Trojans. We, hapless  
ones, for whom that day was our last, wreath the shrines  
of the gods with festal boughs throughout the city.*

(Virgil, *Aeneid*, Book II. line 243 (trans. Fairclough))

From the quotes above, it is clear that Cassandra knew of the downfall of the city and was able to speak it.

A further point can be made regarding Cassandra and Apollo and the sexuality implicit between them. Because Cassandra rebuffed Apollo, she was cursed by him. When the Greeks had taken the city, Cassandra went to the temple of Athena, taking hold of the cult statue in the hope that the goddess would protect her from harm. The lesser Ajax then came upon her in the temple and, ignoring the disrespect this would cause the goddess, raped Cassandra. Athena, in her anger, avenged herself upon Ajax and either struck him down with a lightning bolt, or was aided by Poseidon, who drowned Ajax on an island of rock on his way home from Troy<sup>87</sup>. Tryphiodorus tells of this event, saying:

*Swift Aias, son of Oileus, assaulted Cassandra when she  
took shelter at the knees of the stainless goddess Pallas;  
and the goddess rejected his violence, and, helper  
though she had been aforetime, for one man's sake  
Athena was angered against all the Argives.*

(Tryphiodorus, *Taking of Ilios*, line 645 (trans. Mair))

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<sup>87</sup> Trip, Edward. *The Meridian Handbook of Classical Mythology: An Alphabetical Guide*. Plume, 1974. Print. pg. 32-33.

I think it is possible that, because of the strong connection between sexuality and prophecy, when Ajax raped Cassandra, this corruption of her purity contributed, along with her earlier rebuff of Apollo, to her ultimate doom. She could not continue to give prophecies through the gift bestowed by Apollo as long as she had been violated by another. Namely, she had to die, and soon, for no longer being pure. To support this supposition, I will pull in some of the ancient sources, especially that of Aeschylus' *Agamemnon*.

First, however, that Cassandra was virginal until the time of her rape and had taken no husband is attested to in Euripides' play *The Trojan Women* (trans. Potter). He says of her:

*And, lo, Cassandra, she the Chosen One,  
Whom Lord Apollo spared to walk her way  
A swift and **virgin** spirit, on this day  
Lust hath her, and she goeth garlanded  
A bride of wrath to Agamemnon's bed.*

The important part to notice of this quote is in the third line, which mentions her as "swift and virgin." This story links back to one given to us by Diodorus, which explains why the Pythias are older women who dress as maidens. He explains that Pythias were once young and virginal, but, when a beautiful, young Pythia was raped by a man named Echekrates, and so no longer virginal and allowed to give prophecy, the Pythia was replaced by an older woman. This new tradition allowed a woman to marry and have children, but, following her entrance into the service of Apollo, she was to abstain from sex indefinitely. In remembrance of the tradition of young maiden Pythia, however, this older prophetess wore maiden's clothing.<sup>88</sup>

While there is a clear difference here between the sexual purity of Cassandra and the young prophetess before their attack and defilement, and that of the sexually abstinent, but not virginal Pythias of later times, the link remains of their celibacy. However, the divide between the two types of Pythias may reflect practicality, in that these women who served the temple could first reproduce and live full lives as wives, and then dedicate themselves to Apollo. This would be in contrast to a city where many of the young women could possibly be involved in the workings

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<sup>88</sup> Diodorus Siculus, 16.26.6.

of the temple, and so could possibly cause a severe population decline. Additionally, in the times when Pythian bloodlines were important, sexually pure Pythias would make that descent difficult. Furthermore, there seem to be no accounts of older Pythias either being raped or choosing to take part in sexual activities. Whether or not these women would then have been unseated as Pythias, or allowed to remain, then, is in question. In the case of Cassandra, who could not stop giving prophecy simply by being removed from Apollo's temple, but was, nonetheless, no longer sexually valuable to Apollo, may have possibly had to die to remedy the fact that her impurity may have disrupted her connection to and ability to channel the god.

The mode of her ultimate undoing was murder at the hands of the queen of Mycenae, Clytemnestra, Agamemnon's wife. Following the events at Troy, Agamemnon took possession of Cassandra as a prize of war. He carried her back across the sea to his palace at Mycenae, where his wife and her lover laid in wait to murder them. Aeschylus tells the story of Agamemnon and Cassandra's murders in full in his play *Agamemnon*. What is intriguing about this play, is that Aeschylus gives a good deal of attention to Cassandra, who he makes, in comparison to the great King Agamemnon, a much more pitiable and relatable character. He focuses on her for nearly three hundred lines, which is notably long, and she is given specific attention from the chorus and the bloodthirsty Clytemnestra. Her role in this play in particular provides a unique insight into her relationship to the god Apollo, who bestowed upon her both an incredible gift and a horrible curse.

In an analysis of Aeschylus' play, Robin Mitchell-Boyask argues that, much as the Pythia is seen as a bride to Apollo and unable to partake sexually with anyone else while in his service, so is Cassandra assigned the bride's role. Mitchell-Boyask calls upon Cassandra's outburst in line 1085, "Apollo, Apollo! God of the Ways, my destroyer! Ah, what way is this that you have brought me! To what a house!" to illuminate this relationship. He postulates that Cassandra here

blames Apollo, not Agamemnon, for her passage to Mycenae and death, linking this voyage to that which a maiden takes from her father's house to her husband's.<sup>89</sup>

He then goes on to discuss how, in direct correlation with the myth of Persephone, "Greek wedding ceremonies cast the bride's departure from her house as an abduction and then death."<sup>90</sup> This ties in directly with Cassandra's experience as she is carried from her home, the house of her father, to death in Mycenae. In line 1291 of *Agamemnon* (trans. Smyth), Cassandra even calls the doors to the house of Atreus, "The Gates of Hades." Throughout these events, she refers to Apollo, and not Agamemnon, as her abductor.

Further evidence to Mitchell-Boyask's claims is that the Chorus asks Cassandra in line 1207, "Did you in due course come to the rite of marriage?" Cassandra herself even calls attention to the connection of marriage in line 1178, saying, "And now, no more shall my prophecy peer forth from behind a veil like a new-wedded bride...." Mitchell-Boyask asserts that "these words are spoken by a maiden whom the staging has depicted as a bride, about whom the Chorus uses a marriage formula, and whose own words earlier about Apollo strongly resemble the language of wedding processions."<sup>91</sup>

I think that Mitchell-Boyask's argument has merit in that it further explains the sexual link between Apollo and Cassandra, in a way akin to the thinking that if he cannot have her, no one can, or else that whether or not she wanted it, the two are linked. Additionally, Cassandra as Apollo's wife fits in nicely with the idea of the Pythia as the wife of Apollo; both the Pythia and Cassandra wear a maiden's outfit and abstain from sex. The episode between Ajax and Cassandra is very similar to the one between Echekrates and the beautiful young Pythia, which explained why Pythias were older women.<sup>92</sup> This also makes it clear why Cassandra, unlike her brother

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<sup>89</sup> Mitchell-Boyask, Robin. "The Marriage of Cassandra and the "Oresteia": Text, Image, Performance." *Transactions of the American Philological Association*, Vol. 136, No.2 (2006), pg. 274.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid, pg. 276.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid.

<sup>92</sup> Diodorus Siculus, 16.26.6.

Helenus, had to die after the Trojan War, and in an especially tragic way. When Pythias, similarly, did not heed Apollo's warnings, most notably prophesying when the signs were wrong, their ends were just as tragic.<sup>93</sup>

With a link, then, established between Cassandra and the Pythia, what then can be learned from Cassandra about the Pythia herself? Besides the marriage links and the way that in which sexuality was considered between the god and the Pythia, there is the connection to snakes in the means by which both Cassandra and her twin Helenus received their gift. The two children of Trojan Priam were licked by snakes in the temple of Apollo. Snakes play a role in Delphic mythology in that Python was a female serpent slain by Apollo, earning the god his right to the land of Delphi. Additionally, snakes are chthonic and if Delphic cult practices in some measure reflect earlier Earth goddess worship, snakes and the Pythia would be linked through their connection to the Earth.

Furthermore, Cassandra may also provide illumination into the way the Pythia was regarded by ancient peoples, in that, as she is portrayed by Euripides and especially Aeschylus, she is tragic certainly, but also relatable and likable, made pitiable by her plight. If the general feelings surrounding Cassandra can be applied to the Pythia, then it stands to reason that she was thought of in a kindly fashion, if not in a directly likable, then at least in a respectable way. To support this sentiment, we can look to Euripides' play *Ion*. The main character, Ion, when describing the Temple says, "And on the holy tripod sits Pythia, the priestess and gives her prophecies to the Greeks as they are sung in her ear by Apollo".<sup>94</sup>

In this particular quote, I hear a sense of reverence and high regard surrounding Ion's description of the Pythia. In the lines that follow, Ion continues to show his deep respect and love of the god Apollo, which I believe, at least in this particular work, can be extended to the Pythia

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<sup>93</sup> Connelly, pg. 77-78.

<sup>94</sup> Euripides, *Ion*. Trans. George Theodoridis. 2006. pg. 90-100.

as Apollo's representative. With this in mind, it stands to reason that, as the spokesperson of a beloved god, her position is one of high esteem and the people of Greece think kindly of her.

Later in the play *Ion*, Euripides mentions the Pythia again. He says: "Fly through the byways and through the roads to where the navel of the earth is and where the prophetess stands by the tripod and utters her secret oracles."<sup>95</sup> In this instance, the Chorus is calling Athena to Delphi. The language they use evokes for me a sense of longing, mystery, and excitement. They not only venerate Athena in their entreaty, but also summon her to a place that seems beloved of them. The Pythia in this case is portrayed as a mysterious entity, but again partakes of the reverence surrounding Delphi and Apollo.

Additionally, Cassandra's pronouncement of prophecy may provide valuable insight into what a typical Delphic consultation was like. For example, when Cassandra gives her prophecy, she does so in a way that is easily relayed and understood, at least to the reader, in Aeschylus' *Agamemnon*. She does not speak nonsense words that need to be interpreted by others, and while much of what she says is intelligible, there is also an element of riddle.

However, because of Apollo's curse, the Chorus cannot understand her. This is an interesting problem. On the one hand, Aeschylus may be relating Agamemnon's story, or at least this part of it, from the perspective of Cassandra. If that is the case, she may hear her words as sensical and straightforward, and this is the way that the audience experiences it because of that. The Chorus, though, may not hear the prophecy the same way Cassandra hears it. It is not impossible that their inability to understand her may come from some kind of garbling or incoherency that they, and others in this play and other ancient interpretations of the receivers of Cassandra's prophecy, but not Cassandra herself, are privy to. Alternatively, the words may always be easily understood, and only the curse of Apollo keeps it from the cognition of the Chorus. A third possibility, which may in some measure combine the previous two postulations, is that, because Cassandra abundantly uses references, many of them metaphorical, to that which

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<sup>95</sup> Ibid. pg. 468-470.

will happen and to that which has already come to pass, but may be too far removed for the characters around her to understand, she remains an enigma.

To illustrate this last point, I will draw upon Lycophron's *Alexandra*. When reading this text it was nearly impossible to sort through it without extensive footnote consultation for each paragraph. For example, beginning line 86, Cassandra is giving a prophecy and says:

*I see the winged firebrand<sup>1</sup> rushing to seize the dove,<sup>2</sup> the hound of Pephnos,<sup>3</sup> whom the water-roaming vulture brought to birth, husked in a rounded shell.<sup>4</sup> And thee, cuckold sailor,<sup>5</sup> the downward path of Acheron shall receive, walking no more the byres of thy father's rugged steadings, as one when thou wert arbiter of beauty for the three goddesses. But in place of stables thou shalt pass the Jaws of the Ass<sup>6</sup> and Las,<sup>7</sup> and instead of well-foddered crib and sheepfold and landsman's blade a ship and oars of Phereclus<sup>8</sup> shall carry thee to the two thoroughfares and the levels of Gytheion,<sup>9</sup> where, on the rocks dropping the bent teeth of the pine-ship's anchors to guard against the flood, thou shalt rest from gambols thy nine-sailed<sup>10</sup> fleet.*

(Lycophron, *Alexandra*, 86-102 (trans. Mair))

I left the footnoted numbers in this quote to illustrate the degree to which her words must be explained by one not familiar with the intricacies of her references and metaphors. For example, both the “winged firebrand” and the “cuckold sailor” refer to Paris, though his name is never given. More confusingly, there are four references to Laconia and areas of it, which a person from Mycenae, like a Chorus member, may not understand. When the explanations to her words are hidden, then, she seems to be speaking in a way that is, at face value, intelligible, but is impossible to understand by those who are witnessing her speech. If one is privy to the meanings behind her metaphors, however, the speech becomes easily recognizable. The Chorus, who not only does not understand her reference and also has no prior knowledge, like the audience would, of the events to come, is completely in the dark.

I think that this understanding of Cassandra and the Pythia, that her words are intelligent and spoken rationally, but nonetheless impossible to be understood by those to whom the prophecy is given due to the depth of the metaphor used and the ambiguity that already surrounds all future events, is extremely interesting. A consultation with the Pythia, therefore, may mean

one thing to her and something completely different to the consultant, resulting in her ability to be correct every time, because her words can be taken to mean so many things. However, in Cassandra's case, it is interesting to suppose what her prophecy may have been, had she not been cursed by Apollo. Perhaps, she would have given straightforward oracles or at least those that could be interpreted by others and effect change as the Delphic Pythia was able to do.

However, the fact remains that Cassandra was cursed by Apollo and continued to be so until her death. If Cassandra can be understood as a literary example of the Pythia, then there may be more literal interpretations of her unintelligible language. Lisa Maurizio, for example, in her article *Anthropology and Spirit Possession: A Reconsideration of the Pythia's Role at Delphi* discusses a type of self-hypnosis called a randomizing device that allows individuals to gain access to the spirit world. Randomizing responses have been observed by cultural anthropologists and documented in cases of spirit possession as being used to set up resistance. They work by obscuring the words of the diviner using language that is nearly unintelligible either through garbling, strange intonation, or highly ambiguous language. Body language can also play a role here through the diviner's posture, tone of voice, unusual clothing, and strange gestures. Maurizio describes these devices as being difficult to reproduce and measure which makes it difficult for others to take the diviner's role in society, keeping an "objective system of access to divine knowledge."<sup>96</sup>

These randomizing devices can be linked to the Pythia and Cassandra in several ways. First, it is clear through the oracles that remain, that the Pythia used metaphorical and allegorical language which can be described as highly ambiguous, as did Cassandra. Unfortunately, not much is known about the Pythia's body language, garbling, or strange intonation, though by looking at Cassandra and the way she gave prophecy, this point may be at least partially illuminated.

Additionally, it has long been debated whether or not narcotic gases gave the Pythia access to the divine. Cassandra, as a Pythian figure, certainly did not have access to special gases

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<sup>96</sup> Maurizio, "Anthropology and Spirit Possession: A Reconsideration of the Pythia's Role at Delphi" 81-82.



to gain her prophecies, but can be argued to have used these randomizing devices, especially in Aeschylus's *Agamemnon*. Specifically, in the play, she moans before giving a prophecy, then presents a series of complex corresponding and competing images describing future events. An example of her initial moaning is as follows:

**Cassandra**

Woe, woe, woe! O Apollo, O Apollo

**Chorus**

Wherefore your cry of “woe” in Loxias' name? [1075]  
He is not the kind of god that has to do with mourners.

**Cassandra**

Woe, woe, woe! O Apollo, O Apollo!

**Chorus**

Once more with ill-omened words she cries to the god  
who should not be present at times of lamentation.

(Aeschylus, *Agamemnon*, line 1074 (trans. Smyth))

She continues on a bit further down in line 1107, saying with the Choral reply:

**Cassandra**

Ah, damned woman, will you do this thing? Your  
husband, the partner of your bed, when you have cheered  
him with the bath, will you—how shall I tell the end?  
[1110] Soon it will be done. Now this hand, now that,  
she stretches forth!

**Chorus**

Not yet do I comprehend; for now, after riddles, I am  
bewildered by dark oracles.

As those who know what will come, the audience can interpret what she is saying and make inferences, turning her highly ambiguous language and metaphors into intelligible prophecy that clearly proclaims what will come. However, for those to whom she speaks, the Chorus, she

speaks riddles, much like the Pythian prophecy, because both the Chorus and Delphic consultants are not privy to the knowledge that is available to Cassandra and the audience. With this in mind, it stands to reason that the Delphic Pythia practiced such randomizing devices, as did Cassandra, which erodes the likelihood that the Pythia was under the direct influence of narcotic gases or was a puppet of Apollo. This being said, it is unwise to completely disregard the presence of gases at Delphi, even though Cassandra certainly gave prophecy without them, due to their uniqueness at the site and the multiple lines of reasoning that support their occurrence there. Additionally, it is clear, due to the strong links that exist between them, that Cassandra provides a useful model through which to interpret Pythian consultation rites at Delphi, ways in which we can interpret Greek feelings about the Pythia, and the ways in which Apollo and the Pythia were linked on a sexual level.

**Chapter 9**  
**Conclusions**

In this paper, I have endeavored to better understand the Pythia of Delphi by approaching her from multiple angles. I began first with a discussion of the origins of Delphi, examining the role of Apollo as a foreign invader and argued that his entrance into the area illustrates a possible historical transition from female-dominated prophetic cult of an Earth goddess to that of the male-dominated worship of Apollo, as well as the way in which these two cults combined into Post-Mycenaean Delphi. To do this, I looked at the mythological narratives surrounding Delphi, specifically focusing on the relationships between Apollo, Gaia, Python, Telphusa, and Themis. Additionally, I discussed the lack of any mention of the Pythia in ancient sources and the reasons for why this may be the case.

From here, I moved on to discuss the possible Earth goddess origins of Delphi in more detail, arguing that the pervasive mythical agreement that Gaia founded the site of Delphi, the similarities between Delphi and prophetic Gaia worship in other areas of Greece, and, finally, the connections between Delphi and Minoan Crete Potnia Theron worship support a theory that Delphi was originally occupied by a prophetic Earth goddess cult. To accomplish this aim, I examined the site of Aegira in Achaea, examining the practices there and their relatedness to Delphic practices. Following this, I analyzed archaeological deposits in the form of a lion-headed rhyton, several Minoan seal stones, and additional material from the cleft of Castalia found in the temple to Athena Pronaia. Finally, I linked Earth worship to snakes by discussing chthonic symbols, Python, and the origin of the prophetic powers of Helenus and Cassandra of Troy in the temple to Apollo.

Next, I discussed the Pythia herself, trying to gain a better understanding of who she was by examining the ways in which she was chosen, her link to prominent Delphic families and the belief of hereditary mediumship, as well as the possibility for an individual's predisposition to

medium-like behavior or a natural receptivity to the divine. Having established a base from which to understand unnamed Pythia, I then moved on to explore examples of named Pythia.

Specifically, I considered Pemonoe the first Pythia, Aristonike who gave the famous wooden walls oracle prior to the Battle of Salamis, and Periallus who Herodotus says was discharged from her position due to accepting a bribe from the Spartan king Kleomenes. Additionally, I mentioned the Pythias Themistoclea who advised Pythagoras, Xenokleia who refused to consult for the hero Herakles, and Theonike who is the only archaeologically attested Pythia. Once discussing these women and the import of their actions to Delphic mythological history, I endeavored to postulate reasons that they may have been named when the vast majority of Pythia's names are lost to history, stemming specifically from their link to an important figure in Greek mythology or history.

Following this, I turned to ethnographic research involving spirit possession and linked it to Delphic consultation in order to better understand the origin of female prophecy giving in the area and the unique power that the Pythia held because of her position as an individual possessed by the divine that would otherwise have been barred from her. In order to achieve this end, I made a case for Apollo fitting the description of a spirit and the Pythia as a possessed individual. Then, I discussed why women are traditionally more likely to be possessed by spirits than men, involving theories such as nutrient deficiencies and social frustration. From here, I pulled agency into the discussion and looked at the ways in which possession by the god allowed the Pythia to comment on military decisions, colonial expansion, and the political control of city-states. I also used spirit possession to discuss the Delphic consultation process and the way it can be better understood through a discussion of "spirit language," randomizing devices, and the mental state of the Pythia at the time of consultation.

To look more closely at the Pythia's mental condition at the time of consultation, I next analyzed the debate between archaeologists as to the presence of narcotic volcanic vapors at Delphi or whether oral performances in the form of self-hypnosis dominated Delphic practice. I

used John Hale's research into the intersection of two fault lines under the adyton in the Temple to Apollo, as well as the bituminous limestone deposits his team found that were constituted, by as much twenty percent, of petrochemicals like ethylene, to postulate theories about the use of such chemicals to induce the Pythia's trance-like consultation state. However, due to the problems inherent in John Hale's research that made his theory, in some ways, lacking and incomplete, I found it necessary to try to fill the gaps by linking it to the practice of self-hypnosis and oral performances. Specifically, I analyzed the use of riddles and randomizing devices at Delphi, examined the problem of clarity, and postulated the possibility of a balance between a slight high from narcotic gases and learned methods of self-hypnosis.

Finally, I used the literary figure of Cassandra, the famous daughter of King Priam of Troy to better understand the Delphic Pythia as a woman. I discussed the links between Cassandra and the Pythia, as they apply to the motif of snakes, sexuality between Apollo and his prophetess, the ancient views of these women, and the way in which Cassandra and the Pythia gave prophecy. On the latter point, I made a case for the presence of mind that both Cassandra and the Pythia share when giving prophecy, arguing that both figures are competent and speak rationally, but are nonetheless unable to be understood by those to whom their prophecies are given due to the complexity of their metaphors and the ambiguity that already surrounds all future events.

Through this holistic approach to the Pythia, I have sought to better understand her origins, the ways in which she may have been chosen for her post, the reasons that she was individualized in texts and what this can tell us about her, what sort of powers she exercised on the sociopolitical landscape of Greece, what may have constituted a Delphic consultation and the role oral performance and narcotic vapors played in this, and the interpretation of her language as sensible but highly concealed. While the truth surrounding this mysterious mouthpiece of the prophetic god Apollo may never be fully known, I have endeavored, through the exploration of

these avenues, to deepen our understanding of the Pythia by pulling her into gendered and larger ethnographic understandings, as well as investigating her through literature and archaeology.

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# ACADEMIC VITA

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## Education

**Pennsylvania State University**  
**Schreyer Honors College, Paterno Fellows Program**  
Bachelor of Arts in Anthropology  
Bachelor of Arts in Classics and Ancient Mediterranean Studies

**Expected May 2014**

## Research Experience

“Finding the Pythia” thesis research; Penn State  
Fall 2013-Present

Recorded interviews with local psychics and their consultants, to gain insight into the spirit possession-like nature of the oracle of Delphi, with the aim of better understanding the consultation from the perspective of both the pythia and the consultants to include in an undergraduate honors thesis

## Teaching Assistant Experience

Teaching Assistant and Co-Teacher for PennState Class “Biology Freshman Seminar”  
Fall 2013

Attended class once a week, co-led large group discussion sessions, led small group discussion sessions occasionally, graded essays every other week, attended lesson planning sessions once a week.

Teaching Assistant for PennState Class “Festivals and Sanctuaries in the Ancient Greek World” (Honors Option)

Fall 2013

Attended class biweekly and acted as student mentor, was responsible for extra credit and attendance, read over student papers to give commentary when requested, did preliminary grading on quizzes

Teaching Assistant for TAs for PennState Class “Developing Ecological Consciousness”  
Fall 2012

Attended biweekly lectures and a once a week seminar class, led large group discussions, and acted as a student mentor. Led an intensive small group that met an additional time per week in which we discussed lesson plans and problems during teaching.

Teaching Assistant for PennState Class “Introduction to Women’s Studies”  
Fall and Spring 2011

Attended class biweekly, acted as a student mentor, led small group discussions, and was responsible for attendance and peer review.

Teaching Assistant for TA Training class for Penn State Class “Developing Ecological Consciousness”

Spring 2011

Acted as a student mentor. Attended weekly seminars, graded student journal entries, led small and large group discussions, and led large group activities.

Teaching Assistant for “Developing Ecological Consciousness”

Fall 2011

Attended lecture biweekly and led two seminars per week of 13 students each. Graded essays and projects, took attendance, made availability for student concerns.

Led discussion, facilitated activities, and led class discussions several times. Graded student blog responses and was responsible for attendance.

Teaching Assistant Training class for PennState Class “Developing Ecological Consciousness”

Spring 2010

Attended weekly training sessions in a seminar fashion with readings, reflections, discussion, and practice for the class room

## **Publications**

Honors undergraduate thesis

Expected 2014

Best Art and Writing of 2010, Scholastic Art and Writing Awards of 2010 Anthology  
2010

## **Leadership Experience**

CAMS (Classics and Ancient Mediterranean Studies) Club Officer/ Vice President

Fall 2013-Present

Work with other club officers and several members of the department faculty to plan and facilitate meetings, social events, lectures, and professional opportunities.

Archaeology Club Officer/Social Chair

Fall 2013-Present

Plan events, attend meetings and lectures facilitated by the AIA (Archaeology Institute of America)

Korean Karate Club Officer/Safety Officer

Fall 2012-Present

Underwent certification in CPR and First Aid to serve the club in case of injury or illness

PSU Ecological Representative

Fall and Spring 2010

Eco-Reps freshman initiative to enhance sustainability and environmentalism in the freshman dormitories. Planned and executed events, attended meetings, informed students on the monthly aims, and decorated the dormitory with environmental messages.

## **International Experience**

Rome, Italy  
May-June 2012  
Study tour of Roman archaeological sites

## **Work Experience**

Brandywine YMCA of Delaware, Youth Fitness Instructor/Adult Fitness Instructor Assistant/  
Assistant to the Yes U Can Program  
Wilmington, DE  
Summer 2013-Present

Lead children in exercising in a fun and safe manner. Provide customer service and aid adult members in using workout equipment. Assist personal trainers and oversee workouts of the elderly or handicapped members so that they can work out safely and effectively.

SOAR (Survivors of Abuse and Recovery), Secretary  
Wilmington, DE  
2010-Present

File and close out charts that are no longer active and work with a psychologist, taking dictation and helping him edit his manuscript for a new book. Review and revise employee handbook, and compiled safety regulations.

Brew HaHa! Espresso and Newsstand, Cashier/Barista,  
Wilmington, DE  
Summer 2010, 2011

Conducted business transactions, provided customer service, completed training sessions and passed examination to work on the espresso bar, prepared customer drinks, sandwiches, and bagels

## **Skills**

### **Linguistic**

Professional, research, and creative writing  
Proficiency in French  
Proficiency in Italian

### **Computer**

Microsoft Office (Word, Excel, Powerpoint)  
Mac and Windows operating systems