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'The Oracular Tale' and the Oracles of the Greeks: Storytelling, Conjecture, and Oracular Ambiguity in Herodotus' *Histories* and its Historical and Cultural Context

by

Daniel J. Crosby

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
(Greek, Latin & Classical Studies)
at Bryn Mawr College
2020

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DEDICATION

To Leslie

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Many friends and advisors deserve credit for their roles in helping me to complete this educational journey on which I first embarked more than a decade ago. My professors at Fresno Pacific University, Profs. Marshall and Pamela Johnston, first kindled the passion for Classics that now feel, and I owe to them the thorough preparation in Latin and Greek that I received at FPU. I have little doubt that I would never have dreamed of leaving my hometown, let alone of pursuing a Ph.D. in Classics, without their inspiration and steadfast support.

My time at Bryn Mawr College itself was even more important than would be naturally obvious. I chose Bryn Mawr because of the college's reputation for rigor, my shared interests with many members of the faculty, and most of all, the uniquely collegial and content community of graduate students. The college seemed to cultivate an environment that blended serious study with enthusiasm for the subject. I have been delighted to have had my first impressions proved accurate and to have built formative relationships here. The faculty, in addition to being excellent teachers and thoughtful readers, have gone out of their way to help prepare me with the knowledge, advice, and connections for entering into the profession. I am especially grateful to my advisor, Prof. Radcliffe Edmonds, for all of the time that he has dedicated to my formation through classes, papers, conversations, emails, and now this dissertation. In every way, he has been a model of scholarship, professorship, and fellowship for me. I also thank the graduate students of the Graduate Group and particularly those of the department of Greek, Latin & Classical Studies for welcoming me into this community and providing their intellectual support (and resistance) and friendship throughout my time at BMC. There are simply too many of them to name individually here, but I owe the most to Kate Barnes, R.J. Barnes, Luca D'Anselmi, Collin Hilton, Olivia Hopewell, Charlie Kuper, Joshua Shaw,

Mary Somerville, and Zachary Silvia, who patiently endured many of my sermons on the importance of oracles to understanding the Greeks.

Finally, I thank Profs. Daniel Tober and Rosaria Munson, who read and commented on parts of this dissertation at various stages in its development.

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ABBREVIATIONS

AGIBM: The Collection of Ancient Greek Inscriptions in the British Museum

CID: Corpus des inscriptions de Delphes

DI: McCabe, Donald F. Didyma Inscriptions. Texts and List. “The Princeton Project on the Inscriptions of Anatolia,” The Institute for Advanced Study, Princeton (1985)

DVC: Dakaris, Bokotopulu, and Christidis (ed.). Τα χρηστήρια ἐλάσματα τῆς Δωδώνης τῶν ἀνασκαφῶν Δ. Ευαγγελίδη: I. Επιγράφες 1–2220. 2 vols. Athens, 2013

FD: Fouilles de Delphes

FHG: Karl Müller, Fragmenta Historicorum Graecorum. 5 vols. Paris, 1841–51

FGrHist: Ian Worthington (ed.). Brill’s New Jacoby. Revision of Felix Jacoby (ed.). *Die Fragmente der griechischen Historiker*

IC: Inscriptiones Creticae, ed. Margherita Guarducci. 4 vols. Rome, 1935–1950

IDid: Inschriften Didyma

IG: Inscriptiones Graecae

IM: Otto Kern (ed.). Die Inschriften von Magnesia am Maeander. Berlin, 1900

Iscr. di Cos: Mario Segre (ed.). Iscrizioni de Cos. Monografie della Scuola Archeologica di Atene e delle Missioni Italiane in Oriente, 6. Rome, 1993

Milet: Inschriften von Milet

OGIS: Dittenberger, Wilhelm. Orientis Graeci Inscriptiones Selectae. 2 vols. Leipzig 1903–1905

SEG: Supplementum Epigraphicum Graecum

SGDI: Sammlung der griechischen Dialekt-Inschriften

Lhôte: Éric Lhôte (ed.). Les Lamelles oraculaire de Dodone. Hautes Études du Monde Gréco-Romain, 36. Geneva, 2006

SIG: W. Dittenberger (ed.). Sylloge Inscriptionum Graecarum

ABSTRACT

In this dissertation, I investigate the belief in the power of prophecy in ancient Greece. More specifically, I study how the ancient Greeks used oracles, like those of the famous oracle at Delphi, to make their past, present, and future knowable. I analyze the stories about oracles from Herodotus' *Histories* as well as Thucydides and the corpus of Greek inscriptions using a theory of storytelling called narratology. With this theory, I show that all stories about oracles are expressions of the same basic plot whether a narrator employs all of its typical episodes or leaves some of them implied. Further, I argue that the basic plot, which I call the 'oracular tale,' informs not just how narrators tell their stories and how an audience renders abbreviated stories understandable, but also how the Greeks interpreted oracles, understood their fulfillment, and ultimately believed in their prophetic power. In this way, I argue that the narrative pattern of the 'oracular tale' is a general cultural concept at the center both of Greek thought and of their practice relating to oracles. My conclusions create a more consistent picture that explains the apparent disparities between literary and inscribed texts, which modern scholarship has typically understood to indicate a clear schism between how the Greeks told stories about oracles and how they actually practiced oracular divination. In this way, Herodotus' *Histories* may be used as a reliable source for the societal expectation that oracles were regularly in verse and required conjectural interpretation in order to be understood properly. The pattern of the 'oracular tale' also accounts for how the Greeks made use of oracles. Modern scholarship has been troubled by the real utility of oracular ambiguity as seen in the *Histories*, but Herodotus' stories actually explain the utility the Greeks found in enigmatic oracular pronouncements. Consultants carefully connected oracular language with particular circumstances in narratives that made both oracles and event meaningful. Thus, this 'divinatory thinking' is storytelling, and this way of thinking

allowed consultants to use oracles as flexible frames of reference by which to understand their past and to develop a plan toward a beneficial future.

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Enlightenment thought and its legacy have had a negative and lasting effect on the study of religion in ancient Greece. Its impact is still strongly felt in the study of oracular divination in particular. For more than a thousand years, there was little disagreement in the Christian tradition that the ancient pagans sought with more or less success to understand their past, present, and future by drawing on the special knowledge of superior spiritual powers. The efficacy of communication along the vertical axis between gods and humans was as much of a reality for Christians as it was for the earlier Greeks and Romans.¹ Today, though, it is scarcely credible to some that supernatural beings communicated directly or indirectly with the Greeks. As a consequence of their insistence on this rationalistic approach to matters of religion, scholars now tend to interpret the literary accounts of oracular divination as merely representing a socially constructed, fantasy world in which even the Greeks themselves did not truly believe. For the historical facts of divinatory ritual in ancient Greece, they rely instead on the epigraphic evidence and other contemporary witnesses, which are noticeably different from literary accounts, and they understand the phenomenon almost exclusively in anthropological, socio-political, and psychological terms as an act of communication along the horizontal axis between humans. When conceived in this way, divination serves functions like fostering consensus, maintaining social structures, and managing perceived risk—it is a practice done among humans, by humans, and for humans. The connection between the heavens and the earth has

¹ Fritz Graf provides the useful model of vertical (gods to humans or humans to gods) and horizontal axes (humans to humans) of communication for understanding religious rituals like sacrifice. Fritz Graf, “One Generation after Burkert and Girard,” in *Greek and Roman Animal Sacrifice: Ancient Victims, Modern Observers*, ed. Christopher A. Faraone and F. S. Naiden (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 40–1.

been severed in our thought, and without the divine, the phenomenon that is left for study, though it could be called other things, cannot truly be called divination. This modern perspective has fundamentally changed the way that we read texts, like that of Herodotus' *Histories*, and how we think about his presentation of oracular divination.

The rational skeptics have too swiftly dismissed the value of Herodotus' *Histories* as a reliable source for the historical practice of oracular divination in ancient Greece. His apparent acceptance of impossible geographies, improbable natural wonders, divine intervention, and especially prophetic fulfillment have earned him little credit in the modern world as a scrutinizing and rational historian of real events. In this dissertation, though, I argue that the stories about oracles in the *Histories* are an imitation of the patterns of thought and action familiar from the lived experience of the author and his audience. In making this argument, I directly challenge the theories and interpretations that modern scholars have used to separate historical fact from literary fiction.

By drawing on narratological theory, I demonstrate that Herodotus is working within a traditional genre of stories about oracles that follows a consistent and familiar narrative pattern with respect to its episodes of action, which I call the 'oracular tale.' These episodes are connected and related to each other chronologically, causally, and logically, one to the next, in a narrative schema. Importantly, though, Herodotus does not fully or completely express this narrative pattern every time he tells a story about an oracle, but he sometimes uses colloquialisms, inter-substitutes agents and actions, and even omits certain scenes and episodes entirely. However, I show from specific examples that these divergences in the syntagmatic structure of the narrative pattern are part of a strategy of implication that I call 'narrative compression.' In other words, Herodotus' tendency to compress his narratives in these ways

assures us that his audience held the ‘oracular tale’ as a pattern of thought with which they could unpack his stories and render them understandable.

However, I argue that the ‘oracular tale’ is not just a traditional pattern of storytelling; it is also a familiar pattern of behavior and action. Herodotus uses this familiarity with how divination worked at Dodona, Olympia, and Delphi as the basis of analogies when he explains the practice at other, less familiar sites around the Mediterranean. “The rites of divination both in Egyptian Thebes and in Dodona happen to be similar to each other”;² “... it is possible there [Ismenus] just as in Olympia to consult the oracle by means of sacrifices”;³ “...the prophetess [of Satraean Dionysus] declares oracles just like in Delphi, and there is nothing more complicated.”⁴ What was done in these places was apparently common enough knowledge that his audience could understand his implication. Scholars of ancient divination and religion more generally are often frustrated at the paucity of evidence explicitly explaining how the Greeks performed their rituals. However, it seems to be the case that there was no real need to record what was so fundamental precisely because it was so familiar.⁵ Thus, ‘narrative compression’ often appears to affect oracular tales precisely at the points that are most regular and familiar. By analyzing both the epigraphic records relating to oracles and the historian Thucydides with the same narratological approach, I show that these narratives also reflect the same consistent pattern of

² Ἡ δὲ μαντήϊη ἢ τε ἐν Θήβῃσι τῇσι Αἰγυπτίῃσι καὶ (ἢ) ἐν Δωδώνῃ παραπλήσιαι ἀλλήλησι τυγχάνουσι ἐοῦσαι. Hdt. 2.57.3.

³ ... (ἔστι δὲ κατὰ περ ἐν Ὀλυμπίῃ ἐμπύροισι αὐτόθι χρηστηριάζεσθαι)... Hdt. 8.134.1.

⁴ ... πρόμαντις δὲ ἢ χρέωσα κατὰ περ ἐν Δελφοῖσι, καὶ οὐδὲν ποικιλώτερον. Hdt. 7.111.2.

⁵ To frame it as a general rule, Herodotus often grounds the foreign and unfamiliar in the Greek and familiar. This principle is prominently on display in the *Histories*: “The rite of cleansing is similar for the Lydians and the Greeks” (“Ἔστι δὲ παραπλήσιον ἢ κάθαρσις τοῖσι Λυδοῖσι καὶ τοῖσι Ἕλλησι. Hdt. 1.35.2; “The foreigners make those oaths which the Greeks themselves make...” (“Ὀρκία δὲ ποιέεται ταῦτα τὰ ἔθνεα τὰ πέρ τε Ἕλληνες... Hdt. 1.74.6). To account for this familiarity with ritual, there is a general principle of Greek religion that many of its rituals were not learned from texts but from experience. Similarly, almost no one today learns to play baseball by reading the official rulebook, but from their parents, coaches, friends, and their own experience, both watching and playing. Where baseball finds a place in texts, authors generally assume a certain level of familiarity with how the game is played.

the ‘oracular tale’ and the same kinds of ‘narrative compression’ as in Herodotus’ *Histories*. Additionally, I demonstrate that the important differences that scholars have used to justify a clear separation of historical documents from literary fantasies is really a modern misunderstanding that resulted from one of the symptoms of ‘narrative compression.’ Simply put, the syntagmatic structure of the ‘oracular tale’ remains the same, but when composing their individual narratives, narrators may make different decisions that depend on their media, genre, and specific interests and rhetorical aims. The consistency of the pattern of the ‘oracular tale’ betrays more than just cultural knowledge of how oracular divination was actually performed; it also shows a familiarity with how people in that culture put oracles to use. Moreover, it is by their use that we may understand what the Greeks believed about oracular divination and how it worked for them. In this way, I redeem the value of Herodotus’ *Histories* as a reliable source for the historical practice of oracular consultation and interpretation, and I mend the schism that has been forced between literary and historical sources by providing an account of the Greek belief that their gods apparently and actually communicated with them.

The Schism

For the early Christians, the numerous stories about accurate oracular prophecy from the ancient and contemporary world were impossible to deny in every instance. When the temple of Serapis in Alexandria was destroyed in the year 391 CE in fulfillment of an oracle and to the great astonishment of Christians in Africa, St. Augustine’s response was not to question that the oracle was ever given or whether it had meant something else. The Christian worldview and that of the earlier Greeks and Romans were actually similar insofar as both firmly believed in the effectiveness of communication along a vertical axis between supernatural powers and humans.

By drawing on a longstanding tradition of pagan thought on the nature of *daemones* and prophetic inspiration, the bishop of Hippo worked the accuracy of pagan prophecy into a thoroughly Christian worldview.⁶ In his reasoning, divination can be accurate because it draws on the special powers of demons. Their longevity, swiftness, and keenness of perception allow them to develop an advanced knowledge of causes as an excellent but imperfect science of how things happen. Further, they obviously know their own plans and may offer them as accurate predictions except where those plans are unexpectedly disturbed by divine intervention. Finally, they have heard the truly divine oracles and may give these as accurate predictions of the future whenever truth can facilitate their greater deceptive purposes. St. Augustine did acknowledge that priests, apologists, and cheats could be responsible for fabricating some oracles *post eventum* and for making up some stories of divinatory success—who denied it?⁷ However, with such an explanation for divination’s efficacy at hand, he had no reason to suppose that they were fraudulent in every instance or, along with Cicero, that oracular divination could only work either by chance or by deliberate equivocation.⁸ Divination could work by the power of demons in theory, and it had worked in fact, just as the numerous testimonies of antiquity claimed it did.

Even Christians continued to divine in various ways throughout the Middle Ages, and there was still ambiguity for some regarding the moral implications of the practice. St. Augustine’s judgement about its cause and efficacy, however, became the prevailing one in the Catholic Church for the next millennium and beyond.⁹ Through the Renaissance and the

⁶ Augustine *Divin. daem.* 3.7–6.10.

⁷ Augustine *Divin. daem.* 8.12.

⁸ Cic. *De div.* 2.56.115. This sentiment is given in Cicero’s own voice in the dialogue, but naturally, whether it accurately represents Cicero’s own opinion is subject to debate.

⁹ Although St. Aquinas denies that divination through demons can happen, his conclusion results from a strict definition of divination as the prediction of events that are subject to contingent causes and from his conclusion that the demons do not of themselves have knowledge of the future but by the revelation of God through celestial spirits. Nevertheless, they can predict the future. Aquinas *Super sent.* II.7.2.2; *Summa Theologiae* I:57:3–4; I:86:4; II-II:95.

Reformation, intellectuals considered natural causes drawn from ancient authorities more seriously (like melancholy, drugs, and the movement of the stars) as well as that of the imposture of priests in accounting for prophetic success, but they rarely presented these theories to the total exclusion of the traditional demonic thesis.¹⁰ It seemed that these two other explanations by themselves could not fully account for the prophetic accuracy that was observed in the ancient texts, particularly that of Delphi, the most famous of Greek oracles.

As Enlightenment thinking dawned in Europe, though, a certain kind of rationalism was brought to bear on the ancient sources. Although the available sources themselves were largely unchanged, they began to look different to the intellectuals of that time. In his extremely detailed work, *Two Dissertations on the Oracles of the Ancient Heathens* (1683), Anton van Dale, a Mennonite minister and physician, took an anti-traditional view. He did grant that demons existed—How else could Christ and the Apostles have cast them out?—but he insisted that oracles did not involve demons at all. Rather, he understood the textual evidence of priestly malfeasance as a peek behind the curtain, so to speak, and he used this evidence as a framework with which to interpret all oracular activity. Essentially, ancient oracles were driven by the fraud of a corrupt priestly class and the credulousness of the commons and learned alike.¹¹ Thus, he took the fact that Delphi only gave responses one day per month as a pretense to delay consultation in order that local tour guides could covertly collect information about consultants and relay it to the priests in charge of the oracle.¹² He understood the strict order for consultation

See Anthony Ossa-Richardson, *The Devil's Tabernacle: The Pagan Oracles in Early Modern Thought* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013), 13–82.

¹⁰ Ossa-Richardson, 87–202.

¹¹ In demonstrating this point, van Dale picks up and runs with an undeveloped thought of Caelius Rhodiginus (1517): ‘Videor lectione iugi comperisse [oracula], non ab diis, non ab daemonibus instituta, vel propagata, sed ab vafriis quibusdam, et quaestuariis initio inchoata.’ Rhodiginus, *Lectionum antiquarum libri XXX*, 2.12.

¹² Antonius van Dale, *De oraculis veterum ethnicorum dissertationes duae: quarum nunc prior agit de eorum origine atque auctoribus, secunda de ipsorum duratione & interitu*, 2nd ed. (Amsterdam: Apud Henricum & viduam Theodori Boom, 1700), 99–100.

as a mechanism to ensure that priests did not make a mistake in returning responses to the wrong party.¹³ He interpreted the reports of the awe inspiring sights, sounds, and smells as the malicious efforts of priests to manipulate and predispose the minds of consultants toward belief in the divine power behind Delphi.¹⁴ He supposed that the priests were such practiced forgers that they could open, read, and reseal tablets containing inquiries without the suspicion of consultants.¹⁵ In the end, the apparent accuracy of the Delphic oracle should, in van Dale's view, be chalked up to a systematic propaganda developed to maintain the glory of the sanctuary, to lucky guesses based on the information at hand, to intentional ambiguity that could be verified in any event that might result, and to intimidation of consultants in order to suppress accounts of their failings.¹⁶ Whereas the Christian tradition largely sought to reconcile ancient theories on the mechanism and veracity of oracular divination with a Christian worldview that included similar assumptions about spiritual powers, van Dale cut the line of prophetic power that tethered divination to the world beyond and focused his attention instead on the mundane effects of a ridiculous superstition. There, he made the suspicions of skeptical philosophers and the reports of impious dealings the rules rather than the exceptions. Divination did not *actually* work; it was just intentionally made to seem that way.

Van Dale's *Dissertations* represented the clearest and sharpest break yet with the Christian tradition and had two important consequences for the modern study of Greek oracular divination. First, he raised and attempted to resolve a fundamentally important question about the historical reliability of our sources. By proposing his explanations of universal clerical connivances, on the one hand, and popular credulousness, on the other, he forced a deep schism

¹³ Dale, 110–13.

¹⁴ Dale, 128–9.

¹⁵ Dale, 121.

¹⁶ Dale, 99–100, 117–19, 121–2, 169.

in Greek mentality between the knowledgeable, who knew how oracles *really* worked, and the ignorant, who peopled a fantasy world. The order of priests the world over and the sceptics Thucydides, Lucian, and Oenomaus the Cynic all knew or figured it was a sham. The common folk—as well as Diodorus Siculus, Strabo, Pausanias, and, chief of all, Herodotus—were fooled into believing in a totally constructed world in which oracular prophecy was true and divine in origin.¹⁷ In this view, our ancient sources do not present any kind of self-consistent picture of oracular divination at all, and only hermeneutics of suspicion can separate the wheat from the chaff. Second, by excluding supernatural and providential forces from involvement in oracular divination and attributing all accuracy to educated conjecture, deliberate ambiguity, or blind chance, Van Dale helped lay the foundation for a study of the phenomenon outside of the province of theology and philosophy where it had been situated for centuries. By abolishing the vertical axis of communication, he made divination un-divinatory, a direct denial of much ancient, medieval, and renaissance thought. His own and subsequent Enlightenment thinking could easily and convincingly pan traditional belief in the genuine prophetic power of oracles as a foolish superstition, and so, inquiries into what the Greeks believed about their oracles became less interesting. Instead, his work began a trend of study that investigated what, when, and how human and physical causes induced this mindless belief in divinatory efficacy and with what results. This new study was one of oracular reality in the ancient world, not of the silly imaginings of the stupid.

¹⁷ The methodological issue did not go unnoticed by his contemporaries. Georg Moebius wrote: ‘Verum si sic argumentari licet, cadit, & in fumum abit omnis probatio, quae ex bonis Historicis desumitur. Imo potissima pars *Tractatus de Oraculis D. Van Dalen* cadet, quippe qui pluraque, quae ibidem occurrunt, ex historicis, & aliis authoribus desumsit.’ Georg Moebius, *Tractatus philologico-theologicus de oraculorum ethnicorum origine, propagatione, et duratione*, 3rd ed. (Leipzig: Brand, 1685), 45.

The *Dissertations* enjoyed wide dissemination thanks in large part to the popularity of French intellectual Bernard Fontenelle and his abridgement of the work which caused a stir in Europe.¹⁸ The lines of the contemporary debate were drawn largely along confessional lines, or at least as each stood in relation to the Catholic tradition from the Church Fathers onward.¹⁹ Over the course of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the demonic thesis wasted away into obsolescence, and the imposture thesis, although it had enjoyed initial prominence, fell away as well. A new generation of scholars began to feel an amount of discomfort over the deep schism in Greek thought that Van Dale's theory required. It was scarcely credible that oracular institutions could have pulled so much wool over so many eyes and still have maintained their positions of importance for so long a period. Collectively, the ancient Greeks could be fools or devious geniuses, but not both at the same time and so neatly divided between priests and laity.²⁰ The elegant solution was, therefore, to suppose that even the priests were under the influence of their religious traditions, and this update fit in nicely with the developing grand narrative of human religious and intellectual progress from primitive superstition to civilized rationality.²¹ In this view, the religious authority of the oracles came to be understood as an august veneer for

¹⁸ Van Dale originally published his work in Latin and then translated it into Dutch, his native language, in 1687. Bernard Fontenelle, the influential French intellectual, summarized it in a far more popular work under the title *Histoire des oracles* in the same year, and his treatise was translated into English by Aphra Behn in 1688 and into German by Johann Christoph Gottsched in 1730.

¹⁹ Ossa-Richardson, *The Devil's Tabernacle*, 247–60. It was an expected development, given the obvious analogy to be drawn between Protestant characterizations of Catholic clergy and Van Dale's depiction of the ancient priesthood.

²⁰ "Comment s'est-il pû faire que tant de gens habiles, tant de grandes Philosophes, tant de Royaumes, de Villes & de Républiques si florissantes, n'ayent jamais reconnu qu'ils estoient les dupes de quelques fourbes, qui en sçavoient beau-coup moins qu'eux en toute maniere? Comment ces fourbes & ces imposteurs ont-ils pû sans discontinuation se succeder perpetuellement les uns aux autres, & si bien cacher leur jeu pendant plus de deux mille ans, que personne ne s'en soit jamais apperçû? Estoient-ils d'une espece differente des autres hommes qui vivoient de leur temps? Naissoient-ils tous infiniment habiles et ruzez, tandis que tous les autres naissoient stupides et hébétéz au dernier point?" Jean Francois Baltus, *Réponse a l'Histoire des oracles de Mr. de Fontenelle, de l'Academie françoise* (Strasbourg: Jean Renauld Doulssecker, 1707).

²¹ Ossa-Richardson, *The Devil's Tabernacle*, 268–84.

their real social, political, and juridical effects within Greek culture, which then came to be the focus of study in the discipline of history.

With the prospect at stake of understanding the past in the Rankean way “as it really was,” determining the reliability of the ancient witnesses became critical. It was the historian’s rational judgement that would separate false words from real deeds. By the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, historians had made great strides in gathering and organizing the harvest of evidence for divination that would find its fulfillment in the years to come and stand as the foundation of a subfield within the discipline of Classics.²² Around the same time, new archaeological and anthropological evidence came to light. Additionally, a reemerging atheism and humanism in contemporary philosophy and psychology following thinkers like Nietzsche, Marx, and Freud left the vertical axis of communication in religious ritual to be entirely explained as the symptom of a natural mechanism or delusion in the human mind. In this new scientific climate, scholars set about the business of threshing their harvest. It was then that the centerpieces of the tradition relating to Delphi began to take a consistent thrashing that has fundamentally changed the way that scholars interpret ancient accounts of oracular divination still today.

The most widely discussed issue opened up in the wake of the French School’s excavations in Delphi at the end of the nineteenth century treated the genesis of the Pythia’s possessed behavior.²³ However, what one decided about the character of her inspiration only

²² Richard Hendess, *Oracula Graeca quae apud scriptores Graecos Romanosque exstant* (Halle, 1877); Auguste Bouché-Leclercq, *Histoire de la divination dans l’antiquité*, 4 vols. (Paris, 1879); William Reginald Halliday, *Greek Divination: A Study of Its Methods and Principles* (London: Macmillan, 1913); Theodor Hopfner, *Griechisch-ägyptischer Offenbarungszauber*, 2 vols. (Leipzig: Haessel, 1921).

²³ The excavations found no trace of a chasm from which intoxicating vapors could have arisen. For a concise treatment of the effect that this revelation had on scholarship, see Michael Scott, *Delphi: A History of the Center of the Ancient World* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014), 20–4. Recently, a team of scientists claimed to have found evidence to support the theory of subterranean, intoxicating gases, and they have garnered some enthusiastic support. J. Z. de Boer, J. R. Hale, and J. Chanton, “New Evidence for the Geological Origins of the

affected the historical reliability of a small set of sources in comparison to the issue of oracular authenticity. Since it had been well agreed that the prophetic success found in our sources was impossible except by chance and deliberate ambiguity, historians began to highlight and prefer the reports of oracles that seemed to show evidence of clearer and plainer advice as more accurately representing what actually happened. At the same time, the oracles that seemed too neatly fulfilled in events attracted their spirited skepticism. The results of this rationality were ambiguous at first. The criteria for discerning between oracles that could have come true by chance and those that could only have been made up after the fact ended up being far more subjective in practice than had been supposed in theory.²⁴ Nevertheless, the blurry line between fact and fiction, literary and historical, seemed to grow clearer and sharper the harder they squinted at it through the lens of their reason.²⁵

Joseph Fontenrose set out to remove this element of subjectivity from the question of oracular authenticity. In his landmark study, *The Delphic Oracle* (1978), he sought to address the

Ancient Delphic Oracle (Greece)," *Geology* 29, no. 8 (August 1, 2001): 707–10; Peter Green, "Possession and Pneuma: The Essential Nature of the Delphic Oracle," *Arion*, 17, no. 2 (2009): 27–47. However, Daryn Lehoux, in the most entertaining article I have ever read, systematically demolishes their arguments. Daryn Lehoux, "Drugs and the Delphic Oracle," *The Classical World* 101, no. 1 (2007): 41–56. To explain the phenomenon of the Pythia's possession, scholars then and now have turned to the psychological and psychedelic theories, which they often support with cross-cultural comparisons. Psychological theories: E.R. Dodds, *The Greeks and the Irrational* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1951), 70–4; H.W. Parke and D.E.W. Wormell, *The Delphic Oracle: The History*, vol. 1 (Oxford: Blackwell, 1956), 37–41; Robert Flacelière, *Greek Oracles*, trans. Douglas Garman (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1961), 50–1; C. R. Whittaker, "The Delphic Oracle: Belief and Behaviour in Ancient Greece: And Africa," *The Harvard Theological Review* 58, no. 1 (1965): 21–47; Lisa Maurizio, "Anthropology and Spirit Possession," *The Journal of Hellenic Studies* 115 (1995): 69–86; Quinton Deeley, "The Pythia at Delphi: A Cognitive Reconstruction of Oracular Possession," in *Ancient Divination and Experience*, ed. Lindsay G. Driediger-Murphy and Esther Eidinow (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 226–52. Psychedelic theories: Leicester B. Holland, "The Mantic Mechanism at Delphi," *American Journal of Archaeology* 37, no. 2 (1933): 201–14; C. Scott Littleton, "The Pneuma Enthusiastikon: On the Possibility of Hallucinogenic 'Vapors' at Delphi and Dodona," *Ethos* 14, no. 1 (1986): 76–91.

²⁴ E.g., Parke and Wormell, *The Delphic Oracle*, 1956, 1:94. Subjectivity is Joseph Fontenrose's chief complaint on the treatment of oracular authenticity. Joseph Fontenrose, *The Delphic Oracle: Its Responses and Operations, with a Catalogue of Responses* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), 7.

²⁵ The categories of literary and historical oracles had already solidified by the time of Fontenrose, but some were still not ready to jettison all verse oracles entirely. Jean-Pierre Vernant, "Parole et signes muets," in *Divination et Rationalité*, ed. Jean-Pierre Vernant (Paris: Éditions de Seuil, 1974), 22–3; Georges Roux, *Delphes: son oracle et ses dieux* (Paris: Belles Lettres, 1976), 158.

issue of subjectivity by laying out principles drawn from source criticism for determining oracular authenticity.²⁶ In his reasoning, only documents that were recorded in close temporal proximity to the oracular consultation could count toward constructing a rubric for judging genuine oracular habits, and these ended up being mostly epigraphic and a few contemporary witnesses like Thucydides. He concluded from his selection of what he believed to be the most reliable evidence that the Pythia gave straightforward advice in plain prose that often corresponded to the language of the consultant's question.²⁷ His critical scrutiny was devastating. As he concluded, "The results of this study demand a rejection as non-genuine of almost all responses said to have been spoken in the first three centuries of the Delphic oracle, roughly 750–450."²⁸ In his view, only about one hundred of the 535 extant oracular responses had any claim at all to genuineness. The literary accounts of prophetic verse oracles could only be attributed to popular, traditional, or even propagandistic tales, and like folktales more generally, they were made up. With Fontenrose, the schism in Greek thought, which Van Dale had asserted between the priests and the commons, was spread more widely among the ancients and given a more convincing basis in the facts. There was, in his view, a deep divide in Greek thought about oracles between a traditional storybook world, in which oracles were vague pronouncements about the future that actually came true, and reality, in which oracles gave their consultants clear advice about what to do regarding their problems.

²⁶ Fontenrose's path had been laid before him by Pierre Amandry, who championed the reliability of epigraphic sources over the literary texts, and Roland Crahay, who drew on Amandry's conclusions to argue for the propagandistic purposes behind many of the oracular tales in Herodotus' *Histories*. Pierre Amandry, *La Mantique Apollinienne à Delphes: Essai sur le Fonctionnement de L'Oracle* (Paris: E. de Boccard, 1950); Roland Crahay, *La Littérature oraculaire chez Hérodote* (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1956).

²⁷ Fontenrose, *The Delphic Oracle*, 223.

²⁸ Fontenrose, 233.

As Fontenrose himself acknowledged, the believability of his argument hinged on treating Herodotus as a literary rather than a historical source.²⁹ This decision was troubling for a number of his early critics. There was still the nagging question of how Herodotus could have told manifestly false tales about relatively recent events to an audience who had actually experienced those events and should have known better.³⁰ The chief stumbling block is the famous “wooden wall” oracle, since it would have been delivered in the generation immediately prior to that of Herodotus.³¹ The response that came from classicists in more recent years has pushed familiar notions about the composition and transmission of oral narratives beyond their persuasive limits. Students of Herodotus long before had readily accepted that the historian owed much of his material to stories that he heard in his travels and that these stories were liable to different kinds of change which Oswin Murray politely called “deformation.”³² In this way, it was believed that real events and the real people involved in them entered into a churn of traditional, oral storytelling that was produced by the flexibility of oral transmission, the imposition of narrative patterns and motifs from folklore, and the glorification or condemnation of individuals, groups, values, and institutions. Consequently, scholars already widely believed that oral tradition had left the Greeks with socially constructed accounts of their past. However, by itself such a theory still had difficulty explaining how it was that traditional stories about oracles could have so obviously misrepresented the real-world practice of oracular consultation

²⁹ Fontenrose, 234.

³⁰ Bernard Knox, “Paid Consultant,” *The American Scholar* 48, no. 4 (1979): 561; Frederick E. Brenk, review of *The Delphic Oracle. Its Responses and Operations, with a Catalogue of Responses*, by Joseph Fontenrose, *Gnomon* 52, no. 8 (1980): 702; John Pollard, review of *The Delphic Oracle: Its Responses and Operations with a Catalogue of Responses*, by J. Fontenrose, *The Journal of Hellenic Studies* 101 (1981): 182–83; W. G. Forrest, review of *The Delphic Oracle: Its Responses and Operations with a Catalogue of Responses*, by Joseph Fontenrose, *The American Historical Review* 87, no. 2 (1982): 428–29; J. N. Bremmer, review of *The Delphic Oracle. Its Responses and Operations, with a Catalogue of Responses*, by J. Fontenrose, *Mnemosyne* 36, no. 3/4 (1983): 441–42.

³¹ Hdt. 7.141–3.

³² Oswyn Murray, “Herodotus and Oral History,” in *Achaemenid History II: The Greek Sources*, ed. Heleen Sancisi-Weerdenburg and Amélie Kuhrt (Leiden: Brill, 1987), 93–115.

at what were the most famous and well-trafficked institutions in the land without greater contemporary resistance. Rather than supposing that this constructed past of the Greeks represented a likely account based on familiar, contemporary practices, many have suggested that the Greeks simply preferred the constructed version of oracular divination to its reality because the stories were so entertaining or so precisely reflective of their ideas on the nature of the gods.³³ What Fontenrose's critics saw as a strong objection, those who trusted his interpretation of the evidence understood as a sign of the breadth of the schism, which they radically democratized. In this new way of thinking, everyone in ancient Greece knew how oracles really worked, but the stories that they told about them almost never reflected that knowledge. Therefore, the only thing in these tales that seemed to be worthy of investigation today is the political, social, and psychological conditions of their construction.

³³ "In other words, these scholars still look at oracles as responses to particular events that can be assigned to a particular time and place. But, as we have seen, oracular tales chronicle the eruption of the divine in the human world and are more concerned to establish the presence and miraculous nature of the divine on earth." Lisa Maurizio, "Delphic Oracles as Oral Performances: Authenticity and Historical Evidence," *Classical Antiquity* 16, no. 2 (1997): 330. "The ancient Greeks obviously knew of a number of *post eventum* prophecies, such as the one concerning the 'wooden walls' and 'divine Salamis,' and yet they developed a false-consciousness or cognitive dissonance regarding the matter, perceiving both the patent fictionality of such texts, but needing them nonetheless." John Dillery, "Chresmologues and Manteis: Independent Diviners and the Problem of Authority," in *Mantikê: Studies in Ancient Divination*, ed. Sarah Iles Johnston and Peter T. Struck (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 224. "Why did the Greeks portray Apollo as a riddler? One answer is that the Greeks were fascinated by riddles and riddling situations... Another reason ... is that this image fit well into their more general view of the gods. Divine help could be valuable, but the gods often embedded it within problems..." Sarah Iles Johnston, *Ancient Greek Divination* (West Sussex: Wiley-Blackwell, 2008), 55. "The introduction of riddles into stories about oracles was, however, acceptable for a number of reasons. First, the popularity of riddles... Secondly, we come to fear, the fear of misinterpretation. The divinatory process was not fool-proof, except for the very last stage: you yourself. There was, then, the deep-rooted fear that human weaknesses would spoil everything, because you would not understand what the gods were telling you." Frederick G. Naerebout and Kim Beerden, "'Gods Cannot Tell Lies': Riddling and Ancient Greek Divination," in *The Muse at Play: Riddles and Wordplay in Greek and Latin Poetry*, ed. J. Kwapisz, D. Petrain, and M. Szymansk (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2012), 140–1. "It is at this point that we first find a notable difference between the actual experience and its representation in narrative form: The representation of oracles in the literary evidence of the ancient world duly acknowledges the fact that oracular language is both *like and unlike* regular human language. It is here that we find the notorious ambiguities, metaphors and other tropes which require interpretation to make sense of them, thus stressing that fact that gods and humans can converse with each other only in a mediated fashion." Julia Kindt, "Revelation, Narrative, and Cognition: Oracle Stories as Epiphanic Tales in Ancient Greece," *Kernos* 31 (2018): 42.

Scholars should have received this claim with more shock than they have expressed. After all, one of the most pervasive ideas in popular Greek thought is that words and deeds should be linked. The prevailing claim, though, denies Herodotus' sincerity everywhere and precisely at the point in the *Histories* where he is most sincere. In a preface to his story of the "wooden wall" oracle, he says, "Here, I am compelled to indicate an opinion that is odious to many people, but nevertheless I will not hold back from explaining how it seems to me, at least, to be true."³⁴ The oracle and the debate over its interpretation are directly related to his belief that the Athenians saved Greece by choosing to resist the Persians at sea. If Herodotus knew that the story about the oracle was false, it would be positively disingenuous of him to say that the Athenians were responsible, "second to the gods, at least" (μετά γε θεοῦς, 7.139.5), for repelling the invaders. It would be a boldfaced lie for him to claim that they displayed courage in the face of "fearsome oracles" (χρηστήρια φοβερὰ, 7.139.6), if he knew that Delphi never issued these or similar oracular pronouncements. Moreover, as Donald Lateiner has nicely pointed out, Herodotus was not shy about calling out religious fraud where he saw it,³⁵ nor does he spare even Delphi when he thought foul play likely or, at least, not out of the question.³⁶ The explanation that he told such stories merely because they were appealing or meaningful beyond their veracity introduces a crisis in Herodotean sincerity the likes of which have not, I think, been seen since Detlev Fehling and the so-called "Liar School." But this is where Enlightenment reason and its legacy have left us. Our reason dictates that we moderns should not believe in marvelous tales about divine foreknowledge and prophetic fulfillment, but in reasoning through it, we have also

³⁴ Ἐνθαῦτα ἀναγκαίη ἐξέργομαι γνώμην ἀποδέξασθαι ἐπιφθονον μὲν πρὸς τῶν πλεόνων ἀνθρώπων, ὅμως δέ, τῇ γέ μοι φαίνεται εἶναι ἀληθές, οὐκ ἐπισχίσω. Hdt. 7.139.1.

³⁵ Donald Lateiner, "Deceptions and Delusions in Herodotus," *Classical Antiquity* 9, no. 2 (1990): 230–46.

³⁶ The two famous instances of bribing the Pythias: Hdt. 5.63.1, 5.66.1, 5.90.1, 6.66, 6.123.2.

compelled ourselves to think that neither the ancient historians who wrote them nor the ancient audiences who read them could have believed them either.

Mending the Schism

Given the intense strain that this conclusion puts on the sincerity of our sources, it is worth reconsidering the assumptions and interpretations that have led us to this strange pass.

Michael Flower has recently offered a helpful corrective:

... the reason for performing a divinatory ritual is to receive advice and assistance from the gods. Nevertheless, as modern anthropological studies have revealed, the divinatory ritual also has consequences that are social, political, and psychological, such as resolving indecision, building consensus, and boosting morale. Although some Greeks, such as military commanders, were fully aware of these secondary functions, one should not conflate or confuse the by-products with the fundamental purpose. First and foremost, divination is a system of communication. But, like other religious practices, divination also has various direct and indirect consequences, which are, in effect, its secondary functions.³⁷

Here, Flower is responding to the scholars who have tried to think of divination as a ritual act that only communicates along the horizontal axis and has effects only at the level of individual and group behavior. As a consequence, they have largely ignored an emic approach to the phenomenon that would seek to understand what the Greeks believed about what they were doing and have instead used etic approaches to account fully for that belief with an appeal to human cognition. This approach keeps divination firmly rooted in the world that can be seen, tested, and studied, and amounts to an implicit denial of the reality of supernatural powers. To be sure, some recent studies of the secondary effects and cognitive processes involved in divinatory

³⁷ Michael A. Flower, "Divination and the 'Real Presence' of the Divine in Ancient Greece," in *Ancient Divination and Experience*, ed. Lindsay G. Driediger-Murphy and Esther Eidinow (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 206.

rituals have enriched our study of the practice;³⁸ however, the issue is that without appealing to emic categories, there is no way to determine the difference between divinatory rituals and a group of people making decisions by coinflip or by taking poetry really seriously.³⁹ At the same time, neither classics nor history have the disciplinary competence to argue either for or against the existence of supernatural powers with knowledge of the past, present, and future.

Nevertheless, if we seek as historians to understand what the Greeks believed and their reasoning for it, our first assumption must be that the Greeks actually believed the things they claimed to believe and did the things they said they did. Second, we must consider the moments in the record where the Greeks felt the influence or saw the traces of these powers as unfalsifiable claims. With this dissertation, I take the vertical axis of communication seriously, without deciding its reality, in order to show how Greek oracular divination worked. I do this by reexamining both the literary and epigraphic evidence in a way that does not automatically assume a schism between fictitious words and historical deeds, unbelievable folktales and credible accounts, popular literature and real history. Using narratological theory to compare the words of literary and epigraphic sources, I demonstrate that our evidence creates a clear picture, a consistent pattern, of the words and deeds involved in oracular divination. This picture clearly illustrates a deep-seated, cultural knowledge that oracular sanctuaries issued verbal and often

³⁸ Robert Parker, "Greek States and Greek Oracles," *History of Political Thought* 6, no. 1/2 (1985): 298–326; Esther Eidinow, *Oracles, Curses, and Risk Among the Ancient Greeks* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007); Kim Beerden, *Worlds Full of Signs: Ancient Greek Divination in Context* (Leiden: Brill, 2013); Peter T. Struck, *Divination and Human Nature: A Cognitive History of Intuition in Classical Antiquity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016).

³⁹ Kim Beerden has an interesting discussion on the merits of etic versus emic definitions of divination. She proposes what she thinks of as a strict etic definition of divination: "the human action of production—by means of evocation or observation and recognition—and subsequent interpretation of signs attributed to the supernatural." Beerden, *Worlds Full of Signs*, 20. However, she must, I think, agree that her own definition depends on the emic category of the divine sign. She seems to suggest as much in her comparison and contrast between dicing and divination when she says, "While the distinction between games and divination might seem blurred to us, for the person throwing the dice or using the game-board it was usually obvious whether he was divining or gaming; this depended on the rules agreed on and on the context in which the game was played." Beerden, 39 (my emphasis). Clearly, from the outside looking in, we would need the Greeks themselves to tell us which was which.

poetic responses and that these responses provided a sign of divine knowledge that the Greeks found to be useful.

The type of analysis that I propose avoids making bold claims about the authenticity of particular oracles and the historicity of the events with which they are connected. Such a move has been rare in relatively recent years, but there is at least one example. Michael Flower has argued that four verse oracles recorded by Herodotus, including the “wooden wall” oracle, are the authentic pronouncements of the Pythia named Aristonice transcribed word for word. His case rests on the use of certain metrical formulas, the poverty of style, and a disjointedness of sense that he believes to be the marks of extemporaneous composition and prophetic ecstasy.⁴⁰ While I find his explanation to be a convincing interpretation of the evidence and am sympathetic to their claim upon authenticity, his reasoning seems to me just as subjective as that of the skeptics who dismissed their genuineness. One’s sign of oral composition is another’s mark of imitated orality, and one’s linguistic symptom of an agitated mental state is another’s feature of bad poetry.⁴¹ The problem is that there were surely fictional stories about oracular consultations that circulated in the ancient world. For this reason, it is safer not to make claims that cannot be substantiated about the authenticity of particular oracles or the historicity of specific stories about oracles. Flower’s claim, I think, is a bridge too far, and his argument leads us into the same methodological trap as Fontenrose, since he too supposed that certain qualities of oracular pronouncements are the criteria of authenticity.

Instead, my study draws conclusions about the general practices of oracular consultation in the world of ancient Greece. Herodotus’ stories, for example, may not be true historically, but

⁴⁰ Michael A. Flower, *The Seer in Ancient Greece* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008), 235–9.

⁴¹ See Wallace E. McLeod, “Oral Bards at Delphi,” *Transactions and Proceedings of the American Philological Association* 92 (1961): 317–25; Jesús M. Nieto Ibáñez, “Fórmulas Homéricas y Lenguaje Oracular,” *Minerva* 2 (1988): 33–46.

as I have argued above, it would be extremely odd and occasionally overtly dishonest if these stories did not at least reflect the familiar historical reality of how Greeks went about consulting and interpreting oracles in his time. Herodotus' knowledge of how oracles were acquired and used in his time is more than just suggested by the numerous tales he tells about them. First, he himself seems to have spent some time at Delphi and Dodona, to judge by the tour of the Delphic dedications he gives to the reader and the record of his conversation with the priestesses of Dodona, Promeneia, Timarete, and Nicandra.⁴² More than that, as I showed above, he uses this familiarity with how divination worked at Dodona, Olympia, and Delphi as the common-knowledge basis of analogies when he is trying to explain the practice at other, less familiar sites around the Mediterranean.⁴³ Herodotus knew very well what happened at Dodona, Olympia, and Delphi, and if he supposed that his analogies here would have been readily understood, he must have expected as much of his audience, too. Thus, if it is agreed that his audience was familiar with how oracles worked by their personal experience, their association with those who had experience, and their civic participation, and if Herodotus was trying to provide a sincere account of events in the past, the historian's stories about oracles, even if objectively untrue, would need to have fallen in line with cultural expectations about oracular divination. In other words, if his stories are lies in the sense that they are not historically accurate accounts, they would need to have been "lies like truth," as Hesiod says,⁴⁴ in order to have been believable to his audience. My central claim, therefore, is that Herodotus' stories about oracular consultation and interpretation

⁴² Delphi: Hdt 1.25, 1.31.5, 1.50–1, 1.92.1. Dodona: Hdt. 2.55. On Herodotus' own tour of Delphi and the stories he may have heard there, see Harriet I. Flower, "Herodotus and Delphic Traditions About Croesus," in *Herodotus: Volume 1: Herodotus and the Narrative of the Past*, ed. Rosaria Vignolo Munson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 124–153. About the priestesses of Dodona, it is worth noting that Herodotus only names three other individuals as his sources in the entire *Histories*: Archias of Sparta (3.55), Tymnes the non-Greek agent of Ariapeithes (4.76.6), and Thersander of Orchomenos (9.16).

⁴³ See above.

⁴⁴ Hes. *Theog.* 27.

should be understood as playing on cultural expectations and reflecting cultural knowledge of how oracular divination worked in his time. Importantly, these expectations and this knowledge are themselves historical facts, and it is in this more limited way that Herodotus may be seen as a valuable historical source for oracular activity in ancient Greece.

The Plan

My argument falls into three parts. In the first chapter, I apply narratological theory to Herodotus' *Histories* in order to demonstrate the existence of a distinct genre of story that I call the 'oracular tale.' Herodotus tells 108 stories about oracles. Under narratological analysis, the sequence of action within all of the stories about oracles resolves neatly into five types of episode: *crisis*, in which an event induces an uncertainty in a person or a people that requires oracular insight to resolve; *consultation*, in which consultants go about the business of seeking, obtaining, and reporting an oracular pronouncement; *conjecture*, in which consultants interpret the oracle, conceive an expectation, and formulate a plan; *action*, in which consultants act on their plan and attempt to realize their expectations; and *fulfillment*, in which the oracular pronouncement is said or thought to be fulfilled, accomplished, or complete in its meaning. Individually, the stories may betray clear differences like the consultation of a collection of oracles or a spontaneous prophecy of an oracle-monger as opposed to a trip to an oracular sanctuary, but these differences illustrate the paradigmatic equivalency of these means of consultation within the narrative pattern. Additionally, the narrative order of episodes within the tale often do not strictly and simply follow the order as I have laid it out above. Nevertheless, a close examination of temporal markers reveals a consistent chronological order of episodes. The fact that Herodotus attributes a number of oracular tales to others and sometimes even has

internal narrators tell oracular tales demonstrates that he is not himself the inventor of the ‘oracular tale.’ Rather, it belongs to an oral tradition of storytelling that preceded him.

Scholars have examined narrative patterns in Herodotus’ tales about oracles before. However, they have typically focused on the simpler pattern of oracular pronouncement and fulfillment at the heart of the ‘oracular tale.’ Those using overt narratological analysis tend to see oracular fulfillment as part of a strategy of foreshadowing that introduces dramatic irony.⁴⁵ Some draw a comparison between the themes and motifs identified in modern folktale studies and oracular fulfillment, and they challenge the historicity of Herodotus’ tales based on the similarities that they find.⁴⁶ Others suppose that oracular fulfillment is essentially a propagandistic strategy designed to make some person, group, or institution look good.⁴⁷ Still others believe that the pattern simply expresses how the Greeks thought about the divine, the supernatural, or fate and its involvement in human affairs and avoid or dismiss relation to the actual practice around oracular divination.⁴⁸ Certainly, stories about prophetic fulfillment can be entertaining, resemble folktales, be fabricated by self-interested parties, and make one think about the order of the cosmos, but the more sophisticated and complete narratological analysis that I use here allows us to take note of the occasional gaps that appear in the syntagmatic structure of oracular tales. What becomes clear is that Herodotus sometimes entirely omits

⁴⁵ Jonas Grethlein, “Philosophical and Structuralist Narratologies—Worlds Apart?,” in *Narratology and Interpretation: The Content of Narrative Form in Ancient Literature*, ed. Jonas Grethlein and Antonios Rengakos (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2009), 160–4; Irene J. F. de Jong, “Narratological Aspects of the Histories of Herodotus,” in *Herodotus: Volume 1: Herodotus and the Narrative of the Past*, ed. Rosaria Vignolo Munson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 282–291.

⁴⁶ Joseph Fontenrose, “The Oracular Response as a Traditional Narrative Theme,” *Journal of Folklore Research* 20, no. 2/3 (1983): 113–20.

⁴⁷ Crahay, *La Littérature oraculaire*.

⁴⁸ Jutta Kirchberg, *Die Funktion der Orakel im Werke Herodots* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1965), 117–18; Thomas Harrison, “‘Prophecy in Reverse?’ Herodotus and the Origins of History,” in *Herodotus and His World: Essays from a Conference in Memory of George Forrest*, ed. Peter Derow and Robert Parker (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 239–255; Julia Kindt, “Delphic Oracle Stories and the Beginning of Historiography: Herodotus’ Croesus Logos,” *Classical Philology* 101, no. 1 (2006): 34–51; Julia Kindt, *Revisiting Delphi: Religion and Storytelling in Ancient Greece* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 16–54.

certain episodes from his narration of oracular tales. He also may substitute an episode, or a scene within an episode, either with implicative information in another episode or scene or with what are apparently colloquialisms. Indeed, some of his stories are reduced to one or two episodes, and others, to a single phrase. I call this effect ‘narrative compression.’ By drawing on numerous examples of ‘narrative compression,’ I argue that these omissions, substitutions, and colloquialisms are part of a narratorial strategy of implication and do not vitiate the syntagmatic structure of the ‘oracular tale.’ The ‘oracular tale’ is much like Algirdas Greimas’ ‘canonical narrative schema.’ Not only are the episodes of the ‘oracular tale’ and the ‘canonical narrative schema’ closely related, but their episodes are also logically, causally, and chronologically linked in the same order. The result is that someone who knows the schema naturally expects that certain kinds of events necessarily precede and follow certain others. Thus, Herodotus seems to have counted on his audience to use their knowledge of the ‘oracular tale’ as a framework of expectation in order to understand his implication where he compresses his stories. In other words, the schema is not just a narrative pattern; it is a pattern of thought that his audience used to make sense of his stories about oracles.⁴⁹ Further, given the historian’s expectation that his audience would be familiar with how oracular consultation worked, I conclude that the ‘oracular tale’ is more than just a narrative schema or culturally familiar pattern of thought. It also expresses socially codified expectations of action that one may fairly call a social script.

In chapter two, I answer the objection posed by Fontenrose and followed by many since that Herodotus’ tales are fundamentally at odds with the epigraphic evidence and those literary

⁴⁹ Recently, Georgia Petridou has theorized an “epiphanic schema” taking a similar approach to and drawing similar conclusions from the sources for divine epiphanies. The schema involves four episodes (crisis, authorization, resolution, and commemoration), its emplotment is heavily dependent on generic differences and authorial emphasis, and its consistency shows that the schema was embedded in the public consciousness and was “at the back of the minds of the people who took part in these festivals, viewed these cult statues, attended these sacrifices, or visited these sanctuaries.” Georgia Petridou, *Divine Epiphany in Greek Literature and Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 18–20.

accounts that report on contemporary events. On this point, it is worth recognizing that Fontenrose's reception was as tepid as his work has been influential. A number of his own contemporaries challenged his method.⁵⁰ Given the many and obvious differences between inscribed texts and the histories of Herodotus, Thucydides, and Xenophon, other classicists balked at his proposal of using the former as the touchstone for the latter. Unfortunately, although they raised an important methodological issue, neither they nor subsequent scholars have done much work to correct the record. As a result, most objections to Fontenrose's work have remained at the level of methodological dispute and disagreement over the consequences of his conclusions.⁵¹ No one yet has challenged him on his own ground by making another close examination of the epigraphic evidence under different assumptions. Instead, some have attempted to redeem certain facets of the Herodotean picture of oracular consultation as historical. Through cross-cultural comparisons, these scholars have shown that it is theoretically possible for the Pythia to have produced hexameter verse extemporaneously.⁵² However, without directly tackling Fontenrose's arguments about the reliability of the epigraphic evidence versus the literary sources, their counterarguments are liable to receive a speedy dismissal or equivocal approval from historians. Thus, any attempt to address the schism that has developed must

⁵⁰ M.D.S. Dobson, "Oracular Language: Its Style and Intent in the Delphic Oracles and in Aeschylus' 'Orestia.'" (Ph.D., United States -- Massachusetts, Harvard University, 1976), 12; Brenk, "The Delphic Oracle. Its Responses and Operations, with a Catalogue of Responses," 701; Forrest, "Review of The Delphic Oracle," 429; W. Kendrick Pritchett, "Military Oracles," in *The Greek State at War*, vol. 3 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979), 301–2n22.

⁵¹ Maurizio, "Delphic Oracles as Oral Performances," 310–311; Peter T. Struck, "The Ordeal of the Divine Sign: Divination and Manliness in Archaic and Classical Greece," in *Andreia: Studies in Manliness and Courage in Classical Antiquity*, ed. Ralph M. Rosen and Ineke Sluiter (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 171–2; Jon D. Mikalson, *Herodotus and Religion in the Persian Wars* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003), 57–8; Julia Kindt, "The Inspired Voice: Enigmatic Oracular Communication," in *Mercury's Wings: Exploring Modes of Communication in the Ancient World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 216–17.

⁵² Maurizio, "Anthropology and Spirit Possession"; Flower, *The Seer in Ancient Greece*, 215–22; Lisa Maurizio, "Shared Meters and Meanings: Delphi Oracles and Women's Lament," in *Women's Ritual Competence in the Greco-Roman Mediterranean*, ed. Matthew Dillon, Esther Eidinow, and Lisa Maurizio (London: Routledge, 2017), 97–114; Michael A. Flower, "Understanding Delphi Through Tibet," *Greece & Rome* 65 (2018): 34–53.

explain the apparent disparity that Fontenrose and so many others have seen between contemporary documents and literary works like Herodotus' *Histories*.

By applying the same narratological analysis to the extant inscriptions relating to oracles (even beyond Delphic oracles) and to Thucydides' *Histories*, I demonstrate that these sources actually confirm the picture of oracular activity found in Herodotus both in general and in a number of specifics. The inscriptions and Thucydides both give clear examples of 'Herodotean' oracular tales, and the apparent and real differences can be explained as the effect of 'narrative compression' that reflects the interests and aims of the different narrators. In other words, these differences are symptoms of the differences between the narrators themselves and the time at which they tell their stories, but they do not reflect a difference in their understanding of how oracles were actually acquired and put to use.

Pierre Amandry and Fontenrose observed a real and important difference between the oracular pronouncements in inscriptions and those in Herodotus. The inscriptions tend to avoid direct quotation of verse oracles and almost never detail the intricacies of oracular interpretation. Using the 'oracular tale' as an analytical tool, I show that the difference between the famous Herodotean tales and the epigraphic evidence is not really over the crisis episode, the civic and religious procedures that precede and follow the mantic session, the action episode, or the fulfillment episode. Rather, it is the mode of oracular pronouncements and the episode of conjecture that appear to differ. Importantly, these two elements of the 'oracular tale' depend on each other since, if oracles always gave clear and straightforward advice to their consultants, there would not have been much need for interpreting their meaning in elaborate and enigmatic ways as Herodotus sometimes has it. Thus, the poetic language of oracular pronouncements and the conjectural interpretations that follow from them are together the hinge point in the dispute.

However, Amandry's and Fontenrose's conclusion that the inscriptions reflect the actual practice of oracular consultation and that Herodotus represents the socially constructed tradition is unconvincing when faced with the prominent exceptions that they too quickly ignored or dismissed. When examining such a fragmentary and limited body of evidence, the exceptions are as important as the rules.

My chief argument is that Amandry and Fontenrose have misunderstood indirect reports of oracular language in the epigraphic texts and other contemporary sources as nearly verbatim quotations of what Delphic oracles actually said directly. Thus, based on some examples of close similarity between the consultant's question and the oracular pronouncement, they believed that the Pythia generally issued oracles in plain prose, and for Fontenrose, these prose pronouncements typically recapitulated the language of the question as a sanction or a prohibition.⁵³ I present five main objections to this conclusion. First, as is clear from a close study of Herodotus, that historian clearly did not always expect his audience to think of his indirect, prose reports of oracles as an exact transcription of what the oracle actually said. Rather, he shows from a number of examples that he feels free to compress his narratives by omitting the episode of conjecture and substituting a consultant's interpretation of an oracle for a direct quotation of it. In other words, he sometimes uses an indirect report to express what the agents in the story understood the oracle to mean. I argue that this explains why some oracular pronouncements among the inscriptions seem to resemble the question that was asked so closely: these consultants interpreted their oracles as responding directly to their questions. Second, a close analysis of the epigraphic evidence does not allow us to suppose as a general rule that oracular language was directly related to the language of a consultant's inquiry. There are very

⁵³ Amandry, *La Mantique Apollinienne*, 149–68; Fontenrose, *The Delphic Oracle*, 223.

few examples of their complete concurrence, and there are a number of examples of quite dramatic differences. Third, only four inscriptions can be argued to report oracles in direct prose.⁵⁴ Of these four, two likely involve the submission of a law code for divine approval—in these inscriptions, the codes themselves follow words like “Apollo declared”—one is too fragmentary to be certain whether the oracular pronouncement is presented in direct or indirect speech, and one is too fragmentary to discern whether the text is even oracular. Fourth, there is more and earlier epigraphic evidence for verse and poetically phrased oracles than has often been supposed. Also, Thucydides, like Herodotus, provides full lines of verse oracles as well as snippets of Delphic verse that have lain hidden in indirect prose. Fifth, there are a number of inscriptions that strongly imply that oracles required some kind of interpretation in order to be acted upon in an appropriate way. Although the episode of conjecture is most often omitted or limited in this way, one Hellenistic example gives a detailed account of how consultants went about the conjectural interpretation of oracular words in the light of their present circumstances.⁵⁵ Additionally, although he most often only implies the episode of conjecture, Thucydides clearly shows that his contemporaries thought of oracles as predictive and enigmatic words that required conjectural interpretation, and he occasionally uses the same kind of interpretation himself, though with greater scrutiny. What comes into focus through this analysis is that there is better support for the historicity of verse and poetically phrased oracles as well as their enigmatic interpretation than has commonly been recognized following Fontenrose. This finding helps confirm the general picture of oracular consultation and use that Herodotus paints

⁵⁴ Delphi: *IG* XI.4.1298 (early-third BCE), Didyma: *Milet* I.3.178.1–5 (sixth BCE), *DI* 647.2–5 (sixth BCE), *Milet* I.3.132.a1–7 (sixth BCE).

⁵⁵ Delphi: *IM* 16.18–24 (221 BCE).

in his *Histories*. The Greeks could tell the difference between an oracle and an interpretation of what an oracle meant.

All the same, there has to be a reason why epigraphic narrators and Thucydides generally avoided direct citations of oracles and specific mention of conjectural interpretation as opposed to Herodotus who reveled in them. I propose that the clear differences between Herodotus, Thucydides, and the epigraphic evidence is due to the differences between each of the narrators of these texts. Because it is a significant function of inscribed texts to serve as a guarantee that cultural norms and civic procedures were followed, epigraphic narrators try to build consensus around what a community or dedicatee decided to do about an oracle. Where the consultation has not been completed by the time of the inscription, there is no oracle to transmit or interpret. Where the consultation has been completed, the interpretive process has already been completed too, and this interpretation constitutes a claim about oracular meaning. Thus, it makes sense that epigraphic narrators would avoid citing the actual language of an oracle or mentioning any sort of discrepancy, including the personal consideration or public debate that must have taken place. Doing otherwise would only have introduced a fracture in the consensus that these documents are intended, in part, to foster. Thucydides, the “rational” historian, has been traditionally interpreted as very skeptical of oracles for good reason. It is likely because of this skepticism as well as his focus on human agents and their motives that oracles do not feature as prominently in his work as they do in that of Herodotus. However, his skepticism regarding oracles is not about what sort of thing oracles were or whether or how his fellow Greeks wrangled over oracular interpretation; it is directed at his contemporaries’ claims about oracular fulfillment. It is, therefore, no surprise that much of his interest in oracles is focused on the episode of fulfillment rather than the episode of conjecture. Nevertheless, Thucydides’ reasoning shows that he is

fundamentally working with the same kind of conjectural interpretation as his fellow Greeks in making his judgements. His thinking is just more discriminating than was common at the time. Herodotus, on the other hand, is far more invested precisely in the aspects of dealing with oracles and their interpretation that the epigraphic narrators and Thucydides tend to pass over. His fuller accounts of how Greeks went about the business of interpreting oracular language allow him to introduce complexities that have moral significance, but being further removed from events, he does not need to be as concerned about breaking community consensus as most epigraphic narrators do. Thus, these different narrators are actually using the same pattern of narrative and thought that underlies the ‘oracular tale.’ Each expresses the same cultural knowledge in a different way that reflects their own purposes and interests.

In the third chapter, I answer another popular objection that Herodotus’ depiction of oracular divination is unrealistic. Some since Fontenrose have thought it to be counterintuitive that Greek oracles would ever have issued verses that were ambiguous and required the apparently unreliable hermeneutic of conjecture for their interpretation. Frederick Naerebout and Kim Beerden have made the strongest case on this point:

Divination belongs in the same sphere—humans ask the supernatural to pronounce about the past, present and future in order to point out the right decisions to those who are in doubt before a range of possible options. This can only function properly when answers are *not* ambiguous, but as clear as can be. One did not travel the length of the country to far-away Epirus and pay good money in order to have the oracle at Dodona pronounce something that was a riddle—which would put you in the same situation you started from: you would have to solve the riddle and you might get it wrong. One came all the way to Dodona to make life easier, not more complicated. One wanted to have a clear “yes or “no” when one has asked whether a marriage or migration or business-trip was a good idea. One wanted to have the name of a god when one has asked what god to sacrifice to in order to restore harmony. The above is common sense.⁵⁶

⁵⁶ Naerebout and Beerden, “Gods Cannot Tell Lies,” 136–7. See also Fontenrose, “The Oracular Response”; Catherine Morgan, *Athletes and Oracles: The Transformation of Olympia and Delphi in the Eighth Century BC* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 157; Hugh Bowden, *Classical Athens and the Delphic Oracle: Divination and Democracy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 51; Johnston, *Ancient Greek Divination*, 2008, 55.

For these scholars, the well-established and long-lasting tradition of oracular ambiguity poses a significant problem for oracular utility. If the goal of divination is to have greater certainty about the future, as has been rightly suggested,⁵⁷ it seems that only a clear yes or no will do. The point gains by the fact that it is common sense to us, as Naerebout and Beerden say, but this is to impose our common sense onto the Greeks.

Instead of dismissing the utility of oracular ambiguity based on modern common sense, I show how the Greeks themselves explained their use of oracles.⁵⁸ In this way, one may get closer to appreciating their common sense and their beliefs about the utility of oracles. As I mentioned above and will demonstrate a length in the first chapter, the ‘oracular tale’ is a narrative pattern, a pattern of thought, and a social script of cultural expectations relating to oracles. Greek beliefs about oracular divination shaped the way they told oracular tales and dealt with oracles in practice, and the way they told oracular tales and dealt with oracles in practice sustained their beliefs about oracular divination. The Greeks apparently believed that their gods and heroes had some kind of superhuman knowledge about the past, present, and future and that they could impart that knowledge to humans. This is the central assumption of divination. The validity of that belief is at the very heart of the ‘oracular tale’: the connection between the oracular pronouncement and its fulfillment. If the gods and heroes did not know anything about the past, present, and future, oracles would not be fulfilled. By examining how Herodotus, his informants,

⁵⁷ Robert Parker, “Greek Oracles and Greek States,” in *Crux: Essays in Greek History Presented to G.E.M. de Ste. Croix on His 75th Birthday*, ed. Paul Cartledge and Geoffrey E. De Ste. Croix (London: Duckworth, 1985), 300; Eidinow, *Oracles, Curses, and Risk*, 10–25; Beerden, *Worlds Full of Signs*, 195–222; Hugh Bowden, “Seeking Certainty and Claiming Authority: The Consultation of Greek Oracles from the Classical to the Roman Imperial Periods,” in *Divination in the Ancient World: Religious Options and the Individual*, ed. Veit Rosenberger (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2013), 41–59.

⁵⁸ The issue of the use of oracles is important to address since one of the words for “oracle” (χρησμός) and for “consulting an oracle” (χρᾶσθαι) seem to be related etymologically to the concept of “use” (χρᾶσθαι) or necessity (χρή). Robert Beekes, *Etymological Dictionary of Greek*, vol. 2 (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 1648–9.

and the historical actors in the *Histories* drew this connection, I demonstrate that conjectural interpretation made oracular divination useful. Consultants interpreted oracular language as corresponding to their past, present, and future circumstances. Then, they used these correspondences as the basis either for constructing scripts that they could act out in pursuit of desirable future outcomes or for composing historical narratives to understand why certain events happened to them in the past. In other words, oracular interpretation is storytelling; it is narrative thinking.⁵⁹ Essentially, I argue that consultants in ancient Greece used oracles as somewhat flexible frames of reference by which they could form expectations for the future and make sense of the past.

I begin by relating oracular tales to marvelous tales. Borrowing Aristotle's analysis of narrative continuity in marvelous plots, I show that oracular tales emplot a chance conjunction between an oracular pronouncement and its fulfillment in a marvelous way and with narrative continuity. The chance conjunction of oracular pronouncement and its ultimate fulfillment is contrary to expectation, since the two events are not related by way of a clear sufficient cause, and it seems, as Aristotle says, "as though by plan" and "not random."⁶⁰ It is this vague feeling of intentionality that imparts a logic of coherence and understandability to the narrative, but that feeling results from correspondences in the events themselves and from the fact that they are emplotted together in a narrative in a particular way. In other words, the narrative pattern has an

⁵⁹ My idea here is an extension of that of Ralph Anderson, who thinks of 'divinatory thinking' as "akin" to telling a story. Ralph Anderson, "A Story of Blood, Guts and Guesswork: Synthetic Reasoning in Classical Greek Divination," in *Prophets and Profits: Ancient Divination and Its Reception*, ed. Richard Evans (London: Routledge, 2018), 50–64. What I propose is consonant with, though not dependent on, recent studies on the Theory of Narrative Thought. Lee Roy Beach, Byron L. Bissell, and James A. Wise, *A New Theory of Mind: The Theory of Narrative Thought* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2016). Esther Eidinow is particularly interested in cognitive approaches to divination, and has made a case for the importance of a similar kind of imagination, even embodied simulation, before, during, and after oracular consultation. Esther Eidinow, "A Feeling for the Future: Ancient Greek Divination and Embodied Cognition," in *Evolution, Cognition, and the History of Religion: New Synthesis: Festschrift in Honor of Armin W. Geertz*, ed. A. Petersen et al. (Leiden: Brill, 2018), 447–460.

⁶⁰ Arist. *Poet.* 1451b33–1452a9.

internal logic that imparts the sense of oracular fulfillment. Thus, narrators of oracular tales construct their narratives in such a way as to give oracles specific and definite meanings, a fact which presupposes an interpretation.

This theory poses a significant challenge to typical approaches to the interpretation of the oracles in oracular tales. Some scholars have shown an immoderate skepticism toward claims of oracular fulfillment and have attempted to explain oracles as *post eventum* forgeries or to reinterpret oracles in light of alternative historical facts.⁶¹ They pull oracles out of their proper narrative contexts and create new historical contexts by reimagining or even rearranging the episodes of an oracular tale in a way that explains their origins and language. In this way, oracles may become more readily understandable and palatable to modern modes of reason. Others display a lack of criticism and have an odd reflex toward talking about consultants as “getting it right” or “getting it wrong” when it comes to oracular interpretation.⁶² Although these scholars do not generally take the historicity of the oracles or the procedures of their interpretation seriously, they think along with the internal logic of the ‘oracular tale’ without identifying the interpretive leaps behind its production. Thus, the former analytic tradition of interpretation does not account for narrative un-falsifiability, and the latter unitarian tradition does not account for narratorial tendentiousness.

Here, my approach to oracular tales tries to walk a tightrope between these two hermeneutic extremes. I insist on interpreting oracles within their actual narrative contexts while remaining cognizant of the fact that narrators of oracular tales have constructed their narratives so as to give oracles the interpretations that they believed to be valid. By analyzing the

⁶¹ E.g., Crahay, *La Littérature oraculaire*; Maurizio, “Delphic Oracles as Oral Performances,” 329–32; Noel Robertson, “The True Meaning of the ‘Wooden Wall,’” *Classical Philology* 82, no. 1 (1987): 1–20.

⁶² E.g., Elton Barker, “Paging the Oracle: Interpretation, Identity and Performance in Herodotus’ ‘History,’” *Greece & Rome* 53, no. 1 (2006): 1–28; Kindt, *Revisiting Delphi*, 155–64.

connection that a narrator asserts between an oracular pronouncement and its supposed fulfillment, one may better understand the ‘divinatory thinking’ that informs the composition of a narrative. It is by scrutinizing the occasional cracks that appear in the oracular tales—these are instances in which the event claimed as the fulfillment of an oracle appears to be driven as much by contingent circumstances as by a ‘prophetic plan’—that one may observe how ‘divinatory thinking’ makes oracles work for the Greeks. I analyze three examples of interpretive “failure” on the part of consultants and three examples of the reuse of oracles from Herodotus’ *Histories* in which the link between oracular pronouncement and fulfillment is not so tightly or seamlessly bound. In the process, I demonstrate that ‘divinatory thinking’ involves narrative thinking. Consultants put oracular words together with particular circumstances and develop a plan of action about what to do, which I call a ‘future story.’ It is like a script that consultants expect to be able to act out in detail all the way to the circumstance they conjecture to be the fulfillment of the oracle. Sometimes, though, their experiences do not tally with their expectations. The cracks appear here. In these moments, consultants reinterpret the oracle to produce either a historical account that conceives of the fulfillment of the oracle in a new way (an oracular tale) or a new ‘future story’ (a second act of the script) that they may try again to act out. ‘Divinatory thinking,’ therefore, is synthetic in three senses: it is done by combining correspondences to make meaning, it is verifiable by experience, and it draws artificial and constructed relationships.

The cracks of contingency that appear in these oracular tales show how subjectively, arbitrarily, and opportunistically the Greeks behaved when interpreting oracles. Lisa Maurizio has argued that the reinterpretation of oracles following their objective “disconfirmation” is a

form of “falsification” of oracular meaning.⁶³ Further, she thinks of the reuse of oracles and the occasional flexibility of their language as demonstrating the extent to which an oral tradition can pose a challenge for typical notions of oracular authenticity.⁶⁴ Although her work has given us a helpful way to think about the flexibility of meaning and wording of oracles that may at times appear within an oral tradition, she gives too little importance to the existence of a parallel written tradition.⁶⁵ Further, her interpretations of the texts involved are sometimes guided more by modern theory than by the texts themselves and the notions about oracles that the Greeks embedded in them. By taking such an etic approach and emphasizing contingency in events, one may think of the Greeks as “falsifying” oracular meaning by reinterpretation, but the structure of oracular tales clearly shows that the Greeks believed that there was a ‘prophetic plan’ to how events come to happen. They did not think that they were “falsifying” oracular meaning at all but verifying it as a sign of divine knowledge.

By way of conclusion, I argue that this disparity between ancient and modern ways of thinking about oracles is nicely framed in the debate over oracular ambiguity. Fontenrose once claimed that the Delphic oracle’s reputation for ambiguity is “wholly modern.”⁶⁶ He is right in a sense. By analyzing two metaphors that Herodotus uses in relation to oracles and oracular interpretation, I demonstrate that the Greeks did not trust in oracles that they conceived to be flexible and ambiguous, but in divine signs that they believed to be enigmatic sometimes. Importantly, though, they believed that oracles had single and absolute meanings that could be

⁶³ Lisa Maurizio, “Interpretive Strategies for Delphic Oracles and Kledon: Prophecy Falsification and Individualism,” in *Divination in the Ancient World: Religious Options and the Individual*, ed. Veit Rosenberger (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2013), 61–79.

⁶⁴ Maurizio, “Delphic Oracles as Oral Performances.”

⁶⁵ Bowden, *Classical Athens and the Delphic Oracle*, 37n26; Flower, *The Seer in Ancient Greece*, 218–19. In a more recent chapter, Maurizio herself appears to recognize the fitting critique. Maurizio, “Shared Meters and Meanings,” 101.

⁶⁶ Fontenrose, *The Delphic Oracle*, 236.

discovered and recognized through conjectural interpretation. Oracles may seem ambiguous to us, but a closer look at the issue from an etic perspective shows that this perception stems from the ambiguous and subjective human thinking that interprets oracles enigmatically. From an emic perspective, however, the Greeks thought of themselves as using an enigmatic mode of interpretation to discover objective oracular truth. As their own experiences and familiar oracular tales proved, oracular divination actually worked. To the Greeks, the coincidence between pronouncement and fulfillment seemed, as Aristotle put it, “not random” and “as though by a plan,”⁶⁷ and they understood it as proof of the accuracy of prophecy in support of their belief in the power of divination. In turn, they expressed this belief in the objective truth of oracular fulfillment through telling oracular tales and through ‘divinatory thinking.’ Their belief in oracular divination explains the utility of cryptic verse oracles. Belief allowed consultants to imagine beneficial future circumstances that would render the pronouncement truly fulfilled and then to pursue a plan of action that would lead toward effecting that result. In other words, in a place of indecision about what to do, an oracle provided a frame of reference by which to imagine a beneficial solution to a crisis.⁶⁸ Thus, since divination is about diminishing uncertainty concerning the future or managing risk with the help of divine knowledge, a simple yes-or-no answer is clearly not the only kind of answer that may be helpful toward that end; cryptic verse oracles also fit the bill when accompanied by conjectural interpretation. In the end, there is no objective reason to dismiss Herodotus’ depiction of how oracles worked in his time, and there is every reason to think that the Greeks believed the coincidence of oracular pronouncement and fulfillment reflected the greater order of the universe and the divine knowledge of the past, present, and future.

⁶⁷ Arist. *Poet.* 1452a7, 10.

⁶⁸ Robert Parker has made a similar argument. Parker, “Greek States and Greek Oracles,” 301–2.

CHAPTER TWO: THE CONCEPT OF THE ‘ORACULAR TALE’ AND ITS PLACE IN HERODOTUS

Introduction

Narratives are fundamental to our understanding of oracular divination in ancient Greece. The main way in which oracles are mentioned in our evidence is through narrative, whether they are its central focus, like the greater pattern of a tapestry, or a tangent to it (contextual background, evidentiary support, anecdotal digression, etc.), like a stitch of bright color. By analyzing narratives about oracles, there is insight to be gained into how oracles fit into narratives, how they are used in the world portrayed in literature, and through the author and the audience, how oracles were used by the Greeks in the past.

In this chapter, I introduce the concept of the ‘oracular tale.’ By ‘oracular tale,’ I mean a kind of narrative unit that begins with a problem to be solved, and after an oracular prophecy, concludes with a resolution that accounts for the fulfillment of that prophecy. While oracular tales could be found in any number of authors and genres in antiquity, Herodotus’ *Histories* is a very early text that presents the reader with a large number of such tales. It will, therefore, be an easy way to limit the scope of this study. After defining the principal episodes involved in the ‘oracular tale,’ I first demonstrate the existence of a consistent pattern in the way that Herodotus tells such stories. Because of the chronological, logical, and causal connectedness between these episodes, I argue that one may think of the syntagmatic structure of the ‘oracular tale’ like a narrative schema. In the context of this narrative schema, the appearance even of a fragment of an oracular tale as short as a single episode implies the rest of the episodes. Second, I show that Herodotus has a variety of ways to narrate the material that typifies each of the episodes individually. Often times his narration of the episodes of an oracular tale comes in a rather

abridged form, which I call ‘narrative compression,’ in which roles and actions that are proper to that episode of the tale may be substituted for the others, in whole or in part. ‘Narrative compression,’ though, sometimes involves more significant abridgement, including the use of idiomatic expressions or the omission of roles and actions, that makes stories difficult to understand without a knowledge of the full syntagmatic structure of the ‘oracular tale’. Finally, I draw two conclusions in conversation with related scholarship. First, the consistency of the syntagmatic structure of the ‘oracular tale’ both in the stories told by the main narrator and those told by the internal narrators of the *Histories* is evidence of a traditional story type. Second, the ‘narrative compression’ apparent from his paradigmatic substitutions of roles and actions within the episodes and the use of idiomatic phrases and omissions helps show that the schema of the ‘oracular tale’ must have been familiar cultural knowledge among the ancient Greeks. Otherwise, Herodotus’ meaning in telling some of these tales would have been utterly opaque. Ultimately, I argue that the consistency in storytelling and the evidence of ‘narrative compression’ point more broadly to a consistency in the way that the author and his audience thought about and made use of oracles.⁶⁹ Their knowledge of oracular use was not just informed by stories but also by real experience with obtaining, interpreting, and acting upon oracles. In other words, the schema of the ‘oracular tale’ replicates a culturally known social script of behavior regarding the utility of oracles.

⁶⁹ Ralph Anderson has argued similarly that the stories in Herodotus reflect “contemporary thought processes about oracles,” but he arrives at this conclusion on the ground of cultural approval of Herodotus’ performances of oracular tales, which he derives from Lisa Maurizio. Anderson, “A Story of Blood,” 54; Maurizio, “Delphic Oracles as Oral Performances.” I add the evidence of narrative patterning in these stories to this argument and argue further that the pattern relates to known procedures for consulting, obtaining, and interpreting oracles in Ancient Greece.

Unity and Pattern in Herodotus

B.A. van Groningen once wrote, “Writing history is in first instance nothing but the telling of a tale.”⁷⁰ Few have told tales as well and as memorably as Herodotus. To its credit, scholarship on Herodotus has been deeply invested in analyzing the way in which he tells his *Histories*. To some extent, the texture of the work itself seems to be responsible for the importance of this approach. Readers typically come to think of the *Histories* as a chaotic collection of amusing tales inserted as digressions that often seem unrelated to or even distracting from what appears to be the main subject of the Greco-Persian Wars. As John Gould famously put it, “The first impression one has is of being buried under an avalanche of facts and at the same time utterly lost in a landscape bewilderingly criss-crossed and looped by stories without discernible paths or sense of structured connection.”⁷¹ The feeling of disconnectedness, then, has evoked questions of unity and composition. Simply put, does one say of the *Histories* that it *is* a work by Herodotus or that they *are* his magnum opus?⁷² The tendency in more recent scholarship, though, has been to appreciate the unity and interconnectedness of the *Histories* by asking how the seemingly tangential digressions are related to the main narrative and are interrelated, rather than to hypothesize analytically about the stages of composition. These recent studies necessarily involve searching for patterns within the text like the presence of large-scale structural parallels, themes, folktale motifs, and even syntax and lexis. Similarly, my investigation draws attention to a kind of narrative pattern in tales involving oracles within Herodotus’ *Histories* that I call the ‘oracular tale.’

⁷⁰ B. A. van Groningen, *In the Grip of the Past: Essay on an Aspect of Greek Thought* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1953), 35.

⁷¹ John Gould, *Herodotus* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1989), 42.

⁷² Irene de Jong has a nice summary of the history of this problem in scholarship. Irene J. F. de Jong, “Narrative Unity and Units,” in *Brill’s Companion to Herodotus*, ed. Egbert J. Bakker, Irene J. F. de Jong, and Hans van Wees (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 246–54.

Defining the Traces of an Oracular Tale

The simplest definition of an oracular tale is any story making reference to an oracle. By “oracle” I mean a verbal divine sign.⁷³ These words may be called μαντεῖον, χρησμός, χρηστήριον, λογίον, θεοπροπία, or πρόφαντον or they may just be reported in direct or indirect speech following one of the verbs special to oracular pronouncements, like ἀναιρεῖν (“to give a response”) or χρᾶν (“to declare”). Generally, I have excluded from consideration any passage in which Herodotus tells merely of an oracular institution. However, I have included two stories about the foundations of oracles, both in the same passage.⁷⁴ The word μαντεῖον in this context clearly refers to an institution, and none of the words typically associated with oracular pronouncements are used to describe the words of the marvelous talking birds at Dodona and Ammon. Nevertheless, the inhabitants of Dodona, at least, take them as a “divine message” (θεῖον ... τὸ ἐπαγγελλόμενον), and they are, therefore, the first divine messages received at what would become two of the most famous oracular institutions in the Greek world. Including these two, there are 108 stories or passages pertaining to oracles in the *Histories*.

Illustrating the Basic Pattern of Episodes

What I am calling the ‘oracular tale’ is a type of traditional tale bearing a regularly occurring story pattern or narrative schema that includes five principal sequences of action in its most expansive form. At the outset of the story, a *crisis* (A) arises that opens up the kind of

⁷³ The divine signs that come to the priest or priestess in whatever manner need to be communicated to consultants in language. See Alexander Hollmann, *The Master of Signs: Signs and the Interpretation of Signs in Herodotus* (Washington, D.C.: Center for Hellenic Studies, 2011), 2.3.1.

⁷⁴ Hdt. 2.55.2–3, #23 and #24.

uncertainties that the gods or heroes may be able to mitigate.⁷⁵ Examples include famine (a public issue) and chronic illness (sometimes a private issue), as well as war (a public issue) and showing due reverence (sometimes a private issue). The uncertainty that arises about the crisis may relate to its cause, remediation, or final result. After the appearance of a crisis, an individual or a community undertakes a *consultation* (**B**) of the divine. In this episode, the person or people experiencing a crisis travel to an oracular sanctuary, ask a question that expresses the nature of their uncertainty, and return with an oracular pronouncement.⁷⁶ Following the report of the oracular pronouncement comes the episode of *conjecture* (**C**). Here, an individual mentally or community in debate interprets the pronouncement in light of their circumstances, frames an expectation about a result that is hoped for or feared, and develops a plan to realize or avoid that expectation. Then, the individual or community will take the *action* (**D**) that was planned. Finally, the pronouncement finds its *fulfillment* (**E**) in the sense that the words of the oracle are recognized as fulfilled, accomplished, or complete in their meaning. Importantly, fulfillment may occur either as a consequence of the actions of consultants or in spite of them. In a simple oracular tale, the episodes will appear in this natural sequence, which may be expressed formulaically: **A—B—C—D—E**.

My classification of five sequences of action of the ‘oracular tale’ picks up where Lisa Maurizio leaves off. In an article in 1997, she observes that the majority of Delphic oracles are embedded in narratives found in Herodotus, Plutarch, and Pausanias, and that these narratives

⁷⁵ In this way, we can agree with Esther Eidinow that the purpose of divination is a kind of management of risk and with Kim Beerden that it is to get a grip on uncertainty. However, what ties the concept of risk and uncertainty together is that both are assessed and managed by conjecture, whether good or bad. Eidinow, *Oracles, Curses, and Risk*, 10–24; Beerden, *Worlds Full of Signs*, 195–222.

⁷⁶ The pronouncement is the fundamental component of the ‘oracular tale.’ Its utterance, though, is not its own episode, but may be narrated as an aspect of the consultation, conjecture, or fulfillment. This flexibility is a natural consequence of the intimate connections between these three episodes and the oracular pronouncement. See “Fulfillment” below.

bear “an almost invariable plot structure.”⁷⁷ In her view, this plot structure is represented in the following sequence of episodes: “crisis, consultation, interpretation, action, confirmation or refutation made evident in the oracle’s fulfillment.” However, she leaves this pattern as an assertion and does not go on in the article to demonstrate how this pattern obtains in tales about Delphic oracles. Following her thought, I will provide evidence in the next two parts of this chapter to substantiate her claim.

Herodotus’ story of a divine and miraculous defense of Delphi provides an excellent example of a story in which all five episodes of the ‘oracular tale’ are clearly expressed.

[A] And they [the Persian soldiers] were marching on that path detached from the rest of the army on account of these things: in order that after sacking the temple at Delphi they might show the treasures to Xerxes. Xerxes knew that the things in the temple, however many were worthy of note, were, as I learn, better than the things he was leaving at home from the many people who were always talking about them and especially the dedications of Croesus, son of Alyattes. When the Delphians learned those things, they fell into all terror, and in a state of great fear, [B] they were consulting the oracle about the sacred treasures, whether they should bury them in the ground or transfer it to another land. {P} But the god did not allow them to move it, saying that he was capable of looking after his own. And when the Delphians heard those things, [C] they took thought of their own. [D] Now the children and the women they sent across to Achaea, but most of them climbed up to the peaks of Parnassus and hauled their possessions into the Corycian Cave, and some departed to Amphissa in Locris. All the Delphians, therefore, abandoned the city except for sixty men and the *prophetes*. [E] And when the barbarians on the attack were near and were looking upon the temple, inside, the prophet, whose name was Aceratus, sees arms, which no one was permitted to touch for fear of impiety, carried out from inside and lying at the front of the temple. He was, in fact, on his way to indicate the omen to the Delphians who were there, but when the barbarians were pressing hard on the temple of Athena Pronaia, there occurred omens for them even greater than the one that had just happened. For, in fact, even this is truly a marvel, that arms of war of their own accord appeared outside, lying in front of the temple, but in fact other things that occurred in addition to that are especially worthy to marvel at even among all portents. For when the barbarians were approaching the temple of Athena Pronaia, in that place lightning from heaven fell upon them, and two huge pieces broken from Parnassus were

⁷⁷ Maurizio, “Delphic Oracles as Oral Performances,” 311. See also Riccardo Palmisciano’s concept of the *racconto oracolare*. Riccardo Palmisciano, “Varianti di riformulazione negli oracoli delfici: una pratica della poesia popolare,” *Seminari Romani di Cultura Greca* 3, no. 2 (2014): 280. I choose the word “conjecture” instead of “interpretation” since this episode contains actions that are not always specifically interpretive, but still involve a kind of guesswork, and I use the word “fulfillment” to cover any kind of event that can be connected to the wording of the oracle, regardless of the rightness or wrongness (“confirmation” or “refutation”) conjecture of the consultant.

brought down onto them with a great crash and struck down a great number of them. And from the temple of Pronaia, there came both a voice and war cry. When all of those things combined together, fear fell upon the barbarians. And when the Delphians learned that they were fleeing, attacking them from above, they killed a group of them. The survivors fled straight to Boeotia. Those of the barbarians who returned home were saying, so I learn, that in addition to these, they saw other divine things. For two hoplites of greater than human frame followed behind them, killing and chasing.⁷⁸

In this story, all five episodes of the ‘oracular tale’ are present. News of the Persian approach frightens the Delphians, and they become concerned about letting the treasures fall into the hand of the enemy. However, this *crisis* (A) causes them an uncertainty about the proper disposal of sacred treasure. So, they undertake a *consultation* (B) at the Delphic oracle. They ask whether to bury or remove it somewhere else and are told that Apollo would take care of his own possessions. After hearing the oracle {P}, the Delphians *conjecture* (C) its meaning, and mull over how to protect their own households. Then, they implement their plan in the *action* (D) episode by sending their families to Achaea and stowing themselves and their possession in the crags of Parnassus. Finally, the oracle about Apollo looking out for his own things finds its *fulfillment* (E) when autonomous arms array themselves in front of the temple, lightning sends

⁷⁸ Ἐπορεύοντο δὲ ταύτῃ ἀποσχισθέντες τῆς ἄλλης στρατιῆς τῶνδε εἵνεκα, ὅκως συλήσαντες τὸ ἱρὸν τὸ ἐν Δελφοῖσι βασιλεῖ Ξέρξῃ ἀποδέξαιεν τὰ χρήματα· πάντα δ’ ἠπίστατο τὰ ἐν τῷ ἱρῷ ὅσα λόγου ἦν ἄξια Ξέρξης, ὥς ἐγὼ πυνθάνομαι, ἄμεινον ἢ τὰ ἐν τοῖσι οἰκίοισι ἔλπε, πολλῶν αἰεὶ λεγόντων, καὶ μάλιστα τὰ Κροίσου τοῦ Ἀλυάττεω ἀναθήματα. [Οἱ] Δελφοὶ δὲ πυνθανόμενοι ταῦτα ἐς πᾶσαν ἄρρωδὴν ἀπίκατο, ἐν δέματι δὲ μεγάλῳ κατεστεῶτες ἐμαντεύοντο περὶ τῶν ἱρῶν χρημάτων, εἴτε σφέα κατὰ γῆς κατορύξωσι εἴτε ἐκκομίσωσι ἐς ἄλλην χώραν· ὁ δὲ θεὸς σφέα οὐκ ἔα κινεῖν, φᾶς αὐτὸς ἱκανὸς εἶναι τῶν ἐωυτοῦ προκατῆσθαι. Δελφοὶ δὲ ταῦτα ἀκούσαντες σφέων αὐτῶν πέρι ἐφρόντιζον. Τέκνα μὲν νυν καὶ γυναῖκας πέρην ἐς τὴν Ἀχαιὴν διέπεμψαν, αὐτῶν δὲ οἱ μὲν πλείστοι ἀνέβησαν ἐς τοῦ Παρνησοῦ τὰς κορυφὰς καὶ ἐς τὸ Κωρύκιον ἄντρον ἀνηνείκαντο, οἱ δὲ ἐς Ἀμφισσαν τὴν Λοκρίδα ὑπεξῆλθον. Πάντες δὲ ὧν οἱ Δελφοὶ ἐξέλιπον τὴν πόλιν, πλην ἐξήκοντα ἀνδρῶν καὶ τοῦ προφήτεω. Ἐπεὶ δὲ ἀγχοῦ τε ἦσαν οἱ βάρβαροι ἐπιόντες καὶ ἀπώρων τὸ ἱρὸν, ἐν τούτῳ ὁ προφήτης, τῷ οὔνομα ἦν Ἀκήρατος, ὅρᾳ πρὸ τοῦ νηοῦ ὅπλα προκείμενα ἔσωθεν ἐκ τοῦ μεγάρου ἐξενηνεγμένα ἰρά, τῶν οὐκ ὅσιον ἦν ἅπτεσθαι ἀνθρώπων οὐδενί. Ὁ μὲν δὴ ἦε Δελφῶν τοῖσι παρεοῦσι σημανέων τὸ τέρας· οἱ δὲ βάρβαροι ἐπειδὴ ἐγίνοντο ἐπείγόμενοι κατὰ τὸ ἱρὸν τῆς Προνηΐδος Ἀθηναίης, ἐπιγίνεται σφι τέρεα ἔτι μέζονα τοῦ πρὶν γενομένου τέρεος. Θῶμα μὲν γὰρ καὶ τοῦτο κάρτα ἐστὶ, ὅπλα ἀρήια αὐτόματα φανῆναι ἔξω προκείμενα τοῦ νηοῦ· τὰ δὲ δὴ ἐπὶ τούτῳ δευτέρα ἐπιγενόμενα καὶ διὰ πάντων φασμάτων ἄξια θωμάσαι μάλιστα. Ἐπεὶ γὰρ δὴ ἦσαν ἐπιόντες οἱ βάρβαροι κατὰ τὸ ἱρὸν τῆς Προνηΐδος Ἀθηναίης, ἐν τούτῳ ἐκ μὲν τοῦ οὐρανοῦ κεραυνοὶ αὐτοῖσι ἐνέπιπτον, ἀπὸ δὲ τοῦ Παρνησοῦ ἀπορραγεῖσαι δύο κορυφαὶ ἐφέροντο πολλῷ πατάγῳ ἐς αὐτοὺς καὶ κατέβαλον συχνούς σφεων· ἐκ δὲ τοῦ [ἱροῦ] τῆς Προνηΐδος νηοῦ βοή τε καὶ ἀλαλαγμὸς ἐγένετο. Συμμιγνόντων δὲ τούτων πάντων φόβος τοῖσι βαρβάροισι ἐνεπεπτώκεε· μαθόντες δὲ οἱ Δελφοὶ φεύγοντάς σφας, ἐπικαταβάντες ἀπέκτειναν πληθὺς τι αὐτῶν. Ἐλεγον δὲ οἱ ἀπονοστήσαντες οὗτοι τῶν βαρβάρων, ὥς ἐγὼ πυνθάνομαι, ὥς πρὸς τούτοις καὶ ἄλλα ὥρων θεῖα· δύο γὰρ ὀπλίτας μεζόνως ἢ κατὰ ἀνθρώπων φύσιν ἔχοντας ἔπεσθαι σφι κτείνοντας καὶ διώκοντας. Hdt. 8.35.2–38, #95.

the peaks of Parnassus down upon the Persian troops, and mysterious ghosts chase down and slay them as they flee. Thus, Herodotus expresses all five episodes of the ‘oracular tale’ in their proper sequence: **A—B—C—D—E**.

Part One: Defining the Episodes: Typical Features, Substitutions, and Variations

All of Herodotus' oracular tales are about different events involving different oracles and different people. However, by leaving these differences aside, one may more easily observe the pattern that makes all of his stories about oracles individual expressions of the same type of tale. In the following section, I define more carefully each of the five episodes of the 'oracular tale', as well as the pronouncement, by noting their typical features. Then, I account for the kinds of variation and substitution that can be found in relation to those typical features. In doing so, I show that Herodotus, as a narrator, engages often in what I call 'narrative compression': the effect of the narrator's prerogative to abridge his narrative at points where the information is familiar to the audience, implied by other features within the narrative, or not especially important to his purpose in telling a story. Ultimately, I argue that in order for his compressed narratives to have been understood fully there must have been a familiar pattern of thought and procedure, a social script, for oracular consultation and use that was operative in the Greek culture.

Crisis

Typical Features

The crisis of the 'oracular tale' is the episode in which the would-be consultant faces an uncertainty significant enough to seek out an oracle. This episode is often specifically described in some detail and, thus, constitutes a fully discrete episode of the 'oracular tale'. For example, Herodotus tells us about a famine in Epidaurus as context for the beginning of the hostilities between the Athenians and Aeginetans. He states simply, "The land of the Epidaurians was

producing no fruit. About that misfortune, the Epidaurians consulted in Delphi.”¹ This brief excerpt of the story shows both a crisis, the famine, and a consultation at Delphi as distinct episodes. However, Herodotus clearly connects the two in a nearly causal way. It is because of the famine that they asked about it at Delphi. There is, therefore, a close relationship between these two episodes.

Variations

Variations within the crisis episode may be classed in terms of type and affected party. The categorization of the kinds of crises that prompted consultation aligns generally with observations in existing scholarship and offers no real surprises.² Although one may draw on Herodotus’ own taxonomy of public and private consultations as a foundational distinction,³ there is more overlap between the kinds of crises that affect private individuals and states in the *Histories* than one might at first suppose. These include concerns about an unknown location for something,⁴ the distrust of or displeasure with an oracle,⁵ due reverence,⁶ general prosperity or fortune,⁷ health,⁸ and even offspring.⁹ Indeed, the only crises that are unique to states are related to constitutional issues, like the institution of laws or succession to the kingship,¹⁰ and alliances

¹ Ἐπιδαυρίοισι ἡ γῆ καρπὸν οὐδένα ἀνεδίδου· Hdt. 5.82.1, #59.

² E.g., Fontenrose, *The Delphic Oracle*, 442–4.

³ ...εἴτε ἰδίῳ στόλῳ εἴτε δημοσίῳ χρησόμενοι... Hdt. 5.63.1.

⁴ Public: #12; #67 (#66, παρακαταθήκης πέρι ξεινικῆς).

⁵ Public: #87; Private: #4, #16, #17, #27, #43, #78, (#55, εἰ αἰρέει ἐπ’ ἣν στέλλεται χώραν). It is worth noting that this topic of consultation appears to be fairly common in Herodotus’ *Histories*.

⁶ Public: #15, #21, #22, #81, (#99, εἰ λελάβηκε πλήρεα καὶ ἀρεστὰ [τὰ ἀκροθίνια.]), (#60, κότερα χαλκοῦ ποιέωνται τὰ ἀγάλματα ἢ λίθου); Private: #29, #57, #77.

⁷ Public: #35, #41, #44, #45, #46, #59, #82, and #108; Private: #14, #27, #31, #48, #53, and #54 (#6, εἴ οἱ πολυχρόνιος ἔσται ἡ μοναρχία.).)

⁸ Private: #3, #13, #25, and #45. We may include here as well some of the unusual or unexpected happenings that prompt state consultations: #19, #20, and #82.

⁹ Public: #39; Private: #63 (#104, περὶ γόνου).

¹⁰ #2, #9, #47, #73, #74.

and wars.¹¹ On the other hand, the only crisis unique to the private sphere in Herodotus is the unknown identity of an offender.¹² My point here, though, is not to develop a strict typology, but to indicate generally the kinds of crises that may appear.

This information may be useful for determining what factors motivated both communities and individuals to seek oracular input historically, and this inquiry is common in scholarship on oracles.¹³ However, the remaining category of “uncertain crisis” is even more illuminative for the narratological approach that I take. Even when Herodotus does not know what crisis caused someone to inquire at an oracle, the framework of the ‘oracular tale’ is strong enough that he still provides information about his lack of knowledge on this score, rather than just omitting it altogether. In the episode of the Theraean king Grinnus’ consultation of the Delphic oracle, Herodotus adds that he was inquiring “about other matters” (περὶ ἄλλων).¹⁴ One might say that the word ἄλλων merely punches up the difference between what he was asking and the response that he received to found a colony in Libya. However, this information is not, strictly speaking, necessary for understanding the story, and it only raises the question in the end about why Grinnus seems to have left Delphi without any complaint about the irrelevance of the pronouncement as Battus later did.¹⁵ Herodotus does something similar in his story of Mardonius’ commission of his delegate Mus. As the historian says, “I am not able to indicate what he was wishing to learn at the oracles when he commanded these things, for it is not reported. But I, at least, think that he sent him to learn about his present situation and not about

¹¹ #5, #7, #10, #11, #58, #61, #62, #71, #86, #88, #89, #90, #95, #103 (#70, περὶ σωτηρίας τῆς πόλιος τῆς σφετέρης), (#76, “#70...”), (#84), (#93, περὶ τοῦ πολέμου τούτου), (#105, εἰ τι εἰδεῖεν λόγιον περὶ Περσέων ὡς διαφθερέονται ἐν τῇ Ἑλλάδι)

¹² #33. Of course, this issue may not have been confined to private consultations historically.

¹³ E.g., Bowden, *Classical Athens and the Delphic Oracle*, 109–33; Eidinow, *Oracles, Curses, and Risk*, 42–55, 125–8.

¹⁴ Hdt. 4.150.2, #40.

¹⁵ See Hdt. 4.155.4, #43.

other matters.”¹⁶ In this story, the lack of information prompts Herodotus to speculate about what matters would have concerned Mardonius enough to consult a bunch of oracles. It is apparent, then, that Herodotus supposes and sometimes feels an impulse to provide information to account for a consultant’s visit to an oracle.

Substitutions

Since the crisis is essentially an explanation of the reason for a consultant’s desire for an oracle, there is, as I have shown, a strong logical connection between the episodes of crisis and consultation. One may, therefore, occasionally infer the crisis from information that Herodotus provides about the question asked by the consultant in the consultation episode. A prominent instance may be found in the tale about Teisamenus, who, we are told, inquired at the oracle “about offspring” (περὶ γόνου).¹⁷ Clearly, it was an issue relating to fathering children that prompted him to consult the oracle. Here, Herodotus has compressed his narrative by alluding to a crisis in his narration of the consultation episode.

The evidence shows that there are a number of types of crisis that may prompt the consultation of an oracle in Herodotus’ *Histories*. These crises will certainly have been related in some way to those that the Greeks thought were worth consulting at an oracle. Further, it is clear that Herodotus may substitute an allusion to a crisis within the consultation episode in the place of a discrete episode in some tales. Herodotus seems to have expected his audience to be able to fill in the blank that he left in omitting the crisis with the help of such allusions. In addition, given that Herodotus feels compelled to insert his own supposition about the nature of

¹⁶ Ὅ τι μὲν βουλόμενος ἐκμαθεῖν πρὸς τῶν χρηστηρίων ταῦτα ἐνετέλλετο, οὐκ ἔχω φράσαι· οὐ γὰρ ὧν λέγεται· δοκέω δ’ ἔγωγε περὶ τῶν παρεόντων πρηγμάτων καὶ οὐκ ἄλλων πέρι πέμψαι. Hdt. 8.133.1, #101.

¹⁷ Hdt. 9.33.2, #104. I have set similar examples in parentheses in the footnotes that follow.

Mardonius' crisis, I suggest that there was a cultural expectation that one went to an oracle in order to deal with a specific crisis.

Consultation

Typical Features

I have defined the episode of consultation as the sequence of action in which the consultant goes about submitting an inquiry and acquiring a pronouncement. More generally, the episode of consultation explains the origin of the oracle and how and to whom it came to be known. The temporal extent of the episode may be regarded as spanning from the moment of a decision to seek an oracle to the time at which the consultant departs the sanctuary or learns about the oracle from his delegates. Thus, the pronouncement originates during the consultation. The way that Herodotus narrates the consultation at oracular sanctuaries follows a clear pattern. While the word order of the sentences that depict the consultation may vary according to the whims of the narrator or the exigencies of the example, the chronological order and the paradigms of the actions involved are consistent. First, I will analyze the most extensive example of a consultation in order to illustrate the broader narrative syntax of the episode. Next, I will compare that framework to further examples of consultations in order to fill in some gaps in its breadth and to draw attention to variations and substitutions that are identifiable within the general pattern. In this way, I show how all of the episodes of consultation are really expansive or contracted versions of the same familiar typescene.

The example of Croesus' test of the oracles illustrates what is almost the fullest extent of this series of actions in Herodotus' *Histories*.

He sent them away (ἀπέπεμπε), commanding (Ἐντειλάμενος) the Lydians as follows: after counting the days during the intervening time from that day on which they would

leave Sardis, that they consult (χρᾶσθαι) the oracles on the hundredth day, asking (ἐπειρωτῶντας) what Croesus, son of Alyattes, King of the Lydians, happened to be doing (ὅ τι ποιέων τυγχάνοι ὁ Λυδῶν βασιλεὺς Κροῖσος ὁ Ἀλυάττεω); and after writing down (συγγραψαμένους) whatever each of the oracles would prophesy, that they bring it back (ἀναφέρειν) to him. Now what the rest of the oracles prophesied is said by no one. But in Delphi (ἐν δὲ Δελφοῖσι), immediately after the Lydians came (ἐσῆλθον) into the megaron in order to consult (χρησόμενοι) the god and asked what was commanded (ἐπειρώτων τὸ ἐντεταλμένον), the Pythia says (λέγει) these things in hexameter strain (ἐξαμέτρῳ τόνῳ): “But I know both the number of sand and measures of the sea, and I understand the mute and hear the one who does not speak. The smell of a hard-shelled tortoise comes to my senses, cooked in bronze along with lamb’s meat, under which lies bronze and upon will rest bronze.” After writing it down (συγγραψάμενοι), they went away going back (οἶχοντο ἀπιόντες) to Sardis. And when the others who had been sent were present and bearing (φέροντες) the oracles, then Croesus, opening each one, was looking over the writings. None of them, in fact, was pleasing him, but when he heard (ἤκουσε) the one from Delphi, immediately he made vows and accepted it, since he thought that the only oracle was the one at Delphi, because it had discovered what things he did.¹⁸

There are three scenes into which this consultation can be divided. The first scene is the oracular commission. Here, Croesus (the commissioner) issues a command (Ἐντειλάμενος) to an unnamed group of individuals (the commissioned, who are elsewhere called θεοπρόποι)¹⁹ and sends (ἀπέπεμπε) them to consult (χρᾶσθαι) different oracles and to ask (ἐπειρωτῶντας) about what he was doing at that time. Finally, he tells them to write down the replies (συγγραψαμένους) and bring them back to him (ἀναφέρειν). Thus, this scene informs us about

¹⁸ Ἐντειλάμενος δὲ τοῖσι Λυδοῖσι τάδε ἀπέπεμπε ἐς τὴν διάπειραν τῶν χρηστηρίων, ἀπ’ ἧς ἂν ἡμέρης ὀρμηθέωσι ἐκ Σαρδίων, ἀπὸ ταύτης ἡμερολογέοντας τὸν λοιπὸν χρόνον ἑκατοστῇ ἡμέρῃ χρᾶσθαι τοῖσι χρηστηρίοις, ἐπειρωτῶντας ὅ τι ποιέων τυγχάνοι ὁ Λυδῶν βασιλεὺς Κροῖσος ὁ Ἀλυάττεω»· ἅσσα δ’ ἂν ἕκαστα τῶν χρηστηρίων θεσπίσῃ, συγγραψαμένους ἀναφέρειν παρ’ ἐαυτόν. Ὅ τι μὲν νυν τὰ λοιπὰ τῶν χρηστηρίων ἐθέσπισε, οὐ λέγεται πρὸς οὐδαμῶν· ἐν δὲ Δελφοῖσι, ὡς ἐσῆλθον τάχιστα ἐς τὸ μέγαρον οἱ Λυδοὶ χρησόμενοι τῷ θεῷ καὶ ἐπειρώτων τὸ ἐντεταλμένον. ἡ Πυθίη ἐν ἐξαμέτρῳ τόνῳ λέγει τάδε·
Οἶδα δ’ ἐγὼ ψάμμου τ’ ἀριθμὸν καὶ μέτρα θαλάσσης,
καὶ κωφοῦ συνήμι καὶ οὐ φωνεῦντος ἀκούω.
Ὅδμή μ’ ἐς φρένας ἦλθε κραταιρίνοιο χελώνης
ἐγομένης ἐν χαλκῷ ἄμ’ ἀρνείοισι κρέεσσιν,
ἧ χαλκὸς μὲν ὑπέστρωται, χαλκὸν δ’ ἐπίεσται.
Ταῦτα οἱ Λυδοὶ θεσπισάσης τῆς Πυθίης συγγραψάμενοι οἶχοντο ἀπιόντες ἐς τὰς Σάρδεις. Ὡς δὲ καὶ ὄλλοι οἱ περιπεμφθέντες παρήσαν φέροντες τοὺς χρησμούς, ἐνθαῦτα ὁ Κροῖσος ἕκαστα ἀναπτύσσων ἐπώρα τῶν συγγραμμάτων. Τῶν μὲν δὴ οὐδὲν προσίετό μιν· ὁ δὲ ὡς τὸ ἐκ Δελφῶν ἤκουσε, αὐτίκα προσεύχετό τε καὶ προσεδέξατο, νομίσας μούνον εἶναι μαντήιον τὸ ἐν Δελφοῖσι, ὅτι οἱ ἐξευρήκεε τὰ αὐτὸς ἐποίησε. Hdt. 1.47.1–48.1, #4.

¹⁹ E.g., Hdt. 7.140.1, #86.

the agents involved and the actions to be expected: going (in response to sending: ἀπέπεμπε), and consulting, recording, and bringing back oracles (in response to commanding: Ἐντειλάμενος).

The second scene is the oracular quest, which falls unevenly into halves that describe the journey to the oracular sanctuary and back, divided by the intervention of the oracular pronouncement. Prior to the pronouncement, some subset of Croesus' delegates is at Delphi (ἐν δὲ Δελφοῖσι) already and go (ἐσῆλθον) into the temple to consult (χρησόμενοι) and ask (ἐπειρώτων) "the thing commanded" (τὸ ἐντεταλμένον), which is notably an abbreviation in its own right.²⁰ Where oracular tales follow a more strict chronological sequence with respect to the narrative order, the pronouncement follows next as is the case here. The Pythia declares (λέγει) the oracle in direct speech and hexameter verse (ἐν ἑξαμέτρῳ τόνῳ). After the pronouncement, the scene of the oracular quest continues. The delegates record the oracle (συγγραψάμενοι), go back (οἴχοντο ἀπιόντες), and after being joined by their fellow delegates, carry the oracles to Croesus (φέροντες). Thus, in the oracular quest, there is a named oracular site, the actions of going and consulting, the substance of the inquiry put to the oracle, and then recording and returning.

The last scene of the consultation episode is the oracular reception, in which the consultant learns of the oracle. Croesus begins opening up the tablets, looks over them, and finally hears (ἤκουσε) one that was fitting to his circumstances. Herodotus' extended narration of Croesus' consultation at Delphi allows us to begin to chart out the three scenes of the consultation episode and their agents and actions in the following way:

²⁰ Compare the words of Croesus' delegates, apparently in direct speech, to the Pythia later at Hdt 1.53.2, #5. About the framing of the question, Pierre Amandry argues on the strength of inscriptional evidence that it was rigidly confined to two general types: "Whether it is better and more good to do X?" or "To which god or goddess should one pray for success in X?" However, he seems willing to admit other forms of questions in an earlier period if the evidence allows. Amandry, *La Mantique Apollinienne*, 155–9. It seems clear from much later evidence that these formulas were somewhat traditional; however, there are tablets from Dodona that break this mold. See "*The Mantic session: questions and pronouncements*" in chapter three.

- I. Oracular Commission
 - A. Commissioner
 - 1. Commanding
 - 2. Sending
 - B. Commissioned (expected action)
 - 1. Going
 - 2. Consulting
 - a. Substance of Inquiry
 - 3. Recording
 - 4. Bringing Back
 - II. Oracular Quest
 - A. Oracular Sanctuary
 - B. Commissioned/Consultant in person (realized action)
 - 1. Going
 - 2. Consulting
 - a. Substance of Inquiry
- [Pronouncement]
- 3. Recording
 - 4. Going Back
- III. Oracular Reception
 - A. Commissioned
 - 1. Reporting
 - B. Commissioner
 - 1. Learning

Variations and Substitutions

Using the more complete pattern observed from the example of Croesus' consultation above, one may better appreciate the variations that Herodotus employs in other tales. In that story, the actions within this episode may be neatly divided between the consultant Croesus and his delegates, and this observation may be used as the first significant distinction between subtypes of consultation at oracular centers: consultation by way of delegates as opposed to in-person. The story of Doreius' consultation of Delphi will help distinguish between the two subtypes. Herodotus tells us, "He was going to Delphi in order to consult at the oracle whether he will take the land to which he sets out."²¹ Since Doreius went to the oracle himself, a scene of

²¹ ... ἐς Δελφοὺς οἶχeto χρησόμενος τῷ χρηστηρίῳ, εἰ αἰρέει ἐπ' ἣν στέλλεται χώραν. Hdt. 5.43.1, #55.

commission involving the sending of delegates would be incompatible. Rather, Doreius himself takes the place of Croesus' delegates in the oracular quest scene: he does his own going (οἶχετο) and consulting (χρησόμενος). Likewise, there is less importance for providing the reception scene where Doreius may hear the oracle. This scene is also missing from the story of Doreius, but as should be obvious, the audience is meant to understand it as implied. There will, therefore, necessarily be certain scenes and actions within the episode that pertain only to a consultation by delegates, and the consultant himself may be thought of as being a paradigmatic substitution for that role.

Additionally, there are instances when Herodotus narrates only one, or even part of one scene as a substitute for the full sequence. An example from the Cyrenaean suite of oracular tales in book four pertains to the colonists' poor fortune. Herodotus says, "In the grip of misfortune, the Cyrenaeanes were sending people to Delphi in order to ask (ἐπειρησομένους) by establishing what order they might live best."²² Notably, the historian only narrates the oracular commission and entirely glosses over the oracular quest with the exception of the pronouncement that follows. Nevertheless, it is assumed to have happened. An even more abridged version of a consultation may be found in Herodotus' tale about the heroization of the slaughtered Phocaeans. "The Argyllaeans were sending to Delphi, wishing to remedy their error."²³ Here, not only does one find the same substitution of the commission for the quest, just as in the last example, but the phrase "to send to" in the context of an 'oracular tale' comes to be an abbreviated and idiomatic expression for the formal commissioning procedure of commanding and sending delegates, who would normally appear as the direct object of the verb. In fact, strictly speaking, this sentence

²² Οἱ δὲ Κυρηναῖοι πρὸς τὴν καταλαβοῦσαν συμφορὴν ἔπεμπον ἐς Δελφοὺς ἐπειρησομένους ὄντινα τρόπον καταστησάμενοι κάλλιστα ἂν οἰκέοιεν. Hdt. 4.161.1, #47.

²³ Οἱ δὲ Ἀργυλλᾶοι ἐς Δελφοὺς ἔπεμπον, βουλόμενοι ἀκέσασθαι τὴν ἀμαρτάδα. Hdt. 1.167.2, #19. See also #58 and #67.

would not be comprehensible without the broader framework of the consultation typescene.

However, with an understanding of the framework as given, the idiom is rendered clear, and the quest and reception scenes follow by implication from Herodotus' use of this short sentence.

Just as the commission scene may be substituted for the entire episode of consultation, so can the quest scene. I have already shown how the quest scene is typically divided into two phases: going to and coming from the sanctuary. Either may be substituted for the entire consultation episode. The Pelasgian consultation about the proper names of the gods is an example of the former. The narrator says, "When, therefore, the Pelasgians were consulting (ἐχρηστηριάζοντο) in Dodona whether they should adopt the names [of the gods] coming from the barbarians..."²⁴ Naturally, the audience is not meant to understand that all the Pelasgians went to Dodona to consult; rather, Herodotus has transferred the action of the delegates by metonymy to the people whom they represent. Of the latter, Herodotus' story about the blindness of Pherus is typical. "But in the eleventh year, an oracle for him arrived from the city of Bouto (ἀπικέσθαι οἱ μαντήιον ἐκ Βουτοῦς πόλιος) ..." ²⁵ This story makes no mention of any commission or reception, or even much mention of a quest. All the narrator tells us is that an oracle intended for Pherus came to him. One might be inclined to conclude that Herodotus thought of the oracle at Bouto as busy issuing unsought oracles for delivery to prominent figures. However, comparison with the story of Psammetichus' consultation of the same oracle clearly shows that Herodotus has transferred the action of delegates by metonymy to the oracle in the words, "an oracle arrived for him." In that story, Psammetichus sends (Πέμπαντι) to the oracle at

²⁴ Ἐπεὶ ὧν ἐχρηστηριάζοντο ἐν τῇ Δωδώνῃ οἱ Πελασγοὶ εἰ ἀνέλωνται τὰ οὐνόματα τὰ ἀπὸ τῶν βαρβάρων ἦκοντα... Hdt. 2.52.3, #22. See also #41.

²⁵ ...ἐνδεκάτῳ δὲ ἔτει ἀπικέσθαι οἱ μαντήιον ἐκ Βουτοῦς πόλιος ὥς ἐξήκει τέ οἱ ὁ χρόνος τῆς ζημῆς καὶ ἀναβλέψει γυναικὸς οὐρῶν νιγόμενος τοὺς ὀφθαλμούς, ἥτις παρὰ τὸν ἐωυτῆς ἄνδρα μόνον πεφοίτηκε, ἄλλων ἀνδρῶν ἐοῦσα ἄπειρος. Hdt. 2.111.2, #25.

Bouto—as I pointed out above, the delegates are implied—and an oracle comes back (ἦλθε χρησμὸς).²⁶ Herodotus also uses this same narrative style in tales about Delphic oracles, so one cannot conclude that Bouto is special in this regard.²⁷ In ways like these, Herodotus implies the commission scene by a compressed narration or even by individual words and short phrases proper to the quest scene.

The kind of ‘narrative compression’ in these examples shows that Herodotus expects his audiences to be familiar with the process of oracular consultation. His abridgement sometimes results in what may be considered idiomatic expressions, since they would be incomprehensible, easily misunderstood, or just awkward if taken literally. The presence of these idioms, of course, presumes a cultural context in which they are understood. In the case of these oracular tales, the cultural context must be the shared knowledge of how people went about consulting oracles in ancient Greece. With the schema of the consultation episode of the ‘oracular tale’ as a framework, Herodotus’ abridged tales are rendered immediately comprehensible to his audience in the fullness of their meaning.

There is, however, a more significant substitution for the typical form of the consultation episode in some stories. It appears when oracles are voiced by oraclemongers, the *chresmologoi*, and from oracular collections. These variants may be treated as a distinct subtype of consultation. Although they do not conform as neatly to the narrative pattern as those tales about oracles

²⁶ Πέμπαντι δὲ οἱ ἐξ Βουτοῦν πόλιν ἐς τὸ χρηστήριον τῆς Λητοῦς, ἔνθα δὴ Αἰγυπτίοισι ἐστὶ μαντήιον ἀψευδέστατο, ἦλθε χρησμὸς... Hdt. 2.152.3, #31. See also #27. On the historical procedure of consultation at Egyptian oracles, see Jaroslav Černý, “Egyptian Oracles,” in *A Saite Oracle Papyrus from Thebes: In the Brooklyn Museum [Papyrus Brooklyn 47.218.3]*, ed. Richard A. Parker (Providence, RI: Brown University Press, 1962), 35–48; Allen B. Lloyd, *Herodotus: Book II: Commentary 1–98* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1976), 346–9. It is probable, of course, that Herodotus the “tourist” understood Egyptian stories through a Greek pattern of thought as James Redfield has argued. James Redfield, “Herodotus the Tourist,” *Classical Philology* 80, no. 2 (April 1985): 97–118. However, Herodotus seems to have observed enough Egyptian divination in practice to note differences between their modes (Hdt. 2.83), by which he means not the response itself but the manner in which the response was determined.

²⁷ #61. See Simon Hornblower, ed., *Herodotus: Histories: Book V* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 242.

gained from oracular institutions, these scenes still perform the significant functions of the episode of consultation in an oracular tale. In such stories, an oracle is proclaimed or recalled in a particular crisis, which then prompts the consultant to conjecture about an action that will bring about a more beneficial fulfillment.²⁸ Thus, the actions and appearance of these figures or collections fit perfectly in the ‘oracular tale’ as a consultation. The only significant difference is that no one travels anywhere: the oracles come to the consultant. For this reason, the declarations of oraclemongers and communal recollection of oracles may be substituted paradigmatically for consultations at oracular sanctuaries.

First, in three of the four oracular tales about oraclemongers, Herodotus introduces them following the narration of a crisis and always as spontaneously pronouncing apparently unsought oracles to particular individuals. The story about Peisistratus’ battle against the Athenians is a case in point. “Then, when he was being prompted by a divine impulse (θείη πομπή), Amphilytus the Acarnian comes next to Peisistratus, and the oraclemonger, when he approaches him, prophesies in a hexameter strain, saying these things...”²⁹ Thus, the consultation explains the oracle that follows both as originating spontaneously from Amphilytus, who is a particular kind of man with a claim to divine and prophetic power, and as being relevant to Peisistratus, who stands in the tale as the consultant of the oracle. Further, the story resonates with some of the actions that typically occur in the quest scene. Amphilytus “declares in hexameter strain” (χρᾶ ἐν ἑξαμέτρῳ τόνῳ), which resembles closely the Pythia’s actions in the story of Croesus’

²⁸ On the use of oracle collections in the Athenian assembly, see Bowden, “Seeking Certainty,” 266–72.

²⁹ Ἐνθαῦτα θείη πομπή χρεώμενος παρίσταται Πεισιστράτῳ Ἀμφίλυτος ὁ Ἀκαρνᾶν χρησμολόγος ἀνὴρ, ὃς οἱ προσίων χρᾶ ἐν ἑξαμέτρῳ τόνῳ τάδε λέγων... Hdt. 1.62.4, #7. See also Antichares of Eleon (#54) and Onomacritus the Athenian (#84). In a fourth tale, we are told that the oracle of Lysistratos the Athenian escaped everyone’s notice at the time. Since there is no clear recipient, there is no clear episode of consultation in the story (#98). Finally, an unnamed Poseidonian man, though not called an oraclemonger, acts in this role and both recounts and reinterprets a Delphic oracle for the befuddled Phocceans (#18).

test of the oracles above.³⁰ From this and other evidence, it seems that the behavior of oraclemongers spontaneously pronouncing oracles was at least among the familiar patterns of behavior associated with these individuals, but the way in which Herodotus narrates how people engaged with these figures confirms an association between formal oracular consultation and the utterances of oraclemongers. At the very least, they are interchangeable within the ‘oracular tale.’

Second, there are some stories in which Herodotus describes the communal use of oracular collections. In two of these tales about the Lacedaemonians, the crisis prompts these people to consider their circumstances in light of oracles with which they are familiar. The historian tells us that after the Lacedaemonians ousted the Peisistratidae from Athens, they began to feel sorry that they betrayed their guest-friends and mad that they were not thanked for having done so. Herodotus adds, “And still in addition to these things, the oracles were leading them on saying that many and hostile things will come about for them from the Athenians, oracles of which they were ignorant earlier but then learned when Cleomenes brought them to Sparta.”³¹ Cleomenes, a famous oracle hound, had acquired these oracles during the ousting, in fact, and the Spartans read them afterwards when considering their regret. Interestingly, as Herodotus frames it, their inquiry into the oracle collection not only fueled their regret, but also helped them decide on an action to take. Additionally, as a few other examples show, this episode may not actually involve them leafing through a catalogue of oracles as much as drawing on their recollection. In fact, the Lacedaemonians will remember these oracles later on at the end of book eight and worry about an Athenian-Persian alliance.³² In this way, the consultation of oracular

³⁰ Hdt. 1.47.2, #4.

³¹ “Ἐτι δὲ πρὸς τούτοισι ἐνῆγον σφεας οἱ χρησμοὶ λέγοντες πολλά τε καὶ ἀνάρσια ἔσεσθαι αὐτοῖσι ἐξ Ἀθηναίων, τῶν πρότερον μὲν ἦσαν ἀδαέες, τότε δὲ Κλεομένεος κομίσαντος ἐς Σπάρτην ἐξέμαθον. Hdt. 5.90.2, #62.

³² Hdt. 8.141.1, #103.

collections or the memory of familiar, though less securely provenanced, oracles may stand in the place of a trip to an oracular sanctuary in the consultation episode.

The existence of these patterns in the numerous oracular tales in Herodotus' *Histories* demonstrates more than just a consistency in the historian's own thought. In order for these kinds of narrative compression and idiomatic expressions to be understandable to his audience, there must have existed culturally shared knowledge about how people went about consulting oracles in ancient Greece. This fact may be observed most clearly in Herodotus' story about Doreius' first failed colony. "Taking it badly and not deeming it fitting to be ruled by Cleomenes, Doreius, after asking the people, led Spartiates on a colonial expedition. He neither asked the Delphic oracle to what land he should go for the purpose of colonizing, nor did he do any of the customary things."³³ Here, the narrator tells us explicitly that Doreius did not consult the oracle. This story is a negative consultation. There was apparently a cultural expectation of doing the customary things when considering a colonial expedition in the narrator's world, and the most prominent of them was that the prospective leader should travel to Delphi and ask where he ought to go. Since Doreius did not consult Delphi, the rest of the would-be oracular tale—the pronouncement, conjecture, action, and the fulfillment, most importantly—cannot be expected to follow. Doreius' failure to consult Delphi, that is to say, his violation of the cultural framework of expected action, accounts in a way for his failure three years later when the Macai, Libyans, and Carthaginians drive the Spartans from the land.³⁴ This story reinforces the norm. The knowledge of this shared frame of reference for how and when people consult oracles influences

³³ ... ὁ Δωριεὺς δεινὸν τε ποιούμενος καὶ οὐκ ἀξιῶν ὑπὸ Κλεομένεος βασιλεύεσθαι, αἰτήσας λεῶν Σπαρτιήτας ἦγε ἐς ἀποικίην, οὔτε τῷ ἐν Δελφοῖσι χρηστηρίῳ χρησάμενος ἐς ἥντινα γῆν κτίσων ἦν, οὔτε ποιήσας οὐδὲν τῶν νομιζομένων· Hdt. 5.42.2, #53. It is important to note here that Herodotus apparently believed that it was customary to ask the Delphic oracle where to go and not whether one should colonize, which is what modern scholarship supposes. See "*The Mantic session: questions and pronouncements*" in chapter three.

³⁴ Hdt. 5.42.3. See Thomas Harrison, *Divinity and History: The Religion of Herodotus* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2000), 153–4.

both the way that Herodotus narrates events and the way that his audience renders those events comprehensible and meaningful.

Pronouncement

Typical Features

The pronouncement is not an episode or scene of the ‘oracular tale’ because it may be voiced or revoiced in number of different episodes. It is, however, an essential feature. It commonly appears at the precise moment when a prophet or prophetess speaks it into existence. There is a remarkable consistency in Herodotus’ syntax while presenting the pronouncement within the scene of the oracular quest. The prophetic god, person, or sanctuary (nominative noun) either declares (verb) an oracle to the consultant (dative noun) or simply commands (verb) the consultant (accusative noun). Simple examples are found in the stories of Arcesilaus and the Agyllaeans, respectively: “The Pythia declares the following things to him...,”³⁵ and “The Pythia commanded them...”³⁶ The key variable is the choice of verb, which affects the syntax and the case of the consultants. The verb of speaking oracles is drawn from a fairly broad but mostly conventional range.³⁷ This syntactical structure forms the basis upon which Herodotus may add more details by supplementing the particular actions of the consultants and pronouncer during the quest. Nevertheless, the basic speech introduction is remarkably consistent.

³⁵ Πυθίη οἱ χρᾶ τάδε· Hdt. 4.163.2, #48.

³⁶ Ἡ δὲ Πυθίη σφέας ἐκέλευσε.... Hdt. 1.167.2, #19.

³⁷ ἀναιρέω, φημί, χράω, θεσπίζω, λέγω, φαίνω, φράζω, ἀμείβομαι, κελεύω, απαγορεύω, ἐάω, προφέρω, κρίνω, ὑποκρίνομαι, προσαγορεύω, αὐδάζομαι, συμβουλεύω, μετέρχομαι, φέρω φωνήν.

Variations of Position

Although the pronouncement commonly appears in the oracular quest scene of the consultation episode, the oracle may be reported to or read by any number of characters in the story as an extension of the scene of oracular reception, as part of the episode of conjecture when its meaning is discussed, or in connection with the fulfillment.³⁸ Consequently, the position of the pronouncement within Herodotus' oracular tales is somewhat flexible. However, the appearance of the pronouncement at exactly the points in the narrative where it becomes known to other interested characters or where it becomes pertinent for reasons of explanation, instead of its usual position following the question posed by the consultant, does not upset but expands the potential extent of the schema. The example of the Delphic oracle to the Thebans about their revenge against the Athenians helps illustrate why this is perfectly fitting within the overall pattern of the 'oracular tale.'

Afterwards, the Thebans were sending to the god, wishing to avenge themselves against the Athenians. The Pythia said that their revenge would not come from them, but was commanding that, after bringing it to the "many-voiced" (ἐς πολύφημον), they "ask their nearest" (τῶν ἄγχιστα δέεσθαι). After the delegates departed, they were bringing the oracle to the assembly they had called. And when they learned of the words telling them to "ask their nearest" (τῶν ἄγχιστα δέεσθαι), the Thebans said, after hearing these things, "Do not the Tanagraeans and Coroneans and Thespians dwell 'nearest' (ἄγχιστα) us. These people, at least, endure war always eagerly fighting beside us. Why is it necessary to 'ask' (δέεσθαι) them?"³⁹

In this story, Herodotus makes reference to the pronouncement in three of the four potential positions. First, the Pythia speaks the oracle in the quest scene. Then, the delegates return and

³⁸ I defer a discussion of the connection between pronouncement and fulfillment to the section dedicated to the fulfillment episode. See "Fulfillment" below.

³⁹ Θηβαῖοι δὲ μετὰ ταῦτα ἐς θεὸν ἔπεμπον, βουλόμενοι τείσασθαι Ἀθηναίους. Ἡ δὲ Πυθίη ἀπὸ σφέων μὲν αὐτῶν οὐκ ἔφη αὐτοῖσι εἶναι τίσιν, ἐς πολύφημον δὲ ἐξενείκοντας ἐκέλευε τῶν ἄγχιστα δέεσθαι. Ἀπελθόντων ὧν τῶν θεοπρόπων ἐξέφερον τὸ χρηστήριον ἄλιν ποιησάμενοι· ὥς ἐπυνθάνοντο δὲ λεγόντων αὐτῶν τῶν ἄγχιστα δέεσθαι, εἶπαν οἱ Θηβαῖοι ἀκούσαντες τούτων. Οὐκ ὧν ἄγχιστα ἡμέων οἰκέουσι Ταναγραῖοί τε καὶ Κορωνάιοι καὶ Θεσπιέες; Καὶ οὗτοί γε ἅμα ἡμῖν αἰεὶ μαχόμενοι προθύμως συνδιαφέρουσι τὸν πόλεμον. Τί δεῖ τούτων γε δέεσθαι; Hdt. 5.79.1–2.

report the words of the oracle to the Theban assembly in the reception scene. Finally, the assembly debates the interpretation of the words of the oracle in the conjecture episode.

Herodotus only very rarely mentions any particular pronouncement more than once.

However, he will occasionally defer the pronouncement to either the oracular reception scene or the conjecture episode as he does in the story about Mycerinus' complaint to the oracle of Bouto.

Taking it badly, he sent to the oracle (πέμψαι ἐς τὸ μαντήιον), rebuking the god because, whereas his own father and grandfather, who ended sacrifices and were not mindful of the gods and even killed men, lived for a long time, he himself, who was reverent, was going to die so swiftly. But from the oracle, there came (ἐλθεῖν) to him additional words saying (λέγοντα) that it was even on account of these things that his life was hurrying on, for he did not do what was necessary for him to do. For it was necessary that Egypt fare badly for one hundred and fifty years, and that the two kings before him knew this, but that he did not. When Mycerinus heard (ἀκούσαντα) those things, ...⁴⁰

In this story, there are two important observations. First, as I have shown above regarding

‘narrative compression’ of the consultation episode, Herodotus uses the idiomatic phrases

πέμψαι ἐς τὸ μαντήιον and Ἐκ δὲ τοῦ χρηστηρίου αὐτῷ ... ἐλθεῖν to imply that Mycerinus sent delegates to rebuke the oracle and bring back a response. Additionally, the expression he uses for relaying the words of the oracle, δεύτερα ... λέγοντα, may also be idiomatic, similarly transferring action that is proper to the delegates to the oracle itself and thus naming the delegates by the words of the oracle with which they are inextricably connected in the tale. More commonly, Herodotus omits the verb of speaking altogether in such cases, allowing the verb of motion at the close of the quest scene to introduce an indirect statement at the beginning of the reception scene.⁴¹ Second, Herodotus defers the pronouncement until the reception scene when

⁴⁰ Τὸν δὲ δεινὸν ποιησάμενον πέμψαι ἐς τὸ μαντήιον τῷ θεῷ ὀνειδίσμα ἀντιμεμφόμενον ὅτι ὁ μὲν αὐτοῦ πατὴρ καὶ (ὁ) πάτριος, ἀποκληίσαντες τὰ ἱρὰ καὶ θεῶν οὐ μεμνημένοι ἀλλὰ καὶ τοὺς ἀνθρώπους φθείροντες, ἐβίωσαν χρόνον ἐπὶ πολλόν, αὐτὸς δ' εὐσεβὴς ἐὼν μέλλοι ταχέως οὕτω τελευτήσειν. Ἐκ δὲ τοῦ χρηστηρίου αὐτῷ δεύτερα ἐλθεῖν λέγοντα τούτων εἵνεκα καὶ συνταχύνειν αὐτὸν τὸν βίον· οὐ γὰρ ποιησαί μιν τὸ χρεὼν ἦν ποιέειν· δεῖν γὰρ Αἴγυπτον κακοῦσθαι ἐπ' ἔτεα πενήκοντά τε καὶ ἑκατόν, καὶ τοὺς μὲν δύο τοὺς πρὸ ἐκείνου γενομένους βασιλέας μαθεῖν τοῦτο, κεῖνον δὲ οὐ. Ταῦτα ἀκούσαντα τὸν Μυκερῖνον, Hdt. 2.132.2–4, #27.

⁴¹ #25, #26, #31, #32, #34, #61, #91, #99. Cf. #58.

Mycerinus first hears the oracle announced. In tales like this one, it appears that Herodotus has merely shifted the dramatic focus of his narrative from one scene to another by delaying his account of the pronouncement to this point, but as I have shown above, the historian still implies the full extent of the episode of consultation.⁴²

Variations of Mode

There are two ways in which Herodotus accounts for the content of oracles. He usually presents them either in direct (“The Pythia declares: ‘...’”) or indirect speech (“The Pythia declares that...”) following a certain set of verbs of speaking.⁴³ How the two types appear in the narrative deserves closer attention. A large proportion (twenty-seven out of thirty-five) of the oracles reported in direct speech are found in dactylic hexameter verse.⁴⁴ Only eight oracles are not given in dactylic hexameter: seven appear in prose, of which four are *cledones*, and one appears in iambic trimeter.⁴⁵ The rest of the seventy-three oracles are reported indirectly or merely mentioned in passing.

The appearance of *cledones* in oracular tales deserve some special attention in connection with oracular pronouncements. Auguste Bouché-Leclercq has provided a suitable definition of this unfamiliar prophetic phenomenon in his monumental *Histoire de la divination dans l'antiquité*.

Every utterance, phrase, isolated word, or exclamation heard by a man preoccupied with a thought foreign to the one who speaks, may become a *clledon* for the one who hears it.

⁴² A notable exception to the placement of pronouncement is the story of Cypselos’ own Delphic consultation which is narrated by Soclees in book five. There, the oracle is given following the action sequence, in which Cypselos attempts to seize power in Corinth, and it supplies some explanation for his confidence in success. Hdt. 5.92.ε.2, #65.

⁴³ ἀναίρεω, φημί, χράω, θεσπίζω, λέγω, φαίνω, φράζω, ἀμείβομαι, κελεύω, ἀπαγορεύω, ἐάω, προφέρω, κρίνω, ὑποκρίνομαι, προσαγορεύω, αὐδάζομαι, συμβουλευώ, μετέρχομαι, φέρω φωνήν.

⁴⁴ #4, #6, #7, #9, #10, #12, #13, #35, #42, #45, #46, #48, #63, #64, #65, #70, #76, #77, #79, #86, #87, #88, #93, #94, #97, #98, #106.

⁴⁵ Prose: #14, #17, #40 (*clledon*), #82 (*clledon*), #89, #99 (*clledon*), #108 (*clledon*); Trimeter: #20.

This is to say that there may be, between the thought of this one and an utterance that does not arise from that thought, an unexpected conjunction, a chance harmony which contains providential signification.⁴⁶

Thus, the narrative role of people who speak *cledones* is much like that of the oraclemongers, since the oracle comes to the subject without one needing to seek it out. In Herodotus' *Histories*, there are a number of *cledones* that are either prompted by particular oracular pronouncements or by situations that arise from them. In either case, these prophetic utterances seem to become like riders to the prophecies of the oracles within the oracular tales where they are found. The clearest example is Xerxes' *clledon* to the Spartans after Thermopylae. "An oracle had come from Delphi to the Lacedaemonians to ask justice from Xerxes for the murder of Leonidas and to accept what was offered (τὸ διδόμενον ἐξ ἐκείνου δέκεσθαι)."⁴⁷ So, they send a messenger to do just that, and Xerxes' unwitting response becomes a *clledon*. "And having both laughed and held back for a long time, he spoke pointing at Mardonius, since he happened to be standing next to him, 'Well then, Mardonius here will give them the recompense that is fitting for them.' After he accepted what was said (δεξάμενος τὸ ῥηθὲν), the messenger returned."⁴⁸ The messenger's acceptance of Xerxes' pronouncement in obedience to the Pythia's command is the signal of the prophetic weight of the words.⁴⁹ This *clledon*, of course, is eventually confirmed by Mardonius' defeat at

⁴⁶ « Toute parole, phrase, mot isolé ou exclamation entendue par un homme préoccupé d'une idée étrangère à celui qui parle, peut devenir, pour celui qui l'entend, une κληδών ; c'est-à-dire qu'il peut y avoir, entre la pensée de celui-ci et une parole qui ne procède pas de cette pensée, un rapprochement imprévu, une consonnance fortuite qui contient l'avertissement providentiel. » Auguste Bouché-Leclercq, *Histoire de la divination dans l'antiquité*, vol. 1 (Paris, 1879), 156. See also Halliday, *Greek Divination*, 229–234; John J. Peradotto, "Cledonomanancy in the Oresteia," *The American Journal of Philology* 90, no. 1 (1969): 1–21; Donald Lateiner, "Signifying Names and Other Ominous Accidental Utterances in Classical Historiography," *Greek, Roman and Byzantine Studies*, 2005.

⁴⁷ ... χρηστήριον ἐηλύθεε ἐκ Δελφῶν Λακεδαιμονίοισι, Ξέρξην αἰτέειν δίκας τοῦ Λεωνίδεω φόνου καὶ τὸ διδόμενον ἐξ ἐκείνου δέκεσθαι. Hdt. 8.114.1, #99.

⁴⁸ Ὁ δὲ γελάσας τε καὶ κατασχὼν πολλὸν χρόνον, ὥς οἱ ἐτύγχανε παρεστῶς Μαρδόνιος, δεικνὺς ἐς τοῦτον εἶπε· «Τοιγάρ σφι Μαρδόνιος ὅδε δίκας δώσει τοιαύτας οἷας ἐκείνοισι πρέπει. Ὁ μὲν δὴ δεξάμενος τὸ ῥηθὲν ἀπαλλάσσετο. Hdt. 8.114.2–115.1.

⁴⁹ The acceptance is not only a typical action in the reception scene of oracular tales, but the action is also sometimes vocalized, as in the case of Peisistratus and the oraclemonger Amphilytus (Hdt. 1.63.1, #7) and even Leotychidas' reaction to Hegesistratus saying his own name, "Leader of the Army" (Δέκομαι τὸν οἰωνὸν [τὸν ἡγησίστρατον], ὃ ξεῖνε Σάμει. Hdt. 9.91.2), as a way of marking the listener's understanding of a difference between ordinary and

Platea, which Herodotus marks, saying, “And then the recompense of the murder of Leonidas was paid out (ἐπετελέετο) by Mardonius (ἐκ Μαρδονίου) in accordance with the oracle to the Spartans...”⁵⁰ Thus, the oracle and the *clledon* become thought of as intimately linked in the end, and for this reason, the *clledones* in oracular tales should be thought of as additional qualifications of the oracular pronouncement.⁵¹

It is natural to suppose that the indirect pronouncements stand in the place of the precise words of the oracles that may or may not have been known to Herodotus. However, this fact is demonstrable in some of the tales where Herodotus gives an account of the oracle both directly and indirectly. When telling of the Delphic oracle to the Spartans regarding their prospects during the war against the Persians, Herodotus provides its two alternative predictions (designated 1 and 2) both indirectly and directly (designated a and b, respectively):

For it had been declared by the Pythia to the Spartiates, when they were consulting the oracle about this rising war immediately at its beginning that [1a] either Lacedaemon will be laid waste by the barbarians, [2a] or their king will die. And she declares those things in hexameters, speaking thus: “But to you, dwellers of broad-fielded Sparta, [1b] either your great, famous city will be sacked by the Perseidae, or not this, [2b] but the boundary of Lacedaemon will mourn a dead king from the clan of Heracles. For the might of neither bulls nor lions will hold against him, for he holds the might of Zeus. And I say that he will not be held until the one or the other is torn on behalf of all things.”⁵²

prophetic speech. In another tale, Cleomenes ignores a *clledon* that he heard while capturing the Athenian acropolis. Hdt. 5.72.3–4.

⁵⁰ Ἐνθαῦτα ἦ τε δίκη τοῦ φόνου τοῦ Λεωνίδεω κατὰ τὸ χρηστήριον τὸ τοῖσι Σπαρτιήτησι (γενόμενον) ἐκ Μαρδονίου ἐπετελέετο... Hdt. 9.64.1, #99. Neither the fact that the oracle did not, strictly speaking, prophesy anything, nor that Xerxes or Mardonius (alone) should properly pay the debt, nor that the Persian losses at Platea were incommensurate with the death of a king are significant *aporie*. *Contra* David Asheri, “Platea vendetta delle Termopili: alle origini di un motivo teologico erodoteo,” in *Responsabilità, perdono e vendetta nel mondo antico*, ed. Marta Sordi (Milan: Vita e Pensiero, 1998), 70–2. This effect, which Asheri calls *contaminazione*, is the consequence of the arbitrariness of divinatory thinking. See chapter four.

⁵¹ See also #23, #24, #38, and particularly #40 and #82. Naturally, there is some interpretation involved in cases where *clledones* are understood as complementary to oracles.

⁵² Ἐκέχρητο γὰρ ὑπὸ τῆς Πυθίης τοῖσι Σπαρτιήτησι χρεωμένοισι περὶ τοῦ πολέμου τούτου αὐτίκα κατ’ ἀρχὰς ἐγειρομένου, ἢ Λακεδαιμόνα ἀνάστατον γενέσθαι ὑπὸ τῶν βαρβάρων, ἢ τὸν βασιλέα σφέων ἀπολέσθαι. Ταῦτα δὲ σφι ἐν ἔπεισι ἐξαμέτροισι χρᾶ λέγοντα ᾤδε·

Ὑμῖν δ’, ὦ Σπάρτης οἰκίτορες εὐρυχόριοι,
ἢ μέγα ἄστυ ἐρικυδὲς ὑπ’ ἀνδράσι Περσεΐδῃσι
πέρθεται, ἢ τὸ μὲν οὐχί, ἀφ’ Ἡρακλέους δὲ γενέθλης
πενθήσει βασιλῇ φθίμενον Λακεδαιμόνος οὖρος·
οὐ γὰρ τὸν ταύρων σχήσει μένος οὐδὲ λεόντων

Clearly, then, Herodotus only intended his audience to understand the indirect report of an oracle as an alternative rendering of the direct one. While the alternative prophecies that Herodotus expresses in indirect speech seem fairly close to the oracle in this particular case, there is still some loss of data in his paraphrase.

Analyzing more of the pronouncements comparatively shows how much data may be lost when Herodotus reports oracles indirectly in order to compress the narrative. Like the example of the Delphic oracle above, one of the oracular tales about the Cyrenaean colonization also bears evidence of a pronouncement reported both directly and indirectly (designated a and b, respectively). Herodotus says:

And in the third period, when Battus, who is called blessed, ruled, the Pythia urged all Greeks, declaring [b] that they set sail in order to settle Libya with the Cyrenaeans. For the Cyrenaeans were inviting them to a distribution of land. She declared in this way: [a] “But who should come to much-beloved Libya after land has been divided, I say that it will at some time later be a concern to him.”⁵³

Although the indirect report is similar to the direct one, there is a clear difference in tenor. The indirect report has the implication that the oracle was giving positive advice on this matter: “You should go.” However, the actual words of the oracle show that she is giving more of a prediction: “If you do not go, you’ll be sorry.” In this close comparison, it is more clearly seen how the indirect report is actually more like an interpretation of the oracle’s meaning than it is an exact rendering of oracular words into indirect speech. This observation about the involvement of

ἀντιβίην· Ζηνὸς γὰρ ἔχει μένος· οὐδέ ἔφημι
σχίσεσθαι, πρὶν τῶνδ’ ἕτερον διὰ πάντα δάσσηται. Hdt. 7.220.3–4, #93. See also #46.

⁵³ Ἐπὶ δὲ τοῦ τρίτου, Βάττου τοῦ Εὐδαίμονος καλεομένου, Ἑλληνας πάντας ὥρμησε χρήσασα ἡ Πυθίη πλέειν
συνοικήσοντας Κυρηναίοισι Λιβύην· ἐπεκαλέοντο γὰρ οἱ Κυρηναῖοι ἐπὶ γῆς ἀναδασμῶ· ἔχρησε δὲ ὧδε ἔχοντα·
Ὅς δέ κεν ἐς Λιβύην πολυήρατον ὕστερον ἔλθῃ
γὰς ἀναδαιομένης, μετὰ οἷ ποκά φημι μελήσειν. Hdt. 4.159.2–3, #46.

interpretation in the formulation of indirect reports of oracles will be important later when considering the epigraphic evidence.⁵⁴

Another story from just a bit earlier in the saga of the colonization of Cyrene, helps show how forced some of Herodotus' indirect reports of oracles can be.

And to those things, the Pythia declares (χρᾶ) these things to them: [a] "If having not been there you know flock-nourishing Libya better than I, who have been there, I marvel at your extreme wisdom." After having heard these things, those with Battus sailed back, [b] for in fact, the god was not releasing (ἀπεί) them from colonization, until they would actually arrive in Libya proper.⁵⁵

What should be clear from this example is that it is Herodotus the narrator who makes a determination about the oracle's meaning and imputes it to the delegation. Strictly speaking, the oracle does not give any indication about what the consultants were or were not supposed to do, let alone that the god actually did not release (ἀπεί) them from their earlier obligation. It is only in the context of the earlier and misfortunate attempt at colonization by the would-be Cyrenaeans that this oracle can be understood as commanding them to continue pursuing a colonial foundation until they really arrive in Libya. In reporting oracles indirectly, then, Herodotus' narrative may lose much of the nuance that oracles seem to have had. These passages clearly show that the narrator has made a determination about the oracle's meaning, a conjecture, and imputed it to the consultants.

The same effect may be seen even in instances where Herodotus reports the content of the oracle twice. One example is the story of Cleisthenes' Delphic oracle. "The Pythia declares (χρᾶ) an oracle to him, saying (φᾶσα) that Adrastus is King of the Sicyonians, but he, a stone-

⁵⁴ See "The Mantic session: questions and pronouncements" in chapter three.

⁵⁵ Ἡ δὲ Πυθίη σοφὶ πρὸς ταῦτα χρᾶ τάδε·

Αἱ τὸ ἐμεῦ Λιβύην μηλοτρόφον οἶδας ἄμεινον,

μὴ ἐλθὼν ἐλθόντος, ἄγαν ἄγαμαι σοφίην σευ.

Ἀκούσαντες [δὲ] τούτων οἱ ἄμφι τὸν Βάττον ἀπέπλεον ὀπίσω· οὐ γὰρ δὴ σφεας ἀπείη ὁ θεὸς τῆς ἀποικίης, πρὶν δὴ ἀπίκωνται ἐς αὐτὴν τὴν Λιβύην. Hdt. 4.157.2, #45.

thrower. Since the god was not granting (παρεδίδου) this, at least, ...”⁵⁶ Again in this passage, the narrator has apparently made a determination of the oracle’s meaning and put it in Cleisthenes’ mind, but this determination does not coincide so neatly with what he represents as being closer in wording to the actual oracle. It is only in the context of Cleisthenes’ desire to expel Adrastus from Sicyon that the pronouncement might be interpreted as prohibiting his initial plan.

In the last two examples, Herodotus appears to acknowledge a distinction between what the prophet or prophetess says (χράω/φημί) and what the god means (ἀπίημι/παραδίδωμι). This distinction is also present in a few other examples:

The god was not allowing (ἔα) them to do these things, saying (φᾶς) that Egypt was that land which the rising Nile covers in water, and that Egyptians were those who drink from that river and dwell below the Elephantine polis. Thus, were these things declared to them.”⁵⁷

The Pythia was not allowing (ἔα) it, saying (φᾶσα) that Timo was not the cause of these things, but that, since it was necessary for Miltiades to die badly, she appeared to him as a guide of his evils. The Pythia declared those things to the Parians...⁵⁸

And the god was not allowing (ἔα) them [Delphians] to move them [the treasures], saying (φᾶς) that he himself is sufficient to safeguard his own things.⁵⁹

In each of these three passages, Herodotus seems to draw a distinction between the meaning that was taken from the oracle (οὐ ἔαω) and what the oracle said (φημί) more precisely. If it is right to conclude that Herodotus understood a difference between what an oracle said and what it meant—this also follows generally from his stories about oracles given in direct speech—then

⁵⁶ ... ἡ δὲ Πυθίη οἱ χρᾶ φᾶσα Ἀδρηστον μὲν εἶναι Σικυωνίων βασιλέα, ἐκεῖνον δὲ λευστήρα. Ἐπεὶ δὲ ὁ θεὸς τοῦτό γε οὐ παρεδίδου,... Hdt. 5.67.2, #57.

⁵⁷ Ὁ δὲ θεὸς σφεας οὐκ ἔα ποιέειν ταῦτα, φᾶς Αἴγυπτον εἶναι ταύτην τὴν ὁ Νεῖλος ἐπιὼν ἄρδει, καὶ Αἰγυπτίους εἶναι τούτους οἱ ἐνερθε Ἐλεφαντίνης πόλιος οἰκέοντες ἀπὸ τοῦ ποταμοῦ τούτου πίνουσι. Οὕτω σφι ταῦτα ἐχρήσθη. Hdt. 2.18.2, #21.

⁵⁸ Ἡ δὲ Πυθίη οὐκ ἔα, φᾶσα οὐ Τιμοῦν εἶναι τὴν αἰτίην τούτων, ἀλλὰ (δεῖν γὰρ Μιλτιάδην τελευτᾶν μὴ εὔ), φανῆναί οἱ τῶν κακῶν κατηγεμόνα. Παρίοισι μὲν δὴ ταῦτα ἡ Πυθίη ἔχρησε. Hdt. 6.135.3, #81.

⁵⁹ ὁ δὲ θεὸς σφεα οὐκ ἔα κινέειν, φᾶς αὐτὸς ἰκανὸς εἶναι τῶν ἐωντοῦ προκατῆσθαι. Hdt. 8.36.1, #95.

one ought to be very cautious about treating his indirect reports of oracles as being closely linked to the actual verbal content of oracles, particularly when they are framed as commands or prohibitions. Some interpretation has probably been imposed on the oracle.

Herodotus may tell us, “The Pythia commanded them to bring back the bones of Orestes, son of Agamemnon,”⁶⁰ but it seems that he fully understood that oracular language was more complicated. What he seems to mean here is that the Spartans understood their oracle as a command to transfer Orestes. He sometimes also reports the pronouncements of two different oracles together using a single indirect statement.⁶¹ Again, the evidence does not allow us to conclude that the oracles said the exact same thing or said something so plainly, but only that they were understood to mean the same thing whatever they, in fact, had said. Many oracular tales turn on the meaning of important words and phrases contained within oracles. One need only think of the famous “wooden wall” in the oracle to the Athenians.⁶² Even in oracles reported in indirect speech, Herodotus gives some indications of the phrasing of the oracles lying behind the stories that he had read or heard. Psammetichus learns from an oracle that “his vengeance will come from the sea, when bronze men (χαλκέων ἀνδρῶν) appear.”⁶³ In some similar passages, there are even detectable metrical fragments. The phrases “to the many-voiced” (ἐς πολύφημον, /-~~/--×) and ask “your nearest” (τῶν ἄγγιστα, /- --/--×) in Herodotus’ report of the oracle about Theban revenge scan nicely in dactyls.⁶⁴ There are also the “great empire”

⁶⁰ Ἡ δὲ Πυθίη σφι ἔχρησε τὰ Ὀρέστεω τοῦ Ἀγαμέμνονος ὅστέα ἐπαγαγομένους. Hdt. 1.67.2, #11.

⁶¹ Hdt. 1.53.3–54.1, #5; 9.93.4–94.1, #108. This theory explains why Herodotus might have chosen not to cite the Delphic line of verse given by Aristotle (see note below) even though he appears to have known it.

⁶² #87.

⁶³ ... τίσις ἦξει <οἱ> ἀπὸ θαλάσσης χαλκέων ἀνδρῶν ἐπιφανέντων. Hdt. 2.152.3, #31.

⁶⁴ Hdt. 5.79.1, #58.

(μεγάλην ἀρχήν, ~~/– –/–)⁶⁵ in Croesus’ oracle and a nearly complete hexameter line, “Heracleian land in Sicily” (Ἡρακλείην γῆν ἐν Σικελίῃ, –/– –/– –/–~~/–×), in the pronouncement recited by the oraclemonger Antichares to Doreius.⁶⁶ It is worth noting as well that when Themistocles interprets the “wooden wall” oracle, he suggests the dactylic phrase “wretched Salamis” (ἽΩ σχετλίη Σαλαμίς, ~~/–~~/–~~/–) as what the Pythia might have said if the last two lines of the oracle actually pertained to an Athenian defeat in a naval battle at Salamis.⁶⁷ In each of these cases, it is precisely those words that are so central to the action of the story and that are commonly thought of as contributing to the reputation of oracular ambiguity.

H.W. Parke and D.E.W. Wormell have provided some conjectural reconstructions of Herodotus’ oracular paraphrases in dactylic hexameter based on hints of meter in other tales.⁶⁸ Parke himself, on the other hand, has argued that certain other of Herodotus’ paraphrases contain shadows of iambic trimeter, which he suggests may have been particularly suitable for the Pythia’s refusal of a proposal, since abusive poetry is sometimes found in that meter.⁶⁹ This evidence confirms the impression about oracles taken from the examples that Herodotus quotes in direct speech. In the narrator’s world, oracles are generally spoken to consultants in meter, usually dactylic hexameter. Whether the oracles that he reports are all authentic verbatim quotations preserved on tablets, authentic pronouncements whose wording was flexibly held in collective memory, or totally fabricated by his sources, there must have been a cultural

⁶⁵ We may compare Herodotus (...ἦν στρατεύηται ἐπὶ Πέρσας, μεγάλην ἀρχήν μιν καταλύσειν. Hdt. 1.53.3, #5) with Aristotle’s report of the hexameter line from apparently the same oracle (Κροῖσος Ἄλυν διαβάς μεγάλην ἀρχήν καταλύσει. Arist. *Rhet.* 3.4.4, 1407a38.).

⁶⁶ Hdt. 5.43.1, #54.

⁶⁷ Hdt. 7.143.2, #87.

⁶⁸ H.W. Parke and D.E.W. Wormell, *The Delphic Oracle: The Oracular Responses*, vol. 2 (Oxford: Blackwell, 1956), 30–31.

⁶⁹ H.W. Parke, “The Use of Other Than Hexameter Verse in Delphic Oracles,” *Hermathena*, no. 65 (1945): 58–66. Parke draws particular attention to the phrases ...τιμωρημάτων Μίνως ἔπεμψε μηνίων δακρύματα; (Hdt. 7.169.2, #89) and τῶν κακῶν κατηγεμόνα (Hdt. 6.135.3, #81), and to the extremely rare word λευστήρα (Hdt. 5.67.2, #57).

expectation that oracles, particularly Delphic oracles, were given in poetic meter (mostly dactylic hexameter) and contained certain formulaic and verbal features that distinguish oracular language.⁷⁰

This analysis of the variations and substitutions within Herodotus' rendering of oracular pronouncements shows once again that there is a significant amount of 'narrative compression' that can occur in his oracular tales. This 'narrative compression,' though, is partly to blame for some amount of data loss. While Herodotus may say "the Pythia commanded them...", he did not intend to be understood as expressing the precise verbal content of the oracle in every case, but more often the meaning that consultants took from it as a result of their interpretations. The oracles in the narrator's world are almost always in poetic meters, often unusually worded, and typically difficult to understand.⁷¹ Ultimately, oracles are assigned meaning only after they are set into a specific context.

Conjecture

Typical Features

I have defined the episode of conjecture as the sequence of the 'oracular tale' in which the consultant considers the meaning and import of the oracle. It is essentially a sequence that gives a glimpse into the mind and thoughts of the consultants, whether they remain internal in the case of private individuals or become expressed in communal debate. In this episode, there are three different categories of mental operations: interpreting the words of the oracle in conjunction with known facts, framing an expectation of what will happen, and developing a

⁷⁰ Christopher A. Faraone, "Circe's Instructions to Odysseus (OD. 10.507–40) as an Early Sibylline Oracle," *Journal of Hellenic Studies* 139 (2019): 1–18.

⁷¹ Some notable exceptions to the general inclarity of oracular language are the oracle of Branchidae's response to Aristodicus (#17) and the Delphic oracle's response to the Cnidiads (#20).

plan of action to realize or avoid that expectation. This series of actions constitutes the syntagmatic structure of the conjecture episode. Although there is no example in the *Histories* that shows evidence of all three scenes, nevertheless, the scenes are so intimately interconnected that they entail each other.

Interpretation and Its Variants

Herodotus only rarely provides a full account of the reasoning involved in a consultant's interpretation of an oracle. The story of Lichas' visit to the Tegean smithy is a helpful example for understanding how oracular interpretation was done. The Spartans received the following oracle about where they could find the bones of Orestes, the son of Agamemnon:

There is a certain Tegea in the level land of Arcadia, where two winds blow (ἄνεμοι πνείουσι δύω) under strong compulsion, and strike lies upon strike (καὶ τύπος ἀντίτυπος), and bane upon bane (πῆμ' ἐπὶ πῆματι). There the life-producing earth holds the son of Agamemnon. Collecting him, you will be the defender of Tegea.⁷²

When Lichas stumbles upon a Tegean blacksmith who tells him about the fact that he just recently dug up and reburied a huge human skeleton, Lichas thinks that these must be Orestes' bones.

“But after he thought over the things that were said, he was putting it together (συνεβάλλετο) that it was Orestes according to that oracle, putting it together (συμβαλλόμενος) in this way: looking at the two bellows (φύσας) of the smith, he was discovering (εὔρισκε) them to be the winds (τοὺς ἀνέμους), the anvil (ἄκμονα) and hammer (σφῦραν) to be both the strike and the counterstrike (τόν τε τύπον καὶ τὸν ἀντίτυπον), and the iron (σίδηρον) being worked to be the bane lying upon bane (τὸ πῆμα ἐπὶ πῆματι κείμενον), likening (εἰκάζων) it in such a way, since iron was invented as an evil thing for a human.⁷³

⁷² Ἔστι τις Ἀρκαδίας Τεγέη λευρῇ ἐνὶ χώρῳ,
ἐνθ' ἄνεμοι πνείουσι δύω κρατερῆς ὑπ' ἀνάγκης,
καὶ τύπος ἀντίτυπος, καὶ πῆμ' ἐπὶ πῆματι κεῖται.

Ἐνθ' Ἀγαμεμνονίδην κατέχει φυσίζοος αἴα·
τὸν σὺ κοιμισσάμενος Τεγέης ἐπιτάρροθος ἔσση. Hdt. 1.67.4, #12.

⁷³ ὁ δὲ ἐννώσας τὰ λεγόμενα συνεβάλλετο τὸν Ὀρέστιν κατὰ τὸ θεοπρόπιον τοῦτον εἶναι, τῇδε συμβαλλόμενος· τοῦ χαλκέος δύο ὀρέων φύσας τοὺς ἀνέμους εὔρισκε ἐόντας, τὸν δὲ ἄκμονα καὶ τὴν σφῦραν τόν τε τύπον καὶ τὸν

Lichas' reasoning here may be called synthetic or conjectural. He is pairing the words of the oracle with the circumstance before him in his mind: bellows with "winds," hammer and anvil with "strike and counterstrike," and forging iron with "bane upon bane." The mental act of putting these things together is perfectly expressed with the verb συμβάλλεσθαι, "to throw together"—we still use the similar Latinate word "conjecture" (from *con-iacere*, lit. "to strike together") in English.⁷⁴ In fact, a great number of the verbs that Herodotus uses to indicate this kind of interpretive activity are compounded with the preposition σύν, meaning "together" or "with": συλλαμβάνειν,⁷⁵ συμπίπτειν, συγγινώσκειν, συνιέναι, and συμβάλλεσθαι. The rest are more common verbs for understanding like δοκέειν and μανθάνειν. The interpretation of oracles, then, involves a client's synthetic process of thought that attempts, as Lisa Maurizio puts it, "to suture a true divine word to their circumstances in order to render their world comprehensible."⁷⁶

In other stories, while the narrator may make passing reference to this kind of synthetic interpretation, he more often leaves the details implied. For instance, when the Bacchiadae learn about the oracle Eetion received, they finally understand an older oracle that they did not understand when they first heard it. "But then, when they learned of Eetion's oracle, they immediately understood (συνῆκαν) the earlier one to be in harmony (συνφδόν) with Eetion's."⁷⁷ In this story, the Bacchiadae understand (συνιέναι) their oracle as belonging together with Eetion's. Herodotus leaves the exact correspondences between the words of both oracles and

ἀντίτυπον, τὸν δὲ ἐξελαυνόμενον σίδηρον τὸ πῆμα ἐπὶ πῆματι κείμενον, κατὰ τοιόνδε τι εικάζων, ὥς ἐπὶ κακῷ ἀνθρώπου σίδηρος ἀνεύρηται. Hdt. 1.68.4, #12.

⁷⁴ Paavo Hohti, "ΣΥΜΒΑΛΛΕΣΘΑΙ: A Note on Conjectures in Herodotus," *Arctos: Acta Philologica Fennica* 11 (1977): 5–14. For a fuller discussion of the metaphor latent in this verb, see "The Metaphor of a Deal" in chapter four.

⁷⁵ Sometimes ὑπολαμβάνειν (#23) or just λαμβάνειν (#30, #73, #87) as in "to take" into one's mind.

⁷⁶ Maurizio, "Interpretive Strategies," 70. Ralph Anderson argues that this kind of synthetic thinking is more broadly applicable to divinatory thought as a whole. Anderson, "A Story of Blood."

⁷⁷ ... τότε δὲ τὸ Ἡετίωνι γενόμενον ὥς ἐπύθοντο, αὐτίκα καὶ τὸ πρότερον συνῆκαν ἐὼν συνφδὸν τῷ Ἡετίωνος Hdt. 5.92.γ.1, #63.

other external factors entirely implied by the context, but in light of the plot, they must include, at least, Eetion and eagle (Αἰετὸς), “among the rocks” (ἐν πέτρῃσι) and Petra (the town where Eetion lives), and the verb κύειν (“to produce offspring”) and the tenor of foreboding, both of which are common to these oracles. Thus, the verbal action of interpretation may come to stand in for a thorough explication of the reasoning that goes into the action. Wherever people in the *Histories* are said to be interpreting or understanding oracles, then, one must understand them to be using a similar synthetic process of thought that links words with circumstances whether or not Herodotus enumerates the terms specifically. He expected his audience to be able to do just this.

Expectation and Its Variants

What follows the act of interpretation is the act of forming a certain expectation which helps account for the plan that the consultant then implements in the action episode. The consultant will wish, expect, fear, or trust in a particular outcome from their interpretation. To continue with the example of the Bacchiadae and their interpretation (συνῆκαν) of the relationship between the two oracles and their present circumstances, the narrator tells us that they were “wishing (ἐθέλοντες) to destroy the offspring of Eetion that was about to be born.”⁷⁸ Their wish, explains the actions that the Bacchiadae take in waiting until the child is born and then going to Eetion’s home in order to slay the baby tyrant Cypselus. An interpretation of an oracle may also induce fear of outcomes that the consultant wishes to avoid. When the Argives were invaded by Cleomenes and the Lacedaemonians, Herodotus explains, “At that time, the

⁷⁸ ... ἐθέλοντες τὸν μέλλοντα Ἡετίωνι γίνεσθαι γόνον διαφθεῖραι. Hdt. 5.92.γ.1, #63. Similar terms appear in a number of tales: ἐθέλω (#26), ἐλπίζω (#3, #5, #6, #101), λογιζώ (#101) and βούλομαι (#93). I do not consider the differences between these terms significant for the purposes of this argument. All of them express some sort of thinking about events that have not yet happened, whether justified by reason or not.

Argives were not, in fact, fearing battle in the open, but that they would be destroyed by a stratagem.”⁷⁹ The oracular pronouncement that follows explains this fear and, consequently, their own stratagem of mimicking the movements of the Spartans in an effort to avoid that outcome. Finally, Herodotus may simply say that the consultant trusted in the oracle before describing the action that he takes.⁸⁰ He describes the Lacedaemonians, for instance, as “trusting in an alloyed oracle that they were, in fact, going to enslave the Tegeans,” and so they brought shackles with them into battle.⁸¹ In all of these stories, the nature of the expectation is explicitly named and linked to the episode of action that follows the conjecture.

Sometimes, though, Herodotus may simply mention the act of expectation and leave the expected result out of his narration entirely. This kind of narrative compression happens in the story of Cypselus’ Delphic oracle. “When Cypselus became a man and was consulting in Delphi, there came about a double-edged oracle for him, and being persuaded by it, he both made an attempt at and was holding Corinth.”⁸² Again, his persuasion accounts for the action, but Herodotus does not inform us explicitly about Cypselus’ interpretation or the nature of his trust in the oracle. In order to connect the dots, the audience must look to the words of the oracular pronouncement that address Cypselus as “Cypselus, son of Eetion, king of famed Corinth.”⁸³ It is only in the context of the words of the pronouncement that the nature of his expectation and reason for his attempt at tyranny can fully make sense to the audience.

⁷⁹ Ἐνθαῦτα δὴ οἱ Ἀργεῖοι τὴν μὲν ἐκ τοῦ φανεροῦ μάχην οὐκ ἐφοβέοντο, ἀλλὰ μὴ δόλῳ αἰρεθέωσι. Hdt. 6.77.1, #76. Similar terms appear in a number of tales: φοβέω (#88), δειμαίνω (#48), and δεῖδω (#103).

⁸⁰ At least once, the consultants distrust the oracle. In the case of the Cumaeans, Aristodicus distrusts the oracle they get from Didyma either thinking the advice to be irreverent or that the delegates were not reporting the oracle truly or both. Hdt. 1.158.2, #15.

⁸¹ ... χρησμῶ κιβδηλῶ πίσυνοι, ὥς δὴ ἐξανδραποδιεύμενοι τοὺς Τεγεήτας. Hdt. 1.66.3, #10. For the meaning of the word κιβδηλος, see “The Metaphor of an Alloyed Coin” in chapter four.

⁸² Ἀνδρωθέντι δὲ καὶ μαντευομένῳ Κυψέλῳ ἐγένετο ἀμφιδέξιον χρηστήριον ἐν Δελφοῖσι τῷ πίσυνος γενόμενος ἐπεχείρησέ τε καὶ ἔσχε Κόρινθον. Hdt. 5.92.ε.1, #65.

⁸³ ...Κύψελος Ἡετίδης, βασιλεὺς κλειτοῦ Κορίνθου. Hdt. 5.92.ε.2.

Planning and Its Variants

Following the consultant's interpretation and framing of expectation comes planning. Here, the consultant develops a plan of action that can reasonably result in the realization of his hopes or the avoidance of his fears. The second bit of advice that Croesus received from Delphi and Amphiaraus was that he should make allies of the strongest people of Greece. Herodotus tells us, "And afterwards, he was reflecting (ἐφρόντιζε), investigating who were the strongest of the Greeks whom he might win over as friends."⁸⁴ While he provides Croesus' expectation elsewhere,⁸⁵ Herodotus seems content to pass over his apparently literal interpretation as obvious here. However, before Croesus can ask the strongest of the Greeks to be his allies, which he does in the action episode,⁸⁶ he must learn who they are. In the debate in Athens over the "wooden wall" oracle, on the other hand, there are a few plans that are put forward to the assembly as they think out loud, so to speak, about their options. The idea that the "wooden wall" of the oracle indicated the fleet eventually caught on when they were interpreting the oracle together, but the plans that resulted from that conclusion differed. Herodotus tells us that Themistocles "was counselling (συνεβούλευε), therefore, that they should prepare themselves to make battle at sea, because that [the fleet] was the 'wooden wall.'"⁸⁷ His idea was that the oraclemongers misunderstood the last line of the oracle and had the expectation of losing a sea battle at Salamis. However, at the conclusion of the debate, the narrator continues, "After Themistocles was reasoning in that way, the Athenians knew those things to be more preferable to them than those

⁸⁴ Μετὰ δὲ ταῦτα ἐφρόντιζε ἱστορέων τοὺς ἂν Ἑλλήνων δυνατωτάτους ἐόντας προσκτῆσαιτο φίλους. Hdt. 1.56.2, #5. Similar terms appear in a number of tales: φρόντιζω (#57, #95), μηχανάομαι (#3 and #26), ἐπιτεχνάομαι (#7).

⁸⁵ Hdt. 1.71.1.

⁸⁶ Hdt. 1.69.1–2.

⁸⁷ Παρασκευάζεσθαι ὧν αὐτοὺς ὡς ναυμαχήσοντας συνεβούλευε, ὡς τούτου ἐόντος τοῦ ξυλίνου τείχεος. Hdt. 7.143.2, #87.

of the oraclemongers, who were not allowing (ἔων) that a naval battle be joined, and, to speak generally, not even to raise their hands in defense, but abandoning Attic land, to settle in some other land.”⁸⁸ There are two important observations to make regarding this passage. First, Herodotus does not make Themistocles’ expectation perfectly clear, though it is strongly implied that he fully expected to win a sea battle at Salamis.⁸⁹ Second, in this scene, two conflicting plans are expressed in the assembly, and one is decided upon. Even though the language that Herodotus uses is proper to speech, the activity of debate in the assembly may be considered an externalization of what is for obvious reasons typically described as an internal process in the case of private individuals.⁹⁰

Substitutions

Unlike the episode of consultation, there is not a single story in which all three of the actions of interpreting, expecting, and planning occur together so explicitly in the episode of conjecture. Additionally, this episode is more likely than any other to be omitted entirely in Herodotus’ narration of oracular tales. In other words, it is more likely that Herodotus will compress his narrative here than anywhere in any other episode of the ‘oracular tale’. We may, at times, account for this by the narrator’s expectation that his audience can understand a consultant’s conjecture from his actions. Nevertheless, each scene is necessarily linked together in a connected series of thoughts that entail each other. One does not do an action, except by a

⁸⁸ Ταῦτη Θεμιστοκλέος ἀποφαινομένου, Ἀθηναῖοι ταῦτά σφι ἔγνωσαν αἰρετώτερα εἶναι μᾶλλον ἢ τὰ τῶν χρησμολόγων, οἳ οὐκ ἔων ναυμαχίην ἀρτέεσθαι, τὸ δὲ σύμπαν εἶπαι οὐδὲ χεῖρας ἀνταείρεσθαι, ἀλλὰ ἐκλιπόντας χώραν τὴν Ἀττικὴν ἄλλην τινὰ οἰκίζειν. Hdt. 7.143.

⁸⁹ Herodotus has Themistocles assert this as the ultimate meaning of the oracle in a latter speech. Hdt. 8.60.γ.

⁹⁰ See also #73. We may observe this externalization of internal thoughts most explicitly in the speech of the old Theban in the assembly of his *polis*: “I seem (δοκέω) to myself to understand (συνιέναι) what the oracle wishes to say to us” (Εγὼ μοι δοκέω συνιέναι τὸ θέλει λέγειν ἡμῖν τὸ μαντήιον. Hdt. 5.80, #58). The old man is bringing his thought up for the scrutiny of his fellow citizens.

plan of action; one does not form a plan of action, except by framing an expectation of a result that one intends; and one does not frame an expectation in dealing with oracles, except by interpreting them in light of particular circumstances. Taking a more holistic view of the episode, there are plenty of stories in which Herodotus relates specifically that the consultants do not understand their oracles as meaning anything.⁹¹ In the end, though, thinking that an oracle does not have meaning is still an interpretation and a conjecture. Herodotus' impulse to include mention of when consultants fail to conjecture properly about an oracle demonstrates even more forcefully that the conjectural processes of making an interpretation, forming an expectation, and developing a plan are within his audience's horizon of expectation when it comes to oracular tales.

Action

Typical Features

I have defined the episode of action as a sequence in which the consultant acts in accordance with his conjecture. In the *Histories*, Herodotus narrates these episodes in such diverse ways that they are not easily susceptible to a systematic analysis. Although there tends to be a more limited set of verbs and expressions to convey the activities of the characters in the previous episodes, neither is so neatly determined in the episode of action. However, it is worth pointing out that Herodotus routinely emphasizes that his characters do act directly in response to oracles. In fact, he reduces some of his oracular tales to this formulation exactly. His story about the Theban translation of a gilded statue of Apollo is a case in point. "The Delians did not return that statue, but twenty years later, the Thebans themselves took it to Delium in accordance with

⁹¹ #2, #35, #37, #40, #48, #73, #94.

an oracle (ἐκ θεοπροπίου).”⁹² The phrase ἐκ θεοπροπίου, “in accordance with an oracle,” is the only hint in this short tale that an oracle was involved at all, but the audience clearly meant to understand that it was the oracle that spurred the Thebans into action. Herodotus uses this phrase ten times in some of the shortest of his oracular tales.⁹³

Substitutions

Nevertheless, there is some indication that Herodotus was familiar with more expansive versions of the oracular tales. The best evidence of this fact is found in the tale about the Phocaeans efforts at colonization in book one. At the beginning of the story as Herodotus tells it, the Phocaeans leave their land and set sail for Cynus (Corsica). He explains, “For in Cynus twenty years before these things, they founded a city by the name of Alalia in accordance with an oracle (ἐκ θεοπροπίου).”⁹⁴ However, Herodotus adds a number of details that he left out of his first mention of the oracle when he tells of a Poseidonian man who conjectures a different meaning for it.

Those of them who fled to Rhegium, after setting out from there, founded that city in the land of Oenotria which is now called Hyele. And they founded a city after learning (μαθόντες) from a Poseidonian man that the Cynus which the Pythia declared to them (σφι ἢ Πυθίῃ ἔχρησε) to found (κτίσαι) was the hero and not the island.⁹⁵

⁹² Τὸν δὲ ἀνδριάντα τοῦτον Δῆλιοι οὐκ ἀπήγαγον, ἀλλὰ μιν δι’ ἐτέων εἴκοσι Θηβαῖοι αὐτοὶ ἐκ θεοπροπίου ἐκομίσαντο ἐπὶ Δῆλιον. Hdt. 6.118.3, #80.

⁹³ #1, #8, #18, #28, #39, #80, #85, #91, #92, #107. See also the comparable ‘narrative compression’ in #51 and #87 (Hdt. 8.53.1). Among inscriptions, the phrases κατὰ τὸ μαντήιον (cf. Hdt. 1.91.4, 8.51.2), κατὰ τὸν χρησμόν (cf. Hdt. 7.142.2), and κατὰ τὸ χρηστήριον (cf. Hdt. 1.69.2, 1.86.1, 5.80.2, 7.178.2, 9.64.1) are all comparable to Herodotus’ ἐκ θεοπροπίου. See “*Action*” in chapter three.

⁹⁴ ... ἐν γὰρ τῇ Κύρνῳ εἴκοσι ἔτεσι πρότερον τούτων ἐκ θεοπροπίου ἐνεκτίσαντο πόλιν, τῇ οὖνομα ἦν Ἀλαλίη. Hdt. 1.165.1, #18.

⁹⁵ Οἱ δὲ αὐτῶν ἐς τὸ Ῥήγιον καταφυγόντες ἐνθεῦτεν ὁρμώμενοι ἐκτίσαντο πόλιν γῆς τῆς Οἰνωτρίας ταύτην ἣτις νῦν Ὑέλη καλεῖται. Ἐκτίσαν δὲ ταύτην πρὸς ἀνδρὸς Ποσειδωνιῆτεω μαθόντες ὡς τὸν Κύρνον σφι ἢ Πυθίῃ ἔχρησε κτίσαι ἥρων ἐόντα, ἀλλ’ οὐ τὴν νῆσον. Hdt. 1.167.4, #18. Other examples of additional episodes in particular stories in which Herodotus employs the phrase ἐκ θεοπροπίου include the following: #1, #8, #28, #39, #91. See also #87.

In this passage, the Poseidonian man acts somewhat like an oraclemonger in a typical episode of consultation,⁹⁶ but he conjectures a new meaning for an old oracle. It is in this context that the audience learns that the Phocaeans had consulted the Pythia at Delphi and that the oracle told them “to found Cynus,” which they presumably conjectured to be a reference to the island and concluded that it was necessary to undertake a colonial expedition to Corsica. There are three important observations to make relating to this passage. First, an oracle that seemed to give a clear command ends up being much less clear in hindsight, as I also showed in my discussion about oracular pronouncements above.⁹⁷ Second, Herodotus clearly expects his audience to be able to perform the mental gymnastics of completely rearranging the narrative order of events chronologically in order to make sense of the story in an instant. Lastly, the simple phrase ἐκ θεοπροπίου in the earlier part of the tale simply stands in for details of the original consultation, pronouncement, and conjecture that Herodotus knows and supplies later. It seems that his presentation of an action as a direct consequence of an oracle represents the greatest extent to which Herodotus compresses oracular tales, at least recognizably. It is not terribly important to answer why Herodotus would leave out these details in any particular case. What should be clear, however, is that the stories only make sense fully if his audience is capable of recognizing the total schema of the ‘oracular tale’ lying behind such bare references.

Fulfillment

Typical Features

I have defined the episode of fulfillment as a sequence of action in which the oracular pronouncement is said or thought to be fulfilled, accomplished, or complete in its meaning.

⁹⁶ See “Consultation: *Variations and Substitutions*” above.

⁹⁷ See “Pronouncement: *Variations of Mode*” above.

Foreshadowing the conclusion of the Lydian *logos* in the story of the oracle to the Mermnadae, Herodotus says, “Yet, the Pythia said so much: that retribution will come for the Heraclidae to the fifth descendant of Gyges. Both the Lydians and their kings were making no account of this pronouncement until, in fact, it was fulfilled (ἐπετελέσθη).”⁹⁸ The verb ἐπιτελέειν is not strictly proper to oracular fulfillment: it may mean to finish or complete some task or command,⁹⁹ to perform certain rites,¹⁰⁰ to pay a tax or debt,¹⁰¹ and to fulfill requests, vows, promises, and even dreams and *cledones*.¹⁰² Other verbs in the context of oracular fulfillment betray the same range of meanings: ἀποπιμπλάναι or ἐκπιμπλάναι, “to fill up, sate, fulfill, accomplish,” and ἐξήκειν and ἐξέρχεσθαι, “to have reached a certain point, expire, turn out true.”¹⁰³ One might be tempted to distinguish between religious and secular activities as English is inclined to do with “perform” and “fulfill” versus “pay” and “accomplish.” However, the line between these categories of activity can be quite blurry in the *Histories*. The Epidaurians, for example, agree to Athenian terms that require them to pay an annual tribute of sacred offerings to Athena Polias and Erechtheus for the use of sacred olive wood.¹⁰⁴ What comes into focus, however, is that these words denote the end of certain acknowledged obligations or expectations. Oracles, therefore, should be thought of as determined obligations, or events that need to happen, that are resolved in their meaning when their conditions are met.¹⁰⁵ By examining specific examples of oracular

⁹⁸ Τοσόνδε μέντοι εἶπε ἡ Πυθίη, ὥς Ἡρακλείδῃσι τίσις ἦξει ἐς τὸν πέμπτον ἀπόγονον Γύγεω. Τούτου τοῦ ἔπεος Λυδοὶ τε καὶ οἱ βασιλεῖς αὐτῶν λόγον οὐδένα ἐποιεῦντο, πρὶν δὴ ἐπετελέσθη. Hdt. 1.13.2, #1. See also 2.152.5, #31; 5.1.3, #52; 6.140.1, #82.

⁹⁹ Hdt. 1.51.1, 1.90.1, 1.115.3, 1.126.2, 1.157.2, 1.169.1, 2.91.6, 2.121.α.2, 2.121.δ.6, 4.10.1 (advice of Heracles), 4.43.1, 4.43.6, 4.92, 6.60, 7.16.γ.3, 7.121.1.

¹⁰⁰ Hdt. 1.167.2, 2.37.3, 2.51.2, 2.63.1, 2.122.2, 3.8.2, 4.26.2, 4.76.4, 4.79.2, 4.186.2, 5.4.1, 8.41.2, 8.98.2.

¹⁰¹ Hdt. 2.109.1, 5.49.6, 9.64.1, #99 (pay recompense).

¹⁰² Hdt. 1.86.2, 2.63.1, 3.69.6, 3.125.4 (dream), 3.127.2, 3.138.3, 5.51.2, 5.72.3 (*clledon*).

¹⁰³ Hdt. 4.164.4, #48; 6.80, 82.1, #75; 8.96.2, #97 and #98. See *LSJ*, s.v., “ἀποπίμπλημι,” “ἐκπίμπλημι,” “ἐξήκω,” and “ἐξέρχομαι.”

¹⁰⁴ Hdt. 5.82.3. See also 5.84.1.

¹⁰⁵ This conclusion is also suggested by the etymology of the term χρησμός, which comes from the root χρή, meaning “it is necessary.” Robert Beekes, *Etymological Dictionary of Greek*, vol. 2 (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 1648–9.

fulfillment in the *Histories*, I show that both the narrator and the characters of his stories think about the fulfillment of oracles in precisely the same way.

Because oracular fulfillment is the resolution of obligations understood from the oracle, determining the moment of fulfillment in an oracular tale will necessarily draw a comparison between those obligations and the later events to which they are supposed to relate.¹⁰⁶ In other words, the fulfillment is an interpretation of an oracle in light of present or past circumstances. It is in this sense that oracles are true. In a short digression in book eight, Herodotus editorializes, “I am not able to speak against oracles that they are not true, since I do not wish to try to refute those speaking clearly (ἐναργέως), looking into such words... Since Bacis speaks such things and so clearly (ἐναργέως), I do not dare to speak contradictions about oracles, nor do I accept it from others.”¹⁰⁷ Herodotus is convinced of the obligatory, prophetic value of oracles by their clarity. What he means by clarity may be gleaned from a comparison of the words of the oracle he cites and the event that he has already described. The oracle of Bacis reads:

But whenever they throw a bridge across (γεφυρώσωσι) the holy promontory of golden-sword Artemis (Ἀρτέμιδος χρυσαόρου ἱερὸν ἄκτῆν) and Cynosoura by the sea with their

¹⁰⁶ The issue of an oracle’s pertinence to an event is exactly what Herodotus disputes with Mardonius. Τοῦτον δ’ ἔγωγε τὸν χρησμόν, τὸν Μαρδόνιος εἶπε ἐς Πέρσας ἔχειν, ἐς Ἰλλυριοὺς τε καὶ τὸν Ἐγγελέων στρατὸν οἶδα πεποιημένον, ἀλλ’ οὐκ ἐς Πέρσας. Hdt. 9.43.1, #105.

¹⁰⁷ Χρησιμοῖσι δὲ οὐκ ἔχω ἀντιλέγειν ὥς οὐκ εἰσὶ ἀληθεῖς, οὐ βουλόμενος ἐναργέως λέγοντας πειρᾶσθαι καταβάλλειν, ἐς τοιάδε ῥήματα ἐσβλέψας... [Ες] τοιαῦτα μὲν καὶ οὕτω ἐναργέως λέγοντι Βάκιδι ἀντιλογίας χρησμῶν περὶ οὗτε αὐτὸς λέγειν τολμέω οὗτε παρ’ ἄλλων ἐνδέκομαι. Hdt. 8.77.1–2, #97. The whole chapter has been athetized in some modern editions, like that of K.W. Krüger (1855) and more recently N.G. Wilson (2015). Chiefly, these reasons are: 1) stylistically, the passage seems to some awkwardly inserted in between μὲν-δὲ clauses, 2) stylistically, the passage seems to some to contain peculiar expressions. The reasons for rejecting the passage have been justly rejected as weak and arbitrary by students of Herodotus more generally and those of oracles in particular. See especially, Reginald Walter Macan, *Herodotus: The Seventh, Eighth, & Ninth Books*, vol. 1.2 (London: MacMillan and Co., 1908), 480–2. David Asheri argues that any number of other passages that do not earn the ire of these editors would have to be stricken for violating the sanctity of the μὲν-δὲ construction, and that the supposed peculiarity of Herodotus’ expressions are found in works, both contemporary and even earlier, in the exact same context concerning the precision of divine signs. David Asheri, “Erodoto e Bacide: Considerazioni sulla fede di Herodoto negli oracoli (Hdt. VIII 77),” in *La profezia nel mondo antico*, ed. Marta Sordi, Contributi dell’Istituto di storia antica 19 (Milan: Vita e Pensiero, 1993), 65–6, 72–6. Even Phillipe E. Legrand, who promotes the idea that Herodotus was very skeptical of the truth of oracular prophecy in some cases, finds no sufficient cause to reject this passage. He considers it to be a clear profession of faith. Phillipe E. Legrand, “Hérodote croyait-il aux oracles?,” in *Mélanges Desrousseaux: Mélanges offerts à A.-M. Desrousseaux par ses amis et ses élèves, en l’honneur de sa cinquantième année d’enseignement supérieur (1887–1937)* (Paris: Hachette, 1937), 282–3.

ships (νηυσί), after sacking rich Athens (λιπαρὰς πέρσαντες Ἀθήνας) with raging expectation, divine Justice will snuff out mighty Satiety, the terrible, raging son of Hybris, minded to gulp up all at once. For bronze will mix with bronze, and Ares will turn the sea red with blood. Then does the wide-seeing son of Cronos and mistress Victory bring on the day of freedom for Greece.¹⁰⁸

Now, at this point in the narration, Herodotus has already told of the Persian sack of Athens, which would seem to be a clear fulfillment of the third line of the oracle.¹⁰⁹ However, more of his attention in the context of the oracle is on Salamis and the events leading up to it, specifically the deployments of the Persian fleet. “Then in the middle of the night, some on the western wing were putting to sea, encircling Salamis, but others who were drawn up around both Ceos and Cynosoura (Κυνόσουραν) put to sea, and they were holding (κατεῖχόν) the whole strait with their ships (τῇσι νηυσί) all the way to Mounichia (μέχρι Μουνιχίης).”¹¹⁰ Even though Herodotus does

¹⁰⁸ Ἄλλ’ ὅταν Ἀρτέμιδος χρυσαόρου ἱερὸν ἀκτὴν νηυσὶ γεφυρώσωσι καὶ εἰναλίην Κυνόσουραν, ἐλπίδι μαινομένη λιπαρὰς πέρσαντες Ἀθήνας, δῖα Δίκη σβέσσει κρατερὸν Κόρον, ὕβριος υἱόν, δεινὸν μαιμώνοντα, δοκεῦντ’ ἅμα πάντα πίεσθαι. Χαλκὸς γὰρ χαλκῷ συμμίζεται, αἵματι δ’ Ἄρης πόντον φοινίξει. Τότ’ ἐλεύθερον Ἑλλάδος ἦμαρ εὐρύοπα Κρονίδης ἐπάγει καὶ πότνια Νίκη. Hdt. 8.77.1–2, #97. There are a few of other oracles that are merely mentioned in connection with particular important events and seem according to Herodotus’ story to find fulfillment apart from any action taken specifically in response to knowing them (#79, #98, #106).

¹⁰⁹ Hdt. 8.53.

¹¹⁰ ... ἐπειδὴ ἐγίνοντο μέσα νύκτες, ἀνήγον μὲν τὸ ἀπ’ ἐσπέρης κέρας κυκλούμενοι πρὸς τὴν Σαλαμίνα, ἀνήγον δὲ οἱ ἀμφὶ τὴν Κέον τε καὶ τὴν Κυνόσουραν τεταγμένοι, κατεῖχόν τε μέχρι Μουνιχίης πάντα τὸν πορθμὸν τῇσι νηυσί. Hdt. 8.76.1. There is some debate among scholars about the identity of Cynosoura, “dog tail,” in this passage. It is clear that the toponym could refer to any spit of land that seemed reminiscent of that shape. J.A.R. Munro proposes, and H. Grégoire argues extensively, that given the reference to Ceos, which would seem to indicate the great island to the southeast of Attica, the nearest known Cynosoura would be the one near Marathon. J.A.R. Munro, “Xerxes’ Invasion of Greece,” in *The Cambridge Ancient History: Volume IV: The Persian Empire and the West*, ed. J.B. Bury, S.A. Cook, and F.E. Adcock (New York: MacMillan, 1926), 268–316; H. Grégoire, “La légende de Salamine ou Comment les philologues écrivent l’histoire,” *Les Études Classiques* 4, no. 4 (1935): 519–31. However, as Grégoire himself acknowledges and N.G.L. Hammond objects, such an arrangement of the Persian fleet would require an extraordinary night voyage of around 60 nautical miles in order to be in position at daybreak. This seems improbable even if wind and tide could have been with them the whole time. Recent work on estimating sustained speed of triremes specifically estimates about 4–8 knots, meaning that such a journey would require at least 7.5–15 hours in ideal conditions. Rajmund Krivec, “Rowing Times from Athens to Mytilene: Implications of Misreading Thucydides for 5th-Century Greek Trireme Speed,” *International Journal of Nautical Archaeology* 45, no. 1 (2016): 199–201. I point out as well, that Xerxes holds a council “at the ships” (Hdt. 8.67.1) at Phalerum on the west coast of Attica, some of which had arrived from Trachis there already (Hdt. 8.66.1), the rest of which, except those of the Parians, arrived just before the council. Further, Herodotus states that the Persians did these maneuvers secretly (Hdt. 8.76.3), which seems hardly necessary to point out if they had come from so far away. Hammond argues that Cynosoura must be the promontory of the island of Salamis, and Ceos, one of the scattered islands to its south,

not mention the sanctuary of Artemis at Mounichia, the equation should still be clear: bridging the “holy promontory of golden-sword Artemis” and “Cynosoura by the sea” is like occupying the whole strait with a fleet.¹¹¹ The condition (ἅλλ’ ὅταν...) is fulfilled,¹¹² and Herodotus continues his account of the battle of Salamis, which corresponds to the phrases foretelling bronze mixing, battle (Ares) turning the sea bloody, and victory ushering in freedom for Greece. The clarity that Herodotus sees in this oracle is verbal resonance with circumstances. To him, it is this resonance between oracles and events that appears in the comparison proves the truth and fulfillment of oracular pronouncements, and a number of other scholars have understood him in this way, too.¹¹³

Importantly, it is not just Herodotus who determines the fulfillment of oracles as narrator; his characters in the *Histories* do it as well, and they do it in the very same manner. Cleomenes’ realization of his oracle’s fulfillment is particularly emphasized in his own dramatic words.

While it was burning, he was asking one of the deserters to which of the gods the grove belonged, and he said that it belonged to Argus. When he heard, he groaned greatly and

perhaps modern Talantónisi. N. G. L. Hammond, “The Battle of Salamis,” *The Journal of Hellenic Studies* 76 (1956): 38. In any event, it seems safer to assume that Herodotus is naming local places around Salamis about which our evidence is poor than to propose highly unlikely maneuvers from locations that are better known.

¹¹¹ David Asheri follows Grégoire and consequently understands the fulfillment of the oracle to be a putative metaphorical naval “bridge” between the known Cynosoura in the bay near Marathon and the great island of Ceos. Asheri, “Erodoto e Bacide,” 67–9. It is a possible interpretation, if one ignores or alters the third line about the sack of Athens; however, the fact that Herodotus mentions the oracle at the point in his narrative when the Persian fleet has deployed to prevent the escape of the Greeks from the strait on the west coast suggests that he understood the fulfillment of the condition of the oracle as I recommend. At some point, Persian ships must have actually occupied the whole strait between Cynosoura at Salamis and Mounichia, whether before or during the battle, and this is what Herodotus thought was the oracle’s fulfillment. Asheri’s point, however, that Herodotus’ interpretation of the oracle, whatever it really was, was only one of the potential possibilities of fulfillment and that the oracle may have been recycled are two observations to take quite seriously, even though we lack the evidence to show that the Greeks actually did so in this case. Asheri, 69–72. Jean-Claude Carrière supposes that the oracle was made up before the Battle of Artemision, using the alternative Cynosoura, and then reused before Salamis, but such an interpretation again requires that we mess with the wording of the third line. Jean-Claude Carrière, “Oracles et prodiges de Salamine: Hérodote et Athènes,” *Dialogues d’histoire ancienne* 14 (1988): 230–1.

¹¹² This prefix was typically oracular in the ancient world. See Fontenrose, *The Delphic Oracle*, 166–70.

¹¹³ E.g., Crahay, *La Littérature oraculaire*, 339; Hans Klees, *Die Eigenart des griechischen Glaubens an Orakel und Seher: Ein Vergleich zwischen griechischer und nichtgriechischer Mantik bei Herodot* (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer Verlag, 1965), 80–2; Asheri, “Erodoto e Bacide,” 75–6; Maurizio, “Interpretive Strategies,” 69–70. It is worth noting along with both Maurizio and Asheri that Herodotus’ criteria of oracular fulfillment and accuracy is exactly what modern scholars have used to cast deep suspicion on their historicity.

said, “Oracular Apollo, truly you have deceived me greatly saying that I would destroy Argos (Ἄργος αἰρήσειν).¹¹⁴ I put it together (Συμβάλλομαι) that my oracle is fulfilled (ἐξήκειν).”¹¹⁵

Apollo told Cleomenes that he would “capture Argos,” and when he learns that the grove that he was busy burning was named after Argus, he “puts it together” or “conjectures” (Συμβάλλομαι) that this is what the god meant by the oracle.¹¹⁶ In fact, he is so convinced of the fulfillment, that he marches his army back to Sparta. Thus, he abandons what seems to have been his original interpretation of the oracle that he would capture Argos the city. Clearly, the act of determining the fulfillment of an oracle is fundamentally the same process as the conjecture involved in interpreting it, since both involve putting together the words of an oracle with circumstances.¹¹⁷ Further, given that both Herodotus himself and the historical agents of his *Histories* determine the fulfillment of oracles in exactly the same way, it seems that this synthetic procedure was a familiar one in Greek culture.

Variations

Often, though, the conjectural thinking involved in determining oracular fulfillment is not enumerated explicitly. Herodotus will often leave the process of connecting words with events up to the minds of his audience. The result is that the exact nature of the fulfillment implied by Herodotus becomes a topic of some debate. Herodotus’ story about Peisistratus and the oracle

¹¹⁴ See the pronouncement that Herodotus relates at 6.76.1, #75 (Κλεομένει γὰρ μαντευομένῳ ἐν Δελφοῖσι ἐχρήσθη Ἄργος αἰρήσειν.).

¹¹⁵ Καιομένου δὲ ἤδη ἐπείρετο τῶν τινα αὐτομόλων τίνος εἶη θεῶν τὸ ἄλσος· ὁ δὲ ἔφη Ἄργου εἶναι. Ὁ δὲ ὡς ἤκουσε, ἀναστενάξας μέγα εἶπε· ὦ Ἀπολλὼν χρηστήριε, ἢ μεγάλως με ἠπάτηκας φάμενος Ἄργος αἰρήσειν. Συμβάλλομαι δ’ ἐξήκειν μοι τὸ χρηστήριον. Hdt. 6.80, #75. See also #11, #30, #31, #36, #48.

¹¹⁶ Lionel Scott supposes that the pronouncement was a genuine one and was given by Delphi to Cleomenes. Importantly, he adds that the oracle was probably not such a straightforward statement as “You will take Argos.” Rather, he thinks it more likely that there was a more general reference to Argos, with its potential semantic valence, and success that Cleomenes understood as warranting his attack on the polis. Lionel Scott, *Historical Commentary on Herodotus Book 6* (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 294–5, 302–3.

¹¹⁷ See “Conjecture: *Interpretation and Its Variants*” above.

delivered by Amphilytus the oraclemonger is an excellent case in point. Amphilytus says, “But the *bolos* (βόλος) is cast, and the net (δίκτυον) is spread out, and the tuna will swarm through a moonlit night (σεληναίης διὰ νυκτός).”¹¹⁸ Herodotus continues:

After he comprehended (συλλαβὼν) the oracle and said that he received (δέκεσθαι) the thing declared, Peisistratus led his army onward. But the Athenians from the town were, in fact, turning their attention to lunch at that time, and after lunch some of them were turning their attention to dice (κύβους), and others, to sleep (ὕπνον). Those attacking with Peisistratus rout the Athenians.¹¹⁹

Prompted by Herodotus’ assertion that Peisistratus figured it out, scholarship has sought to interpret the oracle in light of the event, which, as I have demonstrated, Herodotus himself and his characters do elsewhere. B.M. Lavelle develops an elaborate relationship between Peisistratus’ actions and the act of tuna fishing; Walter Lapini suggests that the analogy is between tuna fish and Athenians, on the one hand, and moony night or lunar night (day), on the other; and Jutta Kirchberg has concluded that the oracle offers a slight reference to an opportune moment for an attack.¹²⁰ These suggestions are clever, and some set of them may be partly correct in the end. However, I agree with the interpretation proposed by Dyfri Williams, who understands *bolos* as another word for a die, “moony night” as connected with “sleep,” and the Athenians as the “tuna” who are about to swarm.¹²¹ Given the attention that Herodotus pays to oracular language here and considering his general approach to determining oracular fulfillment,

¹¹⁸ Ἐρριπται δ’ ὁ βόλος, τὸ δὲ δίκτυον ἐκπεπέτασται, θύννοι δ’ οἰμήσουσι σεληναίης διὰ νυκτός. Hdt. 1.62.4, #7.

¹¹⁹ ... Πεισίστρατος δὲ συλλαβὼν τὸ χρηστήριον καὶ φᾶς δέκεσθαι τὸ χρησθὲν ἐπῆγε τὴν στρατιήν. Ἀθηναῖοι δὲ οἱ ἐκ τοῦ ἄστεος πρὸς ἄριστον τετραμμένοι ἦσαν δὴ τηνικαῦτα καὶ μετὰ τὸ ἄριστον μετεξέτεροι αὐτῶν οἱ μὲν πρὸς κύβους, οἱ δὲ πρὸς ὕπνον. Οἱ δὲ ἀμφὶ Πεισίστρατον ἐσπεσόντες τοὺς Ἀθηναίους τρέπουσι. Hdt. 1.63.1.

¹²⁰ B. M. Lavelle, “The Compleat Angler: Observations on the Rise of Peisistratos in Herodotos (1.59-64),” *The Classical Quarterly* 41, no. 2 (1991): 317–24; Walter Lapini, “La Profezia di Anfilito di Acarnania (Herod. I,62,4),” *Eirene* 74 (2011): 88–92; Jutta Kirchberg, *Die Funktion der Orakel im Werke Herodots* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1965), 70–1.

¹²¹ Dyfri Williams, “Herakles and Peisistratos,” in *Image et Céramique Grecque: Actes Du Colloque de Rouen, 25–26 Novembre 1982*, ed. F. Lissarrague and F. Thelamon, Publications de l’Université de Rouen 96 (Rouen: Publications de l’Université de Rouen, 1983), 134n21. Lavelle unfairly dismisses Williams’ interpretation. Lavelle, “The Compleat Angler,” 322n32.

his specific mention of both dice and sleep in the story should perhaps not be seen as just explaining Athenian laziness. In addition, one may suppose that Peisistratus may have conjectured this meaning and planned his attack based on his knowledge of a traditional Athenian postmeridian pastime. Whatever the truth may be, it is evident from his claim that Peisistratus “put it together” that Herodotus thought his audience fully capable of connecting the dots which seem less connected to our modern eyes.¹²² Their minds, though, were formed within the culture and could rely not just on the familiarity of the structure of oracular tales, but also on a living knowledge of Greek language and idiom to help them fill in the blanks left by a narrator.

Substitutions

When Herodotus provides the specific wording of an oracle, determining the precise moment of fulfillment is a matter of connecting oracular words with specific events. However, as I have shown, Herodotus may only paraphrase an oracle or relate how the oracle was understood by the consultants rather than provide a direct quotation.¹²³ Where he presents an oracular pronouncement as a straightforward command, one should understand the fulfillment of the oracle to be the same as the action that executes the command. When the Thebans are ordered by Amphiaraus to choose between having him as an oracle or an ally, it is fair to consider their decision to have him as an ally to be the fulfillment of the oracle.¹²⁴ Following that decision, there is apparently no more future relevance to the oracle: it is spent. It is common for Herodotus to treat the episodes of action and fulfillment as concurrent in this way whenever his characters are knowledgeable of the oracle and act on it.

¹²² Asheri recognizes this possibility as well. Asheri, “Erodoto e Bacide,” 69.

¹²³ See “Pronouncement: *Variations of Mode*” above.

¹²⁴ Hdt. 8.134.2, #102.

The evidence shows that there is a recurrent narrative pattern of pronouncement and fulfillment. The pattern is an expression of the fact that oracles were thought to be true divine messages. I have argued that oracular fulfillment involves the interpretation of oracular language in the context of specific circumstances. For this reason, it is necessarily a form of conjecture that pairs oracles with events, words with deeds. It is clear that both Herodotus himself and the characters of his *Histories* use the same conjectural, comparative reasoning in this way to determine oracular fulfillment. I suggest from this evidence that the understanding of oracular fulfillment modelled in the *Histories* corresponds to the prevailing understanding in Greek culture of the fifth century.

Conclusion

This analysis of the individual episodes shows that there are prominent patterns that allow us to construct an order of actions, scenes, and episodes that typifies the oracular tales in the *Histories*. Here, it is clear that Herodotus sometimes has a tendency to express episodes either by negation, that is, by reporting that the consultant did not do a certain expected action, or even by supposing specific actions to have happened absent his knowledge of any positive evidence for them. In this way, Herodotus' narrative habits seem to be an expression of cultural knowledge and expectation about when and how people in his contemporary world went about getting and using oracles. Moreover, I have also argued from the evidence of 'narrative compression'—his use idiomatic expressions, paradigmatic substitutions of certain roles and actions, and the omission of certain actions and scenes—that the episodes of the 'oracular tale' must have been part of Greek cultural models of action. Without the active knowledge of this

pattern as a framework, his audience would not have been able to understand the meaning behind his implication.

Part Two: The Syntagmatic Structure of an Oracular Tale

In the previous part of this chapter, I also argued occasionally for the logical connections at various points between the actions within the episodes and between different episodes themselves. This interconnectedness is fundamental to the ‘oracular tale’. In this part, I analyze the oracular tales of Herodotus’ *Histories* more holistically by using the definitions of the episodes that I laid out earlier. My analysis uses narratological theory to show clear evidence of a regular pattern in the sequence of the episodes of oracular tales. Drawing on a linguistic analogy, one may fairly call this regular sequence the syntagmatic structure of the ‘oracular tale’. It is its syntagmatic structure and the necessary causal, logical, and chronological connections between its episodes that give the ‘oracular tale’ its coherence and intelligibility as a narrative schema.

In order to illustrate the narrative pattern more concisely, I will use a system of signs. I have already introduced the capital and boldface letters (**A–E**) that I use for representing the episodes. In addition to these, I signify the pronouncement with the sign (**{P}**). Where there are multiple expressions of an episode within a tale, I distinguish these with Arabic numerals (1, 2, 3, etc.), and where the same exact episode is repeated or continued, I mark these with lower-case letters (a, b, c, etc.). I treat the divergences from the basic pattern that appear in the *Histories* in detail below. These divergences are of two types: divergences with respect to narrative sequence, which I designate with S, and divergences on account of duplication, which I designate with D. There are, however, a number of subtypes within these two types of divergences, so I have distinguished between them by pairing the symbol of the main type (S or D) with a lower-case letter corresponding to the subtype (a, b, c, etc.). Here, it will be easiest to provide a list.

Divergences of Sequence

Sa: Explicit Narratorial Intervention

Sb: Pronouncement is a Directive/Treated as Directive

Sc: Oracular Knowledge of Past and Present

Sd: Memory
Se: Explanation
Sf: Significant Fact

Divergences of Duplication

Da: Pronouncement Contains Multiple Predictions, Conditions, or Directives
Db: Multiple Agents Knowledgeable of the Pronouncement
Dc: Failure
Dd: Debate
De: Resumptive Repetition

The Basic Narrative Pattern

Herodotus' story of Cleisthenes' vendetta against the Argive hero Adrastus is an excellent and concise example containing all five episodes of the 'oracular tale' in the regular pattern, though with a slight Herodotean twist.

In these things, it seems to me, this Cleisthenes was imitating his mother's father, Cleisthenes the tyrant of Sicyon. For after he waged a war against the Argives, Cleisthenes first stopped the rhapsodes from competing on account of the Homeric epics, because the Argives and Argos are praised many times throughout. [A] Second, since there was and still is a heroön of Adrastus, son of Talaus, in the agora of the Sicyonians proper, Cleisthenes conceived a desire to cast out this Argive from the land. [B1a] Going to Delphi, he asked of the oracle whether he might cast out Adrastus. [{P}] The Pythia declares an oracle to him, saying that Adrastus is King of the Sicyonians, but he, a stone-thrower. Since the god was not granting this, at least, [B1b] when he returned back, [C1a] he was considering a plan by which Adrastus might himself depart. When he seemed to have discovered one, [D1a/E1a] sending to Boeotian Thebes, he said that he wished to translate Melanippus son of Astacus. The Thebans granted it to him. After he translated Melanippus, Cleisthenes designated a *temenos* for him in the prytany proper, and he established him there in the strongest position. [C1b] Cleisthenes translated Melanippus—for it is also necessary to explain this—because he was Adrastus' greatest enemy, who had killed both his brother Mecisteus and his son-in-law Tydeus. [D1b/E1b] When he designated the *temenos* for him, after depriving Adrastus of sacrifices and festivals, he gave them to Melanippus.¹

¹ Ταῦτα δέ, δοκέειν ἐμοί, ἐμμέετο ὁ Κλεισθένης οὗτος τὸν ἐωυτοῦ μητροπάτορα Κλεισθένεα τὸν Σικυῶνος τύραννον. Κλεισθένης γὰρ Ἀργείοισι πολεμήσας τοῦτο μὲν ῥαψωδοὺς ἔπαυσε ἐν Σικυῶνι ἀγωνίζεσθαι τῶν Ὀμηρείων ἐπέων εἵνεκα, ὅτι Ἀργεῖοί τε καὶ Ἄργος τὰ πολλὰ πάντα ὑμνέεται· τοῦτο δέ, ἡρώιον γὰρ ἦν καὶ ἔστι ἐν αὐτῇ τῇ ἀγορῇ τῶν Σικυωνίων Ἀδρήστου τοῦ Ταλαοῦ, τοῦτον ἐπεθύμησε ὁ Κλεισθένης ἐόντα Ἀργεῖον ἐκβαλεῖν ἐκ τῆς χώρας. Ἐλθὼν δὲ ἐς Δελφοὺς ἐχρηστηριάζετο εἰ ἐκβάλοι τὸν Ἀδρηστον· ἡ δὲ Πυθίη οἱ χρᾶ φάσα Ἀδρηστον μὲν εἶναι Σικυωνίων βασιλέα, ἐκεῖνον δὲ λευστήρα. Ἐπεὶ δὲ ὁ θεὸς τοῦτό γε οὐ παρεδίδου, ἀπελθὼν ὀπίσω ἐφρόντιζε μηχανὴν τῇ αὐτὸς ὁ Ἀδρηστος ἀπαλλάξεσθαι. Ὡς δὲ οἱ ἐξευρησθαι ἐδόκεε, πέμψας ἐς Θήβας τὰς Βοιωτίας ἔφη θέλειν ἐπαγαγέσθαι Μελάνιππον τὸν Ἀστακοῦ· οἱ δὲ Θηβαῖοι ἔδοσαν. Ἐπαγαγόμενος δὲ ὁ Κλεισθένης τὸν Μελάνιππον τέμενός οἱ ἀπέδεξε ἐν αὐτῷ τῷ πρυτανίῳ καὶ μιν ἴδρυσε ἐνθαῦτα ἐν τῷ ἰσχυροτάτῳ. Ἐπηγάγετο δὲ

The passage begins with Herodotus' establishment of the grounds for Cleisthenes' crisis. Cleisthenes was trying to rid Sicyon of Argive heritage and desired, among other things, to remove the heroön of Adrastus the Argive. The crisis (**A**) involved in this desire is one of reverence due to the hero. Cleisthenes is uncertain enough about this issue to consult an oracle. The private consultation (**B1a**) of Cleisthenes is the central episode of the tale. Herodotus tells us that he went to Delphi and asked the oracle for permission, more specifically, whether he should throw out Adrastus. Herodotus then reports the pronouncement {**P**} that Cleisthenes received in indirect speech: "Adrastus is a king of the Sicyonians, but he, a stone-thrower." Related to this pronouncement is an additional comment that the god did not grant him the permission he sought. After a brief mention of Cleisthenes' return, which continues the same episode of consultation (**B1b**), there comes the episode of conjecture (**C1a**). He pondered a plan whereby Adrastus would leave voluntarily. In other words, he would not himself cast out Adrastus, which he thought to be contrary to the oracle, but his goal of effacing Argive heritage would be accomplished all the same. That information is all the audience learns about his conjectured plan for now, and Herodotus passes on to the episodes of action (**D1a**) and fulfillment (**E1a**). Cleisthenes imports the hero and cult of Melanippus from Thebes and installs him in a more prominent position in Sicyon. In so doing, Cleisthenes' action constitutes the fulfillment (**Sb**) of at least Herodotus', if not his own, interpretation of the oracle as denying him permission actually to throw out Adrastus: he does not himself remove the heroön or cast out Adrastus. Because Herodotus understands that his audience may not fully understand how translating Melanippus would bring about Adrastus' departure (καὶ γὰρ τοῦτο δεῖ ἀπηγήσασθαι), he then

τὸν Μελάνιππον ὁ Κλεισθένης (καὶ γὰρ τοῦτο δεῖ ἀπηγήσασθαι) ὥς ἔχθιστον ἐόντα Ἀδρήστω, ὃς τὸν τε ἀδελφεὸν οἱ Μηκιστέα ἀπεκτόνεε καὶ τὸν γαμβρὸν Τυδέα. Ἐπεῖτε δέ οἱ τὸ τέμενος ἀπέδεξε, θυσίας τε καὶ ὀρτὰς Ἀδρήστου ἀπελόμενος ἔδωκε τῷ Μελάνιππῳ. Hdt. 5.67.1–4, #57.

explains Cleisthenes' conjecture in more detail. Apparently, he thought that, by importing and honoring a hero who was in life Adrastus' mortal enemy, the latter would depart. In this short example, one may identify all five sequences of the 'oracular tale' narrated in their proper chronological order, though with some repetition intended as an *explanation* (Se) of Cleisthenes' thought process (C1b) and the systematicity of his effacement of Adrastus (D1b/E1b). The narrative order of the episode is better visualized by the following formulaic expression:

Narrative Order: A—B1a—{P}—B1b—C1a—D1a/E1a(Sb)—C1b(Se)—D1b/E1b(Sb, Se)

Divergences of Order

The 'oracular tale' is also typified by the logical, causal, and chronological order of the episodes that it contains. In order to make sense as a story, the 'oracular tale' must follow the strict syntax of its episodes. One does not go to consult an oracle unless one has a crisis. One also does not receive an oracular response from an oracular institution before going to consult there. The natural consequence of this fact is that oracular tales necessarily follow a very strict syntax, and any deviation within that syntax is limited and easily explained. Herodotus' story of Themistocles' slaughter of Euboean sheep is a tale in which the chronological order is altered most dramatically in its narrative order.

Since Themistocles had in mind that, if he were to break the Ionian and Carian tribes away from the barbarian, they might be able to beat the rest, while the Euboeans were driving their flocks to the sea, he gathered the generals in this place and was saying to them that he seemed to have a ruse by which he was hoping to remove the best ones from among the allies of the king. Now he was revealing these things only so much, but he was saying that there were things to be done by them in addition to their usual business, and he was encouraging them to slaughter however many of the Euboean sheep each would wish—for it was better that the army have them than the enemy—and to command each of their men to light a fire. He was going to concern himself with the time of departure in order that they might arrive safely in Greece. It was pleasing them to do these things, and immediately after they lit the fires, [E2] they turned their attention to the sheep. [D1a] For since the Euboeans disregarded an oracle of Bacis [C] as though it was saying nothing, [D1b] they neither collected nor stored up anything at all when the war was

coming upon them, and matters became a shocking reversal of fortune for them. {P} For the oracle of Bacis about these things goes like this: “Be careful, whenever the barbarian-tongued should throw a papyrus yoke into the sea, to keep the much bleating goats away from Euboea.” [D1c] They were not ready to pay attention to those words that were declared both back then and in their present and expected ills, and so they were ready all the more to pay attention to their misfortune.²

This story is narrated entirely in reverse chronological order with the preceding episodes of the ‘oracular tale’ related by way of explanation of the event that is the narrator’s main focus. The reversal in this tale is occasioned by Herodotus’ focus on the craftiness of Themistocles in the story’s greater context rather than on the oracular tale itself. Thus, the *significant fact* (Sf) that Themistocles convinced the Greeks to kill the Euboean sheep is understood to be the final fulfillment (E2) of the oracle retrospectively. The same is also true of the fulfillment (E1) of the first condition of the oracle. In the greater context of the narrative, Xerxes, “the barbarian voiced,” has already thrown a papyrus yoke into the sea long before when he bridged the Hellespont partly with papyrus,³ and the oracle was known to the Euboeans even beforehand. After mentioning the slaughter of the sheep, Herodotus goes on to provide the *explanation* (Se) that this event was brought on by the action (D1a) of the Euboeans who ignored an oracle of Bacis (Οἱ γὰρ Εὐβοέες παραχρησάμενοι τὸν Βάκιδος χρησμόν). Then, he adds some account of

² Νόφ δὲ λαβὼν ὁ Θεμιστοκλῆς ὡς εἰ ἀπορραγείη ἀπὸ τοῦ βαρβάρου τό τε Ἰωνικὸν φύλον καὶ τὸ Καρικόν, οἳοί τε εἶψαν (ἄν) τῶν λοιπῶν κατύπερθε γενέσθαι, ἐλαυνόντων τῶν Εὐβοέων πρόβατα ἐπὶ τὴν θάλασσαν, ταύτη συλλέξας τοὺς στρατηγοὺς ἔλεγέ σφι ὡς δοκέοι ἔχειν τινὰ παλάμην τῇ ἐλπίζοι τῶν βασιλέος συμμάχων ἀποστήσειν τοὺς ἀρίστους. Ταῦτα μὲν νυν ἐς τοσοῦτο παρεγύμνου, ἐπὶ δὲ τοῖσι κατήκουσι πρήγμασι τάδε ποιητέα σφι εἶναι ἔλεγε, τῶν τε προβάτων τῶν Εὐβοϊκῶν καταθύνειν ὅσα τις ἐθέλοι (κρέσσον γὰρ εἶναι τὴν στρατιὴν ἔχειν ἢ τοὺς πολεμίους), παραίνεέ τε προειπεῖν τοῖσι ἐωυτῶν ἐκάστους πυρὰ ἀνακαίειν· κομιδῆς δὲ πέρι τὴν ὥρην αὐτῶ μελήσειν ὥστε ἀσινέας ἀπικέσθαι ἐς τὴν Ἑλλάδα. Ταῦτα ἤρεσέ σφι ποιεῖν καὶ αὐτίκα πυρὰ ἀνακαυσάμενοι ἐτρέποντο πρὸς τὰ πρόβατα. Οἱ γὰρ Εὐβοέες παραχρησάμενοι τὸν Βάκιδος χρησμόν ὡς οὐδὲν λέγοντα οὐτ’ ἐξεκομίσαντο οὐδὲν οὔτε προεσάξαντο ὡς παρεσόμενου σφι πολέμου, περιπετέα τε ἐποιήσαντο σφίσι αὐτοῖσι τὰ πρήγματα. Βάκιδι γὰρ ὧδε ἔχει περὶ τούτων ὁ χρησμὸς·

Φράζεο, βαρβαρόφωνος ὅταν ζυγὸν εἰς ἄλλα βάλλῃ
βύβλινον, Εὐβοίης ἀπέχει πολυμηκάδας αἶγας.

Τούτοις δὲ οὐδὲν τοῖσι ἔπεισι χρησαμένοις, ἐν τοῖσι τότε παρεούσι τε καὶ προσδοκίμοις κακοῖσι παρῇ σφι συμφορῇ χρᾶσθαι πρὸς τὰ μέγιστα. Hdt. 8.19–20, #94. For the humorous pun on χρᾶσθαι, see J. Enoch Powell, “Puns in Herodotus,” *The Classical Review* 51, no. 3 (1937): 104.

³ Herodotus mentions that the bridge was made of papyrus and flax cables at 7.34.

the failure in their conjecture (C) that the oracle was telling them nothing (ὥς οὐδὲν λέγοντα) before *explaining* (Se) that they did not take their possessions elsewhere as they should have (D1b). Next, he provides the substance of the pronouncement {P} as an *explanation* (Se) for why the Euboeans thought that the oracle said nothing (Βάκιδι γὰρ ὧδε ἔχει περὶ τούτων ὁ χρησμός·). Finally, Herodotus concludes with an ironic statement regarding their lack of attention to the words of the oracle both when they received it and “in their present,” presumably after Xerxes crossed the Hellespont (D1c).

By this example, one may observe the distinction between *fabula* (the chronological order of plot elements) and *sujzet* (the order in which plot elements are narrated) that the Russian formalist Viktor Shklovsky is credited with introducing.⁴ This distinction is made more clearly by comparing the following formulaic expressions of this tale’s narrative and chronological order:

Narrative Order: E1(Sf, Da1) | E2(Da2)—D1a(Se, Dc)—C(Se)— D1b(Se)—{P(Se, Da)}—
D1c(De, Dc)

Chronological Order: {P}—C—D—E1—E2

In a compressed narration of an oracular tale, Herodotus may frequently alter the narrative order of the episodes, while maintaining the logical, causal, and chronological order of the episodes generally by means of participles, the explanatory conjunction γάρ, and different kinds of subordinate clauses. He may be motivated to do this by his greater attention to particularly *significant facts* (Sf), to considerations of dramatic narration like *explicit narratorial foreshadowing* (Sa) or the focus on the *remembrance* (Sd) of an oracle at the moment of its *fulfillment*, or to specific tendencies of the oracles themselves insofar as they may supply

⁴ Viktor Shklovsky, *Theory of Prose*, trans. Benjamin Sher (Elmwood Park, IL: Dalkey Archive Press, 1990), 170. The pertinent essay on Sterne’s *Tristram Shandy* was published in 1921.

knowledge of present and past (Sc) events. However, sometimes the breadth of Herodotus' greater narrative of the Greco-Persian conflict compels a kind of fragmentation that prompts him to weave the episodes of oracular tales into distant parts of the larger fabric of his *Histories*. In this way, events that he has already narrated may become significant as moments of fulfillment for later oracular tales, such as in the example above, and the full significance of a pronouncement may only become apparent much later when he gives an account of its fulfillment. Herodotus, of course, is not writing a collection of oracular tales; rather, oracular tales are part of the historical material that he is shaping into his much greater historical narrative.

My analysis of the *Histories* in terms of interdependent narrative episodes is similar in approach to other narratological research. Algirdas Greimas has theorized the existence of a "canonical narrative schema." The canonical narrative schema consists of the four phases: "manipulation," in which "lack" motivates a change in desires or obligations; "competence," in which there is a development of necessary ability or knowledge; "performance," in which an action is actually performed; and "sanction" in which the performance of the action is evaluated.⁵ According to Greimas, it is due to the logical and causal connections between these four phases of the canonical narrative schema that narratives achieve their coherence, and for this reason, a narrative can contain several series of these phases woven together in order. The narrative pattern of the 'oracular tale' can be translated into the terms of the canonical narrative schema, though not without some loss. What I call the crisis is a situation of "lack" that leads the consultant (Subject/Receiver) to approach an oracle (Sender) to gain insight into how to address

⁵ A.J. Greimas and J. Courtés, *Semiotics and Language: An Analytical Dictionary*, trans. Larry Crist et al. (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1982), 44–6, 169, 184–6, 204–6, 226–8, 267. For a more concise overview of the theory, see Louis Hébert, *Tools for Text and Image Analysis: An Introduction to Applied Semiotics*, trans. Julie Tabler (London: Routledge, Forthcoming), chp. 8.

the “lack” through a consultation. The consultation is Greimas’ phase of “manipulation.” The consultant then attempts to make sense of the oracle through a conjecture in order to develop a plan about how to act on the oracle’s advice, which is the phase of “competence.” Then, comes the action that the consultant takes based on the interpretation, which corresponds to the phase of “performance.” Finally, the story comes to the fulfillment of the oracle, which corresponds to the phase of “sanction.” The different terminology that I have proposed here is more naturally intelligible and specific to stories about oracles.⁶ Notwithstanding the difference in terminology, however, the episodes of the ‘oracular tale’ are also logically, causally, and even chronologically linked in the same order. Regardless of the narrative order, which can differ depending on the narrator’s preferences, the chronological order of episodes is very regular, and from this fact comes the implication, and sometimes the explicit narratorial assertion, of the logical and causal links between each episode.

The syntax of the ‘oracular tale’ must be maintained in order to be understandable. Part of the consequence of the narrator’s influence, though, is that it is not always the case that all six sequences appear in every oracular tale in Herodotus’ *Histories*, as can be seen from the earlier story about Themistocles and the Euboean sheep. Occasionally, there is clear evidence of only a single episode of the ‘oracular tale’ in stories that are more important to Herodotus for other reasons. For example, when Herodotus is describing the movements of the Persian army through

⁶ Recently, Julia Kindt has argued that oracular tales draw on the narrative schema of epiphanic tales as defined by Georgia Petridou (Petridou, *Divine Epiphany in Greek Literature and Culture*, 18–20.): *crisis*, which is familiar; *authorization*, in which an oracle gives authority or legitimacy to the consultant or other individual (for a particular action?); *resolution*, in which oracular words find their fulfillment; and *commemoration*, in which the oracle is remembered or commemorated. Although it helps her goal of appreciating some similarities in the underlying thought on mediation between the divine and mundane spheres, the fit of the epiphanic schema onto oracular tales is not always very neat, as Kindt herself sometimes acknowledges. Kindt, “Revelation, Narrative, and Cognition: Oracle Stories as Epiphanic Tales in Ancient Greece.” The issue is that three totally distinct episodes of the ‘oracular tale’ (conjecture, action, and fulfillment) are shoehorned into *resolution*, which, in fact, only occasionally bring an actual resolution to the original crisis. Thus, the schema I propose here more closely follows oracular tales as they appear in extant sources.

North Africa, he explains that the Cyrenaeans allowed the Persian army to pass through their city “out of reverence toward a certain oracular pronouncement” (λόγιόν τι ἀποσιούμενοι).⁷ Here, Herodotus’ main subject has prompted him to pass over a more complete narration of the way in which the oracle was obtained or recalled and how exactly the Cyrenaeans went about interpreting it. All one may clearly identify is the action that was taken in response to an oracle, the content of which is only surmisable based on their choice to allow the Persians passage through their city.

More commonly, though, stories are missing one or two of the episodes. The story of Croesus’ mute son is a good example.

These things happened to Croesus himself. [A] He had a son, whom I mentioned also earlier, able in other ways, but mute. In his past prosperity, therefore, Croesus had done everything for him, and contriving other things, [B] he had sent delegates to Delphi to consult the oracle about him. {P} The Pythia told him these things: “You Lydian, king of many, great fool Croesus, do not desire to hear the much-prayed-for voice of your crying son in your halls. But it is much better for you to be far away. For he will speak first on an unlucky day.” [E] When, in fact, the wall was breached, and since a certain Persian, mistaking Croesus for someone else, was going forward to kill him, but although Croesus saw the man attacking, he did not care in the state of his present misfortune, and it made no difference at all to him to die at the hand of an assailant. But this mute son, when he saw the attacking Persian, broke out in voice out of fear and distress and said, “You there, do not kill Croesus!” This boy, in fact, uttered that thing first, and afterwards he went on speaking for the rest of his life.⁸

⁷ Hdt. 4.203.1, #51. Andrea Purvis’ recent translation unfortunately omits the sentence in question. Robert B. Strassler, ed., *The Landmark Herodotus: The Histories*, trans. Andrea L. Purvis (New York: Pantheon Books, 2007), 363.

⁸ Κατ’ αὐτὸν δὲ Κροῖσον τάδε ἐγένετο. Ἦν οἱ παῖς, τοῦ καὶ πρότερον ἐπεμνήσθην, τὰ μὲν ἄλλα ἐπιεικής, ἄφωνος δέ. Ἐν τῇ ὧν παρελθούσῃ εὐεστοί ὁ Κροῖσος τὸ πᾶν ἐς αὐτὸν ἐπεποιήκεε ἄλλα τε ἐπιφραζόμενος καὶ δὴ καὶ ἐς Δελφοῦς περὶ αὐτοῦ ἐπεπόμφεε χρησομένους· ἡ δὲ Πυθίη οἱ εἶπε τάδε·

Λυδὲ γένος, πολλῶν βασιλεῦ, μέγα νήπιε Κροῖσε,
μὴ βούλευ πολύευκτον ἱὴν ἀνὰ δώματ’ ἀκοῦειν
παιδὸς φθεγγομένου. Τὸ δέ σοι πολὺ λώιον ἄμφις
ἔμμεναι· αὐδήσει γὰρ ἐν ἡματι πρῶτον ἀνόλβῳ.

Ἀλίσκομένου δὴ τοῦ τείχεος, ἦε γὰρ τῶν τις Περσέων ἀλλογνώσας Κροῖσον ὡς ἀποκτενέων, Κροῖσος μὲν νυν ὀρέων ἐπιόντα ὑπὸ τῆς παρεούσης συμφορῆς παρημελήκεε, οὐδέ τί οἱ διέφερε πληγέντι ἀποθανεῖν· ὁ δὲ παῖς οὗτος ὁ ἄφωνος, ὡς εἶδε ἐπιόντα τὸν Πέρσην, ὑπὸ δέους τε καὶ κακοῦ ἔρρηξε φωνήν, εἶπε δέ· «Ὠνθρωπε, μὴ κτεῖνε Κροῖσον.» Οὗτος μὲν δὴ τοῦτο πρῶτον ἐφθέγγετο, μετὰ δὲ τοῦτο ἤδη ἐφώνεε τὸν πάντα χρόνον τῆς ζῆς. Hdt. 1.85, #13.

Most of the sequences are clearly present. Herodotus tells us that Croesus was concerned about his son not being able to speak (*crisis* **A**). So, he sent emissaries to Delphi in order to ask the oracle about him (*consultation* **B**), and the Pythia responded that he should not wish for his son to speak, because the day that he did would be unlucky for him (*pronouncement* {**P**}). Then, Herodotus recounts that while Sardis was being sacked and Croesus' was nearly killed (for the first time), his son finally spoke (*fulfillment* **E**), and in this way, Croesus' speaking son marks one of the low points of the king's misfortune. What is apparently missing in Herodotus' version of the story are the episodes of *conjecture* (**C**) and *action* (**D**):

Narrative and Chronological Order: **A—B—{P}—E**

There are two important observations to be gleaned from the narrative and chronological order of the tale above. First, just as Vladimir Propp has shown in a similar morphological study of fairytales, the order of the episodes of the 'oracular tale' is not vitiated by the lack or omission of one or more of the five episodes.⁹ Propp felt, though, that he had to content himself with his supposition that daily life and religious belief of a bygone era may be potential explanatory factors for the consistent patterning of the fairytale, given the prominent disparities between the world of fairytales and that of the communities who told them.¹⁰ The oracular tales of the *Histories*, on the other hand, are, at face value, an imitation of the world in which Herodotus lived. I suggest more confidently, therefore, that the consistency of the pattern represents a consistency in the contemporary understanding of how people thought about and used oracles. Second, the audience is not meant to suppose that Croesus did not consider the oracle's meaning at all or that he did absolutely nothing as a consequence of hearing the oracle. Even thinking that an oracle has no apparent meaning or immediate application is an interpretation (conjecture), and

⁹ Vladimir Propp, *Morphology of Folktale*, trans. Laurence Scott (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2009), 108.

¹⁰ Propp, 105–7.

not doing anything may still be considered an action taken in response to an oracle. There are other prominent examples of both.¹¹ Rather, these sequences of the ‘oracular tale’ are implied in the story of Croesus’ oracle about his “unlucky day” based on the familiar syntagmatic structure of the ‘oracular tale’. Further, since the story appears as a flashback in the context of the sack of Sardis, the audience can more easily understand how these episodes are implied. It is not just by the internal logic of the ‘oracular tale’, but by the fact that his conjecture and action have been illuminated to some extent by the greater context into which this tale is set.

Only very rarely are episodes omitted due to an inherent incompatibility of the episodes. In the stories about the oracular doves that visit Dodona and Ammon, the birds appear suddenly and declare their message spontaneously to the unexpecting peoples.¹² It should be clear that the episodes of crisis and consultation missing from this story are incompatible with the manner in which the pronouncements occur. Because of the logical, causal, and chronological connection between the episodes of the ‘oracular tale’, incompatibility is extremely rare and easily explainable.

Accounting Specifically for the Omission of Fulfillment

In the course of Herodotus’ greater narrative, almost all oracles find some measure of fulfillment, even if it is not complete.¹³ Given the centrality of the pattern of pronouncement and

¹¹ Neither the Siphnians (#35) nor the Thereans (#40) can make sense of their respective oracles and so do nothing. Also, the Euboeans in the tale above choose to “ignore” or “badly use” an oracle of Bacis (#94).

¹² Hdt. 2.55.2–3, #23 and #24.

¹³ See Klees, *Die Eigenart des griechischen Glaubens*, 76–9. The lone instance of an oracle that seems to express non-fulfillment explicitly is the story of the attempted scapegoating of Athamas “in accordance with an oracle” and his rescue by Cytissorus, grandson of Athamas. Hdt 7.197.1–3. Afterwards, their descendants live under the same threat of sacrificial death as their forebear, which mitigates, I think, the issue of non-fulfillment here—the Achaeans may perpetually fulfill the oracle by sacrificing the oldest member of the clan if he is caught entering the prytany. This story is very confusing, but I do not think there is sufficient reason to believe that there are two different oracles at work here, as some have. E.g., Pierre Bonnechere, “Sacrifice humain et rites d’initiation à l’âge adulte,” in *Le sacrifice humain en Grèce ancienne* (Liège: Presses universitaires de Liège, 2013), ¶154. It is sometimes the case

fulfillment in the ‘oracular tale,’ it may seem quite odd that some tales show no sign of fulfillment. This evidence would seem to challenge the conclusion that there is a principle of oracular fulfillment in Herodotus’ *Histories*. However, the rare exceptions may fairly be said to imply fulfillment in most cases, to have occurred in the time outside the chronological limits of the *Histories*, or to have been waiting for fulfillment still in Herodotus’ time.

It seems to be the case that Herodotus sometimes only alludes to oracular fulfillment, particularly in instances when he presents the oracular pronouncement as a clear command.¹⁴ When the people of Mareia and Apis, for example, consult the oracle of Zeus at Ammon, they ask whether they really needed to follow the Egyptian dietary law of not eating cows even though they think of themselves as Libyans.¹⁵ All Herodotus tells us here is that the oracle did not allow them to break those laws, since they were, in fact, Egyptians by the definitions proposed in the oracle. Much later in book four, though, he explains that the Libyans from Egypt to Lake Tritonis did not eat the meat of cows, and this area presumably included Mareia and Apis.¹⁶ Given the overarching pattern of obedience to oracular advice that is perceived as a command, as I indicated above,¹⁷ the straightforward prohibition in book two suggests that they followed the oracle’s advice. Further, Herodotus’ point with the story is that it confirms a

that not all of the conditions, directives, or predictions have a fulfillment that can be pointed to either within the text or historically. This evidence of imperfect fulfillment is also supports the tendentiousness of oracular tales what I examine in more detail in chapter four. Hans Klees has suggested that the oracle of Laius about the “Heracleian land” in Sicily and the Pythia’s commission of Doreius’ colonization efforts (Hdt. 5.43, #54, #55) both go unfulfilled. Klees, *Die Eigenart des griechischen Glaubens*, 76–9. However, the issue is not so apparent as that. According to the Sybarite tale, the Delphic oracle was fulfilled in Doreius’ co-capture of Sybaris with the Crotoniates, but it is uncertain how the Crotoniates would have found fulfillment for it. The single word in the indirect report of the Pythia’s pronouncement (αἰρήσειν) without indication of a subject or object could be understood as predicting that that journey would kill him, and I raise this possibility for the similar pronouncement given to Cleomenes (Hdt. 6.76–82, #75). See “*Cleomenes Taking “Argos”*” in chapter four. The oracle of Laius may, in fact, be thought of as fulfilled when Euryalus, a co-founder with Doreius, took control of Minoa (Hdt. 5.46.2).

¹⁴ Thomas Harrison has observed the insinuation of fulfillment in stories about other divine signs as well, like the dream of Pericles’ mother (Hdt. 6.131.2). Harrison, *Divinity and History*, 140.

¹⁵ Hdt. 2.18, #21. For other examples of implied fulfillment, see also #18, #26, #28, #80, #85, #107.

¹⁶ Hdt. 4.186.

¹⁷ See “Fulfillment: *Variations*” above.

definition of Egypt that he had conceived even before hearing the oracle. Just earlier in the narrative, he had defined Egypt as the land north of Elephantine in which Egyptians dwell.¹⁸ Naturally, since both Herodotus and the oracle considered the people of Mareia and Apis to be Egyptians, they must have followed Egyptian customs in Herodotus' own day.

Sometimes Herodotus does not provide a fulfillment for certain oracles in situations where the fulfillment did not happen within the major temporal limits of the *Histories*. Hippias' threat to the Corinthians, for instance, that they would rue the day when they failed to help subject the Athenians to the authority of a tyrant may seem all bluster at first glance, but Herodotus adds, "Hippias responded with these things since he of all men knew the oracles most precisely."¹⁹ With knowledge of the beginning of the Peloponnesian War, Hippias' threat sounds like a veiled reference to the future Corcyraean affair in which the Athenian fleet intervened in defense of Corcyra against its metropolis Corinth.²⁰ The oracles that the Lacedaemonians cite for explaining their fear of growing Athenian power may also hint toward this war.²¹ In all these stories, it is possible to locate a reasonable fulfillment between the chronological end of Herodotus' *Histories* and the time of his composition in the late-fifth century, and it is also fair to assume that Herodotus' audience would have been familiar with such memorable and recent events.

¹⁸ Hdt. 2.17.

¹⁹ Ἰππίας μὲν τούτοις ἀμείψατο οἷά τε τοὺς χρησμοὺς ἀτρεκέστατα ἀνδρῶν ἐξεπιστάμενος... Hdt. 5.93.2, #68. For a threat by Themistocles involving the citation of oracles, see #96. It may have been the case that this oracle was cited again as an impulse for the Athenian colonization of Thurii in southern Italy (444 BCE), in which Herodotus himself may have joined (Arist. *Rhet.* 3.9.2, 1409a27; Suda H.536). One of the conditions of the Delphic oracle to the Athenians regarding their revenge against the Aeginetans is that they would eventually subdue them, even if they preferred not to wait the thirty years dictated. Hdt. 5.89.2, #61. Their conquest of the Aeginetans was complete in 458 BCE.

²⁰ Hermann Strasburger, "Herodot und das perikleische Athen," *Historia: Zeitschrift für Alte Geschichte* 4, no. 1 (1955): 12–14.

²¹ #62 and #103.

However, in some cases, the oracle seems not to have found a fulfillment even by the time of composition. In his geography and ethnography of Libya, Herodotus explains, “They say that there is an oracle for the Lacedaemonians to colonize this island [Phla].”²² Herodotus’ phrasing suggests that the oracle had not been fulfilled by his own time. Otherwise, he would have stated simply that there was a Spartan colony there now. In all of these instances, it is clear that Herodotus mentions some oracles that were still considered to be active at the end of the Persian Wars in 479 BCE and even after the time of his composition at the end of the same century.²³

Divergences of Duplication

The remaining divergences between the basic pattern and the narrative arrangement of the episodes of the ‘oracular tale’ may be accounted for entirely by duplication within the basic pattern. These divergences may be neatly categorized. Frequently, an oracle may be understood as *predicting multiple events, offering multiple conditions, or issuing multiple directives* (Da). Indeed, spontaneous utterances, called *clodontes*, may also intervene and be understood as prophetic riders to the original pronouncement.²⁴ Necessarily, then, the number of moments of fulfillment may be correspondingly multiple and occur at various point in the chronology of the tale. In some cases, partial fulfillment of an oracle may even come chronologically before its pronouncement, given the importance of oracular *knowledge of present and past* (Sc) events and the effect of *remembrance* of an oracle (Sd) on narrative order. For example, in the Delphic

²² Ταύτην δὲ τὴν νῆσον Λακεδαιμονίοισι φασὶ λόγιον εἶναι κτίσαι. Hdt. 4.178, #49. See also #50

²³ The oracle that Onomacritus was accused of inserting into the collection of the oracles of Musaeus, which was supposed to have said that the islands around Lemnos would disappear into the sea, presents an interesting case study for the activities of oraclemongers. However, Herodotus considers it a forgery, and so there is no need to search for a fulfillment. Hdt. 7.6.3, #83.

²⁴ #40, #82, and #99. See “Pronouncement: *Variations of Mode*” above.

oracle given to the Siphnians, the consultants receive a condition for the fulfillment of the rest of the oracle relating to their prosperity: “But whenever there should come about a white prytany and a white-browed agora, then, in fact, there is need for the wise man to beware of a wooden ambush and a red herald.”²⁵ Herodotus goes on to say, “The agora and prytany of the Siphnians then were made of Parian marble.” Thus, the condition by which the wise man needed to beware was already fulfilled at the moment of the oracular pronouncement. Unfortunately for them, the Siphnians were collectively unwise in this matter.

The duplication of the episodes of *conjecture* and *action*, on the other hand, may be classified in three different ways. First, whenever there are *multiple knowledgeable parties* (Db) of the same oracle, each may try to advance their own respective agendas at cross-purposes. A particularly prominent example is the case of the oracle given to Alyattes. When the oracle became known to Thrasyboulus that Alyattes was not going to receive another oracle about his health until he had rebuilt the temple of Athena that his soldiers had burned to the ground, he anticipated Alyattes’ plan and forced him by a ruse to accept peace and an alliance on more favorable terms.²⁶ Here, the different agents take different actions based on their knowledge of the same oracle.

In other stories, consultants may, within the context of the story, *fail* (Dc) in their *conjectures* and subsequent *actions*, and consequently, they have to try again. A prominent example is the story about the oracle that the seer Teisamenus receives from Delphi. When

²⁵ Ἀλλ’ ὅταν ἐν Σίφνῳ πρυτανήια λευκὰ γένηται
 λευκοφρύς τ’ ἀγορή, τότε δὴ δεῖ φράδμονος ἀνδρὸς
 φράσσεσθαι ξύλινόν τε λόχον κήρυκά τ’ ἐρυθρόν.
 Τοῖσι δὲ Σιφνίοισι ἦν τότε ἡ ἀγορὴ καὶ τὸ πρυτανήιον Παρίῳ λίθῳ ἡσκημένα. Hdt. 3.57.3, #35.

²⁶ Hdt. 1.19–22, #3. Along with Thomas Harrison, I consider the Pythia’s response to Alyattes to be an oracle. Harrison, *Divinity and History*, 155. Although she claims that she will not give an oracle until Alyattes has rebuilt the temple, this kind of condition is precisely the sort of thing we find in other oracles. Indeed, when he does rebuild it, Alyattes recovers. Further, Herodotus does not seem to be certain what matter the consultation actually concerned. For another example of an agent other than the primary consultant taking action, see #50.

inquiring about offspring, Teisamenus is told that he will win five great contests.²⁷ He interprets the word “contests” to mean athletic competitions and begins training for the pentathlon. After a close loss in the Olympic games, the Spartans approach Teisamenus to ask him to lead their army as its seer, interpreting “contests” as “battles,” and after his acceptance, this interpretation proves valid in a series of five major Spartan victories. Teisamenus’ first failure to interpret the prophecy opens up the necessity of adopting a different interpretation and pursuing that one to its confirmation or validation.

Finally, in some tales, the episode of conjecture is expanded to embrace many different interpretations raised in public *debate* (Dd). A good example of this phenomenon is the Theban debate over the meaning of the oracle that told them to “ask their nearest.”

... the Thebans said, after hearing these things, ““Do not the Tanagraeans and Coronaeans and Thespians dwell ‘nearest’ us. These people, at least, endure war always eagerly fighting beside us. Why is it necessary to ‘ask’ them? But surely that is not what the oracle means.” While they were saying such things, someone, at long last, spoke up after considering the matter. “I think that I understand what the oracle wants to say to us. Both Thebe and Aegina are said to be daughters of Asopus. Since they are sisters, I think that the god is commanding us to ask the Aeginetans to be our avengers.”²⁸

Here, the Thebans weigh the merits of two possible interpretations of the oracle in their assembly. They immediately dismiss the former as improbable, and they adopt the latter as the basis of their subsequent actions. Herodotus may expand upon the syntagmatic structure of the tales that he tells in these ways. However, the overarching pattern is still fundamentally consistent with the general narrative schema of the ‘oracular tale.’

²⁷ Hdt. 9.33, #104.

²⁸ εἶπαν οἱ Θηβαῖοι ἀκούσαντες τούτων. Οὐκ ὦν ἄγχιστα ἡμέων οἰκέουσι Ταναγραῖοι τε καὶ Κορωναῖοι καὶ Θεσπιέες; Καὶ οὗτοί γε ἅμα ἡμῖν αἰεὶ μαχόμενοι προθύμως συνδιαφέρουσι τὸν πόλεμον. Τί δεῖ τούτων γε δέεσθαι; Ἀλλὰ μᾶλλον μὴ οὐ τοῦτο ἢ τὸ χρηστήριον. Τοιαῦτα ἐπιλεγόμενων εἶπε δὴ κοτε μαθὼν τις· Ἐγὼ μοι δοκέω συνιέναι τὸ θέλει λέγειν ἡμῖν τὸ μαντήιον. Ἀσωποῦ λέγονται γενέσθαι θυγατέρες Θήβη τε καὶ Αἶγινα· τουτέων ἀδελφεῶν ἐουσέων δοκέω ἡμῖν Αἰγινητέων δέεσθαι τὸν θεὸν χρῆσαι τιμωρητῶν γενέσθαι. Hdt. 5.79.2–80.1, #58.

Finally, oracular tales may be nested within and depend upon each other. This phenomenon results in the appearance of different suites of oracles that develop a greater plotline. Most famously, the Lydian *logos*, as has been noted by Lisa Maurizio and Julia Kindt,²⁹ is largely composed according to the general patterning of the ‘oracular tale,’ while containing a number of different oracular tales within it. The Lydian oracles all culminate in the fall of Croesus and the Pythia’s defense oracle that explains the fulfillment of many of the previous oracles.³⁰ Indeed, due to the “great empire” oracle, Croesus sets out to find the strongest of the Greeks and recruit them as his allies. The Spartan digression here contains a shorter suite of oracular tales that explain how the Spartans came to defeat the Tegeans after struggling mightily to win their battles.³¹ Whereas Croesus’ oracles are related to a broader range of issues, these Spartan oracles arise from the same issue that continues to frustrate them due to their misunderstanding and ignorance until a clever conjecture by Lichas provides them with the spiritual aid they need to defeat the Tegeans. Both sets of oracles, however, show Herodotus’ skill in planning his narrative. He remembers the oracles in his narrative that are still active even when the events that they predict happen far distant in the narrative from his first mention of their pronouncement.

Conclusion

The stories that Herodotus tells about oracles display a regular pattern in the sequence of their episodes. This pattern is consistent in the chronological sequence of episodes even when the narrative sequence varies according to the narrator’s purpose. The existence of this pattern shows

²⁹ Maurizio, “Interpretive Strategies,” 65–6; Kindt, *Revisiting Delphi*, 20–3.

³⁰ #2, #4, #5, #6, #13, #14.

³¹ #10, #11, #12.

not only a consistency in Herodotus' narrative method, but also a consistency in his thought about oracles. The syntagmatic structure of the 'oracular tale' is tied together not just chronologically but also causally and logically. For this reason, the 'oracular tale' is a kind of narrative schema. Just as I said in my discussion about the variations and substitutions in individual episodes above, Herodotus seems to have thought that his audience was capable of filling in the blanks in instances where he omits particular episodes. It is clear that when certain episodes are omitted from any tale, this omission does not vitiate the sequence in any way, since the schema strongly implies the continuing narrative effect of what is omitted. In order for his audience to understand these stories fully, despite their occasional fragmentary appearance, they must have had the schema of the 'oracular tale' as a familiar frame of reference.³² The consistency in Herodotus' thought about oracles, then, is both reflective and expressive of Greek cultural knowledge of this schema, which, I suggest, ultimately relates to how people within his culture actually consulted, interpreted, and acted upon oracles. In this way, oracular tales reflect a kind of social script of expected behavior.

³² "Similar patterns may be found for omens and predictions, and in other cases where the outcome of action is prefigured in the narrative. In order to understand these cases, it is necessary to be aware of what I have called the full form in each instance, for the narrative of Herodotus is often elliptic, and a short story or phrase may be unintelligible without reference to the complete pattern." Henry R. Immerwahr, *Form and Thought in Herodotus* (Chico, CA: Edwards Bros., 1981), 75. Importantly, Immerwahr's study of narrative patterns in Herodotus also includes similar schemas that are based on apparent facts and familiar procedures, like the precedence of thought to action and the procedure of a military campaign, respectively. Immerwahr, 67–78.

Part Three: Conclusion: The Import of Narrative Patterning in the ‘Oracular Tale’

I argued above for the existence of a prominent narrative pattern in the tales that Herodotus tells about oracles. Scholars have not totally ignored the existence of a pattern, but they have typically confined their comments to the correlation of the pronouncement and fulfillment. In this way, their conception of oracular tales as framed narrative units corresponds helpfully with Herodotus’ impulse toward narrative closure.¹ However, the conclusions that they draw from the existence of this prominent pattern vary widely. In the following part, I draw the conclusions from the analysis of oracular tales above into conversation with those reached by scholars who have approached the narrative patterning in these tales differently.

Narratological approaches have sought to understand the more basic pattern of pronouncement and fulfillment as imparting a dramatic effect on the narrative or to give insight into culturally significant themes. These observations are valid and useful for understanding the text and its contemporary effect. However, my concern is not to argue for the contemporary effect of this type of narrative. Rather, I seek to demonstrate that this narrative pattern is fundamental to a pattern of thought and action relating to oracles that Herodotus, the historical agents of his *Histories*, and his expected audience all shared. Folklorists have been interested in relating certain parts of the narrative pattern to the influence of folklore on Herodotus. As a consequence, they treat all such stories as historically unreliable evidence for determining how

¹ Ingrid Beck and Henry Immerwahr have likened this kind of narrative framing structure and other similar opening-and-closing patterns of repetition to ring composition. Mabel Lang coined the terms “directional statement” and “narrative hook” for characterizing similar narrative structures, and more recently Egbert Bakker has discussed Herodotus’ “complex strategy of signposting.” Mabel L. Lang, *Herodotean Narrative and Discourse* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984), 1–17; Egbert J. Bakker, “The Syntax of Historie: How Herodotus Writes,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Herodotus*, ed. Carolyn Dewald and John Marincola (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 92–102. Deborah Boedeker and John Herington have also paid special attention to topical and thematic closure at the end of the *Histories*. Deborah Boedeker, “Protesilaos and the End of Herodotus’ ‘Histories,’” *Classical Antiquity* 7, no. 1 (1988): 30–48; John Herington, “The Closure of Herodotus’ ‘Histories,’” *Illinois Classical Studies* 16, no. 1/2 (1991): 149–60.

people really dealt with oracles in ancient Greece. The point of my study of the ‘oracular tale’ is not to determine the historicity of any particular tale, but the historicity of Herodotus’ representation of how people consulted, interpreted, and acted upon oracular pronouncements generally. Further, it is helpful to note that what scholars of folklore take as manifest evidence of falsehood, Herodotus takes as proof of the truth value of oracles. Nevertheless, it is clear that Herodotus both depicts and participates in a lively tradition of storytelling about oracles just as the folklorists say. Some scholars who are particularly suspicious of the historicity of oracular tales attribute the origin of their patterning to their creation in different socio-political contexts according to a principle of propaganda. I argue that their results are contradictory and arbitrary and that even a false story must follow certain conventional paradigms of veracity in order to have the propagandistic effect that scholars presume these stories to have had. Finally, other scholars have understood the patterning to promote certain moral lessons and theological beliefs. While my conclusions do not challenge any of their findings, I draw attention to three specific examples in order to illustrate that the way a story is told influences Herodotus’ belief in an oracular tale and that his belief influences the way he tells an oracular story.

Narratology and Dramatic Effect and Theme

There can be no denying that the pairing of pronouncement and fulfillment has a dramatic effect for the narrative. This effect has been the focus of other recent narratological research. Irene de Jong and Jonas Grethlein have identified the pairing as a strategy of prolepsis and analepsis or “explicit narratorial foreshadowing.”² In this way of thinking, this type of foreshadowing in tales about oracles creates or highlights the tensions between the knowledge of

² Grethlein, “Philosophical and Structuralist Narratologies—Worlds Apart?,” 160–4; de Jong, “Narratological Aspects of the Histories of Herodotus,” 282–291.

the narrator, the audience, and the internal characters of the story. Grethlein thinks of this knowledge gap as occasioned by a concept that he calls the “future past.”³ This “future past” is a narrative feature of special significance to historiography in which the future of the historical actors falls temporally before a fixed moment in the past, the “historiographical *telos*,” that is known certainly to the historical narrator and at least potentially to the audience either through outside knowledge or from the historical narrator.⁴ The result of this difference in knowledge is that the audience can feel a sense of suspense at the introduction of the oracle and dramatic irony at the telling of its fulfillment. Given the importance of the pronouncement-fulfillment pattern to the ‘oracular tale’, our story type necessarily has the potential for creating suspense and irony that may be felt by the audience. Although it will be necessary to consider how narrative and belief influence each other, I am not especially concerned here with dramatic narrative effect.

Claude Calame is another scholar who has used a narratological approach on stories about oracles in Herodotus’ *Histories*. His work is related to mine in theory; however, his aims are entirely different. Calame is particularly interested in discovering the “deep semionarrative structures” and “figurative isotopies.”⁵ He argues that narrative shows a conflict that bears out a rearrangement of social concepts and values when agents with specific “semantic qualities” or “predicates” are introduced into the phases of Greimas’ “canonical narrative schema.” In his view, Herodotus’ stories about the colonization of Cyrene are political narratives that bear out a theme of establishing authority by way of its focus on civic actors, like the founding *oecist* figure, and the theme of civilization by way of the vegetal and golden-age imagery in the

³ See also Kindt, “Delphic Oracle Stories,” 43–4; Kindt, “Revelation, Narrative, and Cognition: Oracle Stories as Epiphanic Tales in Ancient Greece,” 52.

⁴ Jonas Grethlein, “‘Future Past’: Time and Teleology in (Ancient) Historiography,” *History and Theory* 53, no. 3 (2014): 309–15; Jonas Grethlein, “Ancient Historiography and ‘Future Past,’” in *Knowing Future Time in and through Greek Historiography*, ed. Alexandra Lianeri (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2016), 59–77.

⁵ Claude Calame, *Myth and History in Ancient Greece: The Symbolic Creation of a Colony*, trans. Daniel W. Berman (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), 32–3.

oracular pronouncements.⁶ Thus, his analysis of the syntactic arrangement of the canonical narrative schema within these tales is his way to get down to the more abstract level of culturally significant themes.

My analysis of the ‘oracular tale’ does not challenge Calame’s findings of culturally significant themes in oracular tales. Rather, I account better for the existence of the schema of the ‘oracular tale’ itself. The narratives betray a consistency in thought that is shared between the narrator, the internal historical agents, and his audience. As I have shown by the discussion of the syntagmatic structure of the ‘oracular tale’, Herodotus frequently omits particular episodes and scenes within certain tales. However, it is clear from comparative analysis within the *Histories* that this habit is more fairly considered to be ‘narrative compression’ than ignorance of the facts or evidence against the actuality of such episodes and scenes. One can never, of course, prove Herodotus’ knowledge of information that he does not provide, but our observation of the expansion and contraction of his oracular tales is suggestive of the fact that omissions result from his own narratorial preferences. The schema really represents a consistency in Herodotus’ and his historical agents’ way of thinking about oracles, but they are not unique in this thought. It is apparent from some forms of ‘narrative compression,’ like the presence of idiomatic expressions and the omission of certain scenes and episodes, that Herodotus expected his audience to have the same way of thinking about oracles as a frame of reference. This framework of the ‘oracular tale’ seems to have been cultural knowledge, for without it, some of his oracular tales would remain opaque in whole, like his tale of Peisistratus’ interpretation of Amphilytus’ oracle, or in part, like his occasional references to the seemingly spontaneous arrival of an oracle from a particular sanctuary.

⁶ Calame, 93–99.

Folklore Studies/Oral Tradition and Authenticity/Historicity

Using another approach to the oracular tales in Herodotus, scholars have studied the coincidence of prophetic pronouncement and fulfillment as bearing out certain identifiable folktale motifs in traditional tales. By calling the ‘oracular tale’ a traditional story, I myself do not mean that there is necessarily an exact correspondence between its narrative elements and the motifs identified from folktales in a modern index like that of Stith Thompson.⁷ Instead, I mean that the evidence of common sequences of action and of a regular story pattern in Herodotus suggests that he is following a way of telling stories about oracles that was itself traditional among his oral sources of information.

Herodotus, as a storyteller, was a collector and arranger of preexisting stories. He himself was not present at most of the events that he describes, and so, he relied much on what he heard (*akoe*), supplemented by what evidence he saw (*opsis*) and his own judgement (*gnome*).⁸ It has been well established that some of the stories that Herodotus tells share motifs familiar from popular folktales. In 1921, Wolf Aly composed the first extended study of the folktale motifs that appear in Herodotus’ *Histories*.⁹ Relying mostly on the catalogue of folktale types developed by Antti Aarne and a commentary on the folktales of the Grimm brothers by Johannes Bolte and Georg Polívka, he traced similarities through the entirety of the *Histories*. The traditional example of Herodotus’ potential debt to folktale is the story of Rhampsinitus and the thief from

⁷ Stith Thompson, *Motif-Index of Folk-Literature: A Classification of Narrative Elements in Folk-Tales, Ballads, Myths, Fables, Mediaeval Romances, Exempla, Fabliaux, Jest-Books, and Local Legends*, 6 vols. (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1932–1936).

⁸ Hdt. 2.99.1. See Aldo Corcella, “Herodotus and Analogy,” in *Herodotus: Volume 2: Herodotus and the World*, ed. Rosaria Vignolo Munson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 44–77.

⁹ Wolf Aly, *Volksmärchen, Sage und Novelle bei Herodot und seinen Zeitgenossen: Eine Untersuchung über die volkstümlichen Elemente der altgriechischen Prosaerzählung* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1921).

book two which shares some resemblance with the Grimms' "Der Meisterdieb": the thief fools the king and marries his daughter.¹⁰ Other scholars have followed Aly, though not as systematically, and demonstrated different and more complicated connections to folktale types and motifs using more recent theory and tools.¹¹ For example, Heinrich Bischoff and Richmond Lattimore were responsible for fleshing out the story type of "der Warner" or "the wise advisor."¹² The consequence of these and other findings is that we are compelled to think of Herodotus as a collector of preexisting stories—even a heroic hunter of these marvelous creatures, as Carolyn Dewald has memorably characterized him¹³—as much as a narrator.¹⁴ Herodotus is a re-arranger, re-interpreter, and re-teller of what Alan Griffiths calls the "hintertext,"¹⁵ and few now would deny it outright.¹⁶

¹⁰ Aly, 67–8.

¹¹ (Villainy to Villainy-Punished and Lack to Lack-Liquidated story types) John Nikolaos Kazazis, "Herodotos' Stories and History: A Propopian Analysis of His Narrative Technique." (Ph.D., United States -- Illinois, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 1978). ("Der Meisterdieb" and the "King's Parade template") Alan Griffiths, "Behind the Lines: The Genesis of Stories in Herodotus," in *Homer, Tragedy and Beyond: Essays in Honour of P.E. Easterling*, ed. Felix Budelmann and Pantelis Michelakis (London: Society for the Promotion of Hellenic Studies, 2001), 75–89. ("Our Lady's Child" and the story of Gyges and Croesus) William F. Hansen, "The Protagonist on the Pyre: Herodotean Legend and Modern Folktale," *Fabula* 37 (1996): 272–285; William F. Hansen, *Ariadne's Thread: A Guide to International Tales Found in Classical Literature*, Myth and Poetics. (Cornell University Press, 2002), 316–27.

¹² Heinrich Bischoff, "Der Warner Bei Herodot" (Dissertation, Marburg, Germany, Philipps University of Marburg, 1932); Richmond Lattimore, "The Wise Adviser in Herodotus," *Classical Philology* 34, no. 1 (1939): 24–35.

¹³ Carolyn Dewald, "Narrative Surface and Authorial Voice in Herodotus' 'Histories,'" *Arethusa* 20, no. 1/2 (1987): 147–70.

¹⁴ See Nino Luraghi, "The Stories Before the Histories: Folktale and Traditional Narrative in Herodotus," in *Herodotus: Volume 1: Herodotus and the Narrative of the Past*, ed. Rosaria Vignolo Munson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 87–112.

¹⁵ Griffiths, "Behind the Lines: The Genesis of Stories in Herodotus," 78.

¹⁶ Detlev Fehling's theory of systematic fabrication on Herodotus' part did have some partisans for a while in the so-called "liar school of Herodotus." Detlev Fehling, *Die Quellenangaben bei Herodot: Studien zur Erzählkunst Herodots* (Walter de Gruyter, 1971); O. Kimball Armayor, "Did Herodotus Ever Go to the Black Sea," *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology* 82 (1978): 45–62; O. Kimball Armayor, "Sesostris and Herodotus' Autopsy of Thrace, Colchis, Inland Asia Minor, and the Levant," *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology* 84 (1980): 51–74; Stephanie West, "Herodotus' Epigraphical Interests" 35, no. 2 (1985): 278–305; François Hartog, *The Mirror of Herodotus: The Representation of the Other in the Writing of History*, trans. Janet Lloyd (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988). For reaction to this position, see Murray, "Herodotus and Oral History," 1987; Gordon S. Shrimpton and K.M. Gillis, "Herodotus' Source Citations," in *History and Memory in Ancient Greece* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1997), 229–265; W. Kendrick Pritchett, *The Liar School of Herodotus* (Amsterdam: J.C. Gieben, 1993); Nino Luraghi, "Local Knowledge in Herodotus' Histories," in *The Historian's Craft in the Age of Herodotus*, ed. Nino Luraghi (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007); Robert Fowler,

Herodotus makes no secret of the fact that he is drawing his oracular tales largely from people who told him stories. He claims to have certain tales from named individuals four times in the *Histories*, and one of them bears the report of two oracular tales.¹⁷ He also refers the origin of other stories to specific groups of people. In the middle of the story of Alyattes' illness, for example, Herodotus says, "I know it, hearing from the Delphians that it happened in that way."¹⁸ Nino Luraghi has proposed that similar apparent citations simply refer the story to the "social surface," that is to say the people to whom the story is true or important.¹⁹ This explanation does alleviate some of the real issues relating to Detlev Fehling's famously critical observations regarding Herodotus' so-called *Epichoroi-Zitate*. However, few, I think, would deny the volume of evidence that Herodotus himself went to Delphi and heard some local stories about famous consultations there—his interest in reporting specific details of the dedications there and his claim to have heard from Delphians are more than just suggestive.²⁰ Although his versions are all that remain of these stories in some cases, they apparently did not originate with him. Rather, he re-tells these tales by expanding, compressing, and weaving them into the fabric of his inquiry into the Greco-Persian conflict.

"Herodotus and His Contemporaries," in *Herodotus: Volume 1: Herodotus and the Narrative of the Past*, ed. Rosaria Vignolo Munson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 80–6.

¹⁷ Promeneia, Timarete, and Nicandra (2.55.3, #23 and #24); Archias of Sparta (3.55); Tymnes, the non-Greek agent of Ariapeithes (4.76.6); and Thersander of Orchomenos (9.16).

¹⁸ Δελφῶν οἶδα ἐγὼ οὕτω ἀκούσας γενέσθαι... Hdt. 1.20.1.

¹⁹ Luraghi, "Local Knowledge in Herodotus' Histories."

²⁰ See for example, Hdt. 1.120. Harriet Flower points out that some of the oracular tales, like those of Croesus, may have been connected with the specific objects at Delphi as explanations for their existence, which, considering the importance of the dedications, may preserve historical facts fairly accurately. Flower, "Herodotus and Delphic Traditions," 140–3. I would argue also that the arrangement of these dedications in the sanctuary could have offered local guides and even visitors an effective means of remembering great volumes of details via spatial memory. On his use of inscriptions and dedications at Delphi as sources, see Manuela Mari, "From Inscriptions to Literature (and Sometimes Back Again): Some Uses of Epigraphic Sources in the Ancient Literary Traditions on Delphi," in *Inscriptions and Their Uses in Greek and Latin Literature*, ed. P. Liddel and P. Low (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 127–8. Felix Jacoby justly suspects the potential at least for elaboration in such oral traditions relating to monuments. Felix Jacoby, *Die Fragmente der griechischen Historiker*, vol. 3b: Kommentar zu nr. 297–607 (Text) (Leiden: Brill, 1955), 215.

Further, Herodotus' *Histories* actually portray the existence of a living tradition of oracular tale-telling. His characters sometimes cite oracles and tell oracular tales to persuade, trick, or cow each other into action or inaction. Cleomenes, for example, defended his actions on the Argive campaign to the ephors against a charge of bribery by means of a story about his oracle and sacrifice, and "saying these things, he was seeming to the Spartiates to say what was both believable and fitting, and he was acquitted by a large margin."²¹ Miltiades recalled an oracle to the Pelasgians in order to convince them to surrender Lemnos to Athenian control.²² Herodotus also represents historical figures as telling oracular tales, as in the case of Soclees the Corinthian and King Leotychidas of Sparta.²³ The evidence, therefore, shows that there was a tradition of oracular tale-telling in Classical Greece and that Herodotus was both drawing on and participating in this tradition in composing the *Histories*.

While the examples of Cleomenes and Miltiades help demonstrate that stories about oracles were familiar in Classical Greece, the two examples of the characters within the narrative telling oracular tales in the same way as Herodotus can be cited to confirm the traditional character of their narrative pattern. In the longest speech in the *Histories*, for example, the Corinthian Soclees gives a history of Corinthian tyranny that is essentially a series of five oracular tales, each showing evidence of the schema.²⁴ The uniformity of the stories between the main narrator and the internal narrators also shows that neither Herodotus nor his expected

²¹ Ταῦτα λέγων πιστά τε καὶ οἰκότα ἐδόκεε Σπαρτιῆτησι λέγειν καὶ διέφυγε πολλὸν τοὺς διώκοντας. Hdt. 6.82.2, #75. This passage provides more evidence for my argument that Herodotus is telling stories that aligned with Greek belief.

²² Hdt. 6.140.1, #82. Interestingly, it was not easy to persuade the Pelasgians that the oracle had been fulfilled. "Now the Hephæstians were persuaded, but the Myrinaeans were besieged since they did not agree that the Chersonese was Attic..." Ἡφαιστιᾶδες μὲν νῦν ἐπαίθοντο· Μυρινᾶιοι δὲ οὐ συγγινώσκοντες εἶναι τὴν Χερσόνησον Ἀττικὴν ἐπολιορκέοντο... Hdt. 6.140.2. The Myrinaeans debate the fulfillment of the central condition of the rider that the Pelasgians attached to the oracle, and Miltiades has to compel them by force to submit. This story is another great example of contingency of events and cracks in the logic of the 'oracular tale.' See chapter four.

²³ Hdt. 5.92, 6.86.

²⁴ Hdt. 5.92, #63, #64, #65, #66, #67.

audience were uncomfortable with stories about even relatively recent events falling into what some have classified as folktale motifs. In fact, contrary to modern expectations, Herodotus even expresses disbelief in the historicity of stories that do not maintain strict adherence to the schema, as I will show below.

In this way, I differ from Joseph Fontenrose, who has done the most systematic work in combing Herodotus' stories about oracles specifically for folkloric narrative elements.²⁵

Fontenrose analyzed these stories in closer comparison with other stories from the ancient and modern world. For example, he argues that the oracle predicting Cambyses' death expresses the folktale motif he calls "Jerusalem Chamber."²⁶ In this motif, a prophecy predicts the place and manner of a character's death, the character understands these indications incorrectly, and consequently, the character meets doom in an unexpected or ironic way. Just so, the oracle of Bouto tells Cambyses that he will die in Ecbatana, but assuming the oracle to mean Ecbatana of Media, the Persian king dies in Ecbatana of Syria instead from a bizarre riding accident.

Similarly, some motifs that Fontenrose identifies circle around the problem of understanding oracular pronouncements;²⁷ others have an oracle offer specific directives whose execution bear

²⁵ Fontenrose, *The Delphic Oracle*, 58–87. See also Fontenrose, "The Oracular Response." To an extent, he was following a small but productive group of scholars following Aly like H.W. Parke, D.E.W. Wormell, and Ronald Crahay who had already made gestures toward the folkloric traditions in tales about oracles, but their contributions in this area are much less pronounced. Additionally, in his dissertation of 1978, John Kazazis showed how an oracle can play the Proppian role of the donor, the agent who tests the hero or provides that character with magical assistance, in at least a few of Herodotus' tales. However, he has no special interest in or attention to oracles. Kazazis, "Herodotos' Stories and History," 69, 85, 90.

²⁶ Hdt. 3.64.3–5, #36. Fontenrose, *The Delphic Oracle*, 58–9. Aly suggested the folk tradition of an attempt to avoid the fulfillment of an oracle in the case of Cambyses. Aly, *Volksmärchen, Sage und Novelle bei Herodot und seinen Zeitgenossen*, 98. Crahay calls this story an example of "l'avertissement incompris" which he says are common in prophetic literature. Crahay, *La Littérature oraculaire*, 217.

²⁷ "Macduff and Birnam Wood" in the "Mule King" oracle (1.55.2, #6) and Siphnian oracle (3.57.3, #35), and "Equivocal Prediction of Death or Fortune" in the "Great Empire" oracle (1.53.3, #5). Fontenrose, *The Delphic Oracle*, 63, 65, 67.

similarities to folklore.²⁸ Fontenrose's interest in these oracles, therefore, has to do with the role or function they play in these different folkloric motifs, all of which may be subsumed into the 'oracular tale'.

Further, Fontenrose's purpose for investigating folkloric elements in these stories is to separate the historical and authentic wheat from the ahistorical and spurious chaff. By doing this, he aims to develop objective criteria for evaluating the authenticity of oracular pronouncements and reliable information about practices at Delphi.²⁹ As he himself says, "We are sure to consider the oracles of epic and tragedy unauthentic; for others, however, we look to the reliability of the source, to historical probability, and to the credibility both of the narrative which accompanies the response and of the response itself."³⁰ Thus, any hint of folkloric elements, in so far as they are deemed historically improbable or otherwise incredible, negates a story's value for investigating the historical habits of Delphic oracles and their use.

Lisa Maurizio, on the other hand, suggests that essentially the same narrative pattern as I demonstrated above is evidence of "structuration."³¹ She takes this concept of structuration from Jan Vansina's work on oral narrative and history. For Vansina, structuration is the process by which information is organized and reorganized when it is remembered, narrated, and re-remembered repeatedly within a community.³² This reorganization results in the addition and loss of data, altered temporal sequences, transposition of material, topical rearrangement, and narrative condensation. The end result of all of this change is that certain "definite patterns" appear in stories, and these are most noticeable in older stories where the process of structuration

²⁸ "Distinctive Sign" in the Argive double oracle (6.77.2, #76), "Hero Helper" in the "Bones of Orestes" oracle (1.67.4, #11), "King's Death for His City" in "The King or the City" oracle (7.220.3-4, #93), and "Minos and Skylla" in the Parians' oracle regarding Timo (6.135.2-3, #81). Fontenrose, 75, 77-8.

²⁹ Fontenrose, 1-10.

³⁰ Fontenrose, 11.

³¹ Maurizio, "Delphic Oracles as Oral Performances," 311-12.

³² Jan Vansina, *Oral Tradition as History* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985), 165-73.

has gone furthest in causing the narrative to conform to a pattern that makes them “most memorable and most significant.” In Maurizio’s thinking, the patterning occasioned by structuration is evidence of oral transmission, and this is the significant point of her argument. She thinks that it is necessary to adopt a different notion of authenticity due to the essentially oral character of the tales that report oracles. After objecting to the notion that oracles are authentic only if they report the very words that the Pythia spoke, Maurizio advocates for a definition of authenticity that is grounded in the study of orality and includes under its mantle all of the oracles and their related stories that were ever attributed to Delphi in antiquity.³³ Given the amount of narrative change that she suggests in her citation of Vansina’s concept of structuration, she leaves us with only a very strange kind of authenticity to which to cling. According to earlier notions of authenticity, she would have to admit that none are authentic, since they cannot be said to report the very words of the Pythia; by hers, however, all are authentic, since they are all attributed to Delphi in antiquity. In the end, it is difficult to avoid the thought that there is little profit to be gained from such a new definition.

³³ The idea that consultants, as the audience of oracles and oracular tales, had the authority to deny the authenticity of a prophet or reporter of an oracle comes from Gregory Nagy and is followed by Julia Kindt and Ralph Anderson to name only two. Gregory Nagy, *Poetry as Performance: Homer and Beyond* (Cambridge University Press, 1996); Julia Kindt, “Oracular Ambiguity as a Mediation Triple,” *Classicum* 334 (2008): 23–4; Kindt, *Revisiting Delphi*, 13–14; Kindt, “The Inspired Voice,” 218; Anderson, “A Story of Blood,” 53–4. However, I cannot accept Maurizio’s argument for a consultant’s prerogative to “reject [the Pythia’s] performance and thereby [to] refuse to confer authority on her.” Maurizio, “Delphic Oracles as Oral Performances,” 316–17. In the case of the first Athenian consultation about the Persian invasion, which she cites on this point, the oracle is fulfilled regardless of the delegates’ resistance to accepting it: Athens and Attica are laid waste, and the Athenians “flee to the ends of the land” (φύγ’ ἐς ἔσχατα γαίης) by abandoning Athens and taking to the sea (Hdt. 7.139.2, 8.41.2, 8.54.1, #86). In the end, it appears that the Athenians took the Pythia’s advice seriously, even if they did not like it (8.53.1). See Harrison, ““Prophecy in Reverse?,”” 151–2. Otherwise, we end up wondering why they would deny the authenticity of an oracle upon whose advice they acted, and even more troubling to Maurizio’s interpretation, why either they or Herodotus would have bothered to record and preserve it as part of an oracular story that follows the same pattern as that of the “wooden wall” oracle, which was supposedly meant to take its place. Further, the story is clear: the community only debates interpretation, not authority. See “*Oracular Collections and the Notions of “Authenticity” and “Flexibility”*” in chapter four. In Herodotus, while consultants do occasionally complain in the episode of consultation about the oracles they receive, they generally do not have much persuasive effect and fulfillment follows whether they like it or not (#14, #16, #17, #27, #40, #43, #78).

My purpose, however, is not to pronounce judgement upon the authenticity of individual oracles or the historicity of any particular stories in Herodotus, even though I am inclined to think that there is more truth there than Fontenrose and even Maurizio have supposed. Rather, I point out that neither of these excellent scholars seriously considers that much of our human existence appears or is patterned. These patterns may be natural, as in the seasons of the year or cycles of life; intentional, as in the familiar pattern of action involved in going through airport security; or incidental, as in the sense of déjà vu. Michael Shermer puts it best: “Humans are, by nature, pattern-seeking, storytelling animals, and we are quite adept at telling stories about patterns whether they exist or not.”³⁴ I argue that the patterning of the ‘oracular tale’ is reflective not only of a belief in oracular prophecy and a traditional way of telling stories, but also a culturally known way of consulting, obtaining, and interpreting oracles that is borne out in the plot of these tales. It is the pattern of action and thought in the ‘oracular tale’ that is authentically and historically related to the use of oracles in ancient Greece. The ‘oracular tale’ expresses socially codified expectations of action, and in this way, one may consider the ‘oracular tale’ to be a familiar social script in the ancient Greek world that was acted out by those who would consult and use oracles.

Socio-Political History and Herodotus’ Sources

Since my argument has to do with a more general, cultural way of telling stories and thinking about oracles, I am not concerned with tracking down Herodotus’ sources of information precisely. Since Herodotus recorded these stories, they must have been circulating in the Greek-speaking world. However, the apparent coincidence of prophetic fulfillment has led

³⁴ Michael Shermer, “Out of This World,” *Washington Post*, November 21, 1999, sec. X.

some scholars to suspect the involvement of biased storytellers and to conjecture origins for these stories. Roland Crahay's *La Littérature oraculaire chez Hérodote* represents the most systematic review of oracular tales in this light. After arguing that the overwhelming majority of oracles preserved among the fifth-century historians can in no way be considered authentic,³⁵ Crahay shifts his attention to the questions of who composed these oracles and their accompanying stories and why they did so. In his opinion, states, public officials, priests of oracular sanctuaries, and even private persons all fabricated and collected favorable oracles at times in order to defend their interests in the present and press their agendas in the future.³⁶ In this way of thinking, the original context of the oracular tales that Herodotus reports is not the historical events actually recorded in the *Histories* but the silent political machinations of his contemporary world.

An appropriate and familiar case study is the famous “wooden wall” oracle. Crahay himself suggests a novel context for both the oracle and the story. He thinks that the wording of the oracle and the circumstances of the later Battle of Salamis fall too closely in line with Themistocles' own naval agenda to be believable as genuine. Rather, he thinks that Themistocles himself fobbed off these lines on Delphi, estimating that if things turned out well, Delphi would not bother to deny such complimentary evidence of its prescience.³⁷ He also suggests that the story quickly became popular after the victory at Salamis among patriotic Athenians working in defense of imperialism. It was, after all, Athenian courage and determination in the face of the Persian onslaught and fearsome oracles that saved Greece from the barbarians. Albert Oeri, on

³⁵ Crahay, *La Littérature oraculaire*, 3–22.

³⁶ Crahay, 21–22, 58–60.

³⁷ Crahay, 302. Marie Delcourt follows Crahay, and H.W. and D.E.W. Wormell, and A.J. Holladay also think it likely that Themistocles was responsible for the oracle in some way, at least exerting pressure on Delphi to give it. Marie Delcourt, *L'Oracles de Delphes* (Paris, 1955), 130; Parke and Wormell, *The Delphic Oracle*, 1956, 1:169–71; A. J. Holladay, “The Forethought of Themistocles,” *The Journal of Hellenic Studies* 107 (1987): 182–87.

the other hand, attributed the story to a Delphic source, whom he called ‘philodelphus.’ As he formulaically put it in his dissertation of 1899, “No one does not see that the last two verses of oracle II were made up after the Battle of Salamis by a man who held the glory of Apollo close to his heart.”³⁸ This Delphic source has been identified by some as the priests or other partisans who twisted the facts either toward the greater glory or in defense of Pythian Apollo.

The same question—*cui bono*?—lies behind all such theories about sources and deals with the supposed political stakes in various epochs. As can be seen in the case study above, there could be a number of different answers to this question, and deciding among potential sources is often subjective. It must be conceded that oracles and stories about oracles could be subject to all kinds of intentional and unintentional manipulation—Oswin Murray calls it “deformation,” and Lisa Maurizio, “falsification.”³⁹ However, in order for these stories to have their propagandistic effect, as scholars like Oeri and Crahay assume they did, it would seem to be necessary that at least the process of consultation and interpretation depicted in these tales would need to align with cultural knowledge about how people actually obtained and used oracles. Otherwise, the story would be unbelievable, and its intended effect, undermined.

Here, Leotychidas’ speech to the Athenian assembly is an important example. Leotychidas and Cleomenes once deposited Aeginetan hostages with the Athenians.⁴⁰ When only Leotychidas returned to collect them, the Athenians claimed that it would not be just to return them to the one without the other.⁴¹ In response, the Spartan king told them a traditional Spartan

³⁸ ‘Nemo non videt ultimos duos versus oraculi II post pugnam Salaminiam fictos esse ab homine, cui corde erat Apollinis gloria.’ Albert Oeri, “De Herodoti fonte Delphico” (Ph.D., Basil, University of Basil, 1899), 39. For a more expansive discussion of his findings, see 38–41, 64–8. Oeri was not the last to suppose a Delphic source for some of Herodotus’ stories about oracles. Arthur Fairbanks, “Herodotus and the Oracle at Delphi,” *The Classical Journal* 1, no. 2 (1906): 37–48; Flower, “Herodotus and Delphic Traditions.”

³⁹ Murray, “Herodotus and Oral History,” 1987, 102; Maurizio, “Interpretive Strategies,” 68–70.

⁴⁰ Hdt. 6.73.2.

⁴¹ Hdt. 6.86.

story, he claimed, about a man named Glaucus who once refused to return a deposit to his guest-friend. He consulted the oracle to ask permission to swear a false oath and claim the deposit as profit, but the Pythia told him:

Glaucus, son of Epicydas, it is more profitable immediately to win by an oath and to take the money. Swear, since death, at least, stays the trustworthy man. But the child of Oath is nameless and neither does he have hands nor feet, but swiftly he pursues, until, catching them, he destroys a whole family and a whole house. But the family of a trustworthy man is better later.⁴²

According to Leotychidas, Glaucus tried to ask for forgiveness, but the Pythia told him that asking for permission to commit such a deed was as bad as to do it.⁴³ He returned the deposit in the end, but it was too late. Leotychidas concluded with a moral: “Now there is no offspring of Glaucus at all nor any household considered to be related to Glaucus, and he was torn out of Sparta at the root. Thus, it is not a good thing to have anything in mind about a deposit other than to return it when they ask.”⁴⁴ Leotychidas clearly had an agenda in telling this story. This oracular story may not have actually happened; Leotychidas may have made it up on the spot. However, the idea that one could make up such an oracular story, and an oracle along with it, presupposes that there was a familiar model from which to work, as Martin Nilsson noted long ago in his critique of the notion about authentic oracles prevailing at his time.⁴⁵ A counterfeiter imitates what it is genuine in order to profit.⁴⁶ Indeed, the story closely follows the schema of the

⁴² Γλαῦκ' Ἐπικυδείδῃ, τὸ μὲν αὐτίκα κέρδιον οὕτω
ὄρκῳ νικῆσαι καὶ χρήματα λήισσασθαι·
ὄμνυ, ἐπεὶ θάνατός γε καὶ εὐόρκον μένει ἄνδρα.
Ἀλλ' Ὀρκου πάϊς ἔστιν, ἀνώνυμος οὐδ' ἐπὶ χεῖρες
οὐδὲ πόδες· κραιπνὸς δὲ μετέρχεται, εἰς ὃ κε πᾶσαν
συμμάρψας ὀλέσῃ γενεὴν καὶ οἶκον ἅπαντα·
ἄνδρὸς δ' εὐόρκου γενεὴ μετόπισθεν ἀμείνων. Hdt. 6.86.γ.2, #77.

⁴³ Hdt. 6.86.γ.2, #78.

⁴⁴ Γλαύκου νῦν οὔτε τι ἀπόγονον ἔστι οὐδὲν οὔτ' ἰστίη οὐδεμία νομιζομένη εἶναι Γλαύκου, ἐκτέτριπταί τε πρόρριζος ἐκ Σπάρτης. Οὕτω ἀγαθὸν μὴδὲ διανοέεσθαι περὶ παρακαταθήκης ἄλλο γε ἢ ἀπαιτεόντων ἀποδιδόναι. Hdt. 6.86.δ.

⁴⁵ Martin P. Nilsson, “Das delphische Orakel in der neuesten Literatur,” *Historia* 7, no. 2 (1958): 247, 248.

⁴⁶ As Thomas Harrison says, “False prophets too, like false oracles, presuppose true ones.” Harrison, *Divinity and History*, 142.

‘oracular tale,’ and its narrative and chronological order follow in lockstep.⁴⁷ Neither Leotychidas, if he actually told this story; nor the Delphic priests, if Crahay is to be believed⁴⁸; nor Herodotus, nor anyone’s audience could have supposed that this moral lesson would have been persuasive if this story falsely represented how people sought oracles and how they were interpreted and thought to be fulfilled. No one could have believed any of these tales to be true if they utterly misrepresented what people were actually doing with oracles, and no appeal to social constructionism or literary license can fully explain this disconnect.⁴⁹

In the end, though, examining potential bias and determining the precise sources of Herodotus’ information is not material to my argument. There is, indeed, a good case to be made that people at Delphi were prominent sources for Herodotus. However, whether a story came from Athens, Delphi, or indeed professional “remembrancers” of any other polis,⁵⁰ does not change the fact that it was a story in circulation among Greeks in Herodotus’ time, and my argument is not concerned here with the political stakes per se.

Thematic Patterning and Moral, Theological, and Historiographical Import

Other scholars are interested in the pattern of pronouncement and fulfillment as a way for Herodotus to indicate theological truths and moral lessons. There can be little doubt that

⁴⁷ #77: A—B1a—{P}—B1b—#78—D—E; #78: A—B—{P}—D—E.

⁴⁸ Crahay, *La Littérature oraculaire*, 99.

⁴⁹ *Contra* Bowden, *Classical Athens and the Delphic Oracle*, 107; Naerebout and Beerden, “Gods Cannot Tell Lies.” Ralph Anderson offers an argument similar to mine that the acceptance of Herodotus’ stories about oracles must hinge on specific and culturally known grounds about how oracles were used in Ancient Greece. Anderson, “A Story of Blood,” 54.

⁵⁰ In an attempt to explain the conflicting accounts that Herodotus reports and the frequent appearance of *Epichoroi-Zitate* (e.g., “The Aeginetans says...”), J.A.S. Evans hypothesized that an official class of professional remembrancers in the Archaic Age who were responsible for remembering the oral traditions of their poleis, and that there were a few left in the fifth century with which Herodotus could speak. J. A. S. Evans, “Oral Tradition in Herodotus,” in *Herodotus: Volume 1: Herodotus and the Narrative Past*, ed. Rosaria Vignolo Munson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 113–123.

Herodotus' world takes as a given that oracles can offer humans a glimpse of the future known to the gods, and that the oracular tales he tells may be understood as conveying a moral theme. To Oswin Murray, the story pattern of rise, *hybris*, and fall, which tracks closely with the pronouncement and fulfillment of a number of oracular tales in the *Histories*, seems to align closely with a Delphic morality best exemplified by the traditional maxims, "Know thyself" and "Nothing in excess."⁵¹ Whereas Murray pushes this "moral and aesthetic patterning" further to theorize about Herodotus' debt to Delphic and eastern Greek traditions of storytelling, others are content to refine how this patterning offers a more specific theological and moral meaning. Jutta Kirchberg, Thomas Harrison, and Julia Kindt have come to similar conclusions in this regard. To them, the recurring pattern in stories about oracles gives the impression that many of the events in the world of the *Histories* come about as a result of a predetermined fate known to the gods.⁵² It is the operation of fate that pushes the moral lesson in these stories: human beings need to acknowledge and live according to their proper place in the cosmic order, since *hybris* brings *nemesis*. Indeed, Harrison and Kindt think that the pattern of pronouncement and fulfillment are so important that they consider it to be more fundamental to Herodotus' approach to historiography: an oracle's prophetic foresight provides an authoritative complement to the narrator's historiographical hindsight.

Certainly, I can agree that the pattern of prophecy and fulfillment in the *Histories* may give the impression of a predetermined fate, but a statement like this is almost a truism, as Harrison acknowledges. Once it has happened, an event cannot have happened any differently

⁵¹ Murray, "Herodotus and Oral History," 1987, 101–8.

⁵² Kirchberg, *Die Funktion der Orakel*, 117–18; Harrison, "'Prophecy in Reverse?'" ; Kindt, "Delphic Oracle Stories"; Kindt, *Revisiting Delphi*, 16–54. Julia Kindt's recent work on narratology and oracular tales points to the same conclusions with greater theoretical complexity. Kindt, "Revelation, Narrative, and Cognition: Oracle Stories as Epiphanic Tales in Ancient Greece."

than it did happen—thinking to the contrary only raises the counterfactual fallacy. Similarly, once it has been told, to consider that the story might have been told differently is simply speculation. Any complete narrative, then, carries a certain fated aspect with it.⁵³ I will show later in chapter four that this fact is why narratives make the most convincing proof of divinatory foreknowledge—that it worked as opposed to *how* it worked. However, it is key to understand that telling this kind of story influences belief in the prophetic plan as much as belief in the prophetic plan influences the telling of this kind of story.

There are two tales in Herodotus that illustrate the mutual influence between belief and storytelling. The first comes following the story of Cambyses' mistreatment of the corpse of Amasis. Here, Herodotus tells an alternative, Egyptian story about how Amasis actually escaped this violation.

But as the Egyptians say, Amasis did not suffer these things, but some other Egyptian who was the same age as Amasis, whom the Persians maltreated thinking that they were maltreating Amasis. For they say that when Amasis learned from an oracle the things that were going to happen to him when he died, thus, in fact, taking measures against the things to come, he buried that dead man, the one that was actually whipped, close to the doors inside his own tomb, and he ordered his son to bury his own body in as deep of a recess of the tomb as possible. Now the commands of Amasis themselves, the ones pertaining to the tomb and the man, do not seem to be well founded to me, but it seems that the Egyptians are granting these events undeserved dignity.⁵⁴

⁵³ "Narrative, as a narrow subset of texts, is by definition incapable of complete incoherence. In light of its finite and composed nature, a narrative is a *closed system*. Epistemologically, this does not mean that readers are Cartesian neutral observers, but merely observers external to the narrative world who are able to see the narrative (*sjuzhet*) as a temporal whole (unlike the author, who cannot perceive the full *fabula*). The subjective yet external viewpoint of the reader reveals that the composition of the narrative is limited and preset. Therefore, on the most rudimentary level, narrative is fully deterministic in that the temporal progression is fixed. Douglas Estes, *The Temporal Mechanics of the Fourth Gospel: A Theory of Hermeneutical Relativity in the Gospel of John* (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 166, see also 91–3.

⁵⁴ Ὡς μέντοι Αἰγύπτιοι λέγουσι, οὐκ Ἀμασις ἦν ὁ ταῦτα παθών, ἀλλὰ ἄλλος τις τῶν Αἰγυπτίων ἔχων τὴν αὐτὴν ἡλικίην Ἀμάσι, τῷ λυμαινόμενῳ Πέρσαι ἐδόκεον Ἀμάσι λυμαινέσθαι. Λέγουσι γὰρ ὡς πυθόμενος ἐκ μαντηίου ὁ Ἀμασις τὰ περὶ ἐωυτὸν ἀποθανόντα μέλλοντα γίνεσθαι, οὕτω δὲ ἀκεόμενος τὰ ἐπιφερόμενα τὸν μὲν ἄνθρωπον τοῦτον τὸν μαστιγωθέντα ἀποθανόντα ἔθαψε ἐπὶ τῇσι θύρῃσι ἐντὸς τῆς ἐωυτοῦ θήκης, ἐωυτὸν δὲ ἐνετείλατο τῷ παιδί ἐν μυχῷ τῆς θήκης ὡς μάλιστα θεῖναι. Αἱ μὲν νυν ἐκ τοῦ Ἀμάσιος ἐντολαὶ αὗται αἱ ἐξ τὴν ταφὴν τε καὶ τὸν ἄνθρωπον ἔχουσαι οὓς μοι δοκέουσι ἀρχὴν γενέσθαι, ἄλλως δ' αὐτὰ Αἰγύπτιοι σεμνοῦν. Hdt. 3.16.5–7, #34. There are only two other tales in which there is clearly non-fulfillment. The first also involves Amasis, who, in his thieving days, escaped conviction for his crimes by some oracle (#33). But Herodotus and Amasis himself seem to consider

In this story, Amasis learns about what is going to happen to his corpse when he dies, and he successfully avoids the oracle's prophecy by his ruse of substitution. The story that the Egyptians tell clearly violates the internal logic of the 'oracular tale.' People obey or disobey oracular commands and benefit from or suffer whatever consequences come, but for oracular prediction to be truly prophetic, what is predicted must be the ultimate result. With the structure of the 'oracular tale' as a rubric, therefore, it is clear why Herodotus thinks that the Egyptians are just trying to save face in the end by this story. In this case, Herodotus seems to be using the 'oracular tale' as a frame of reference for evaluating the truth of the matter.⁵⁵ Thus, the manner in which a story is told affects Herodotus', and his audience's, belief in it.

We also find evidence of belief influencing the way Herodotus tells a story. The best example of this comes when Mardonius sends a messenger named Mus to oracles throughout northern Greece. Herodotus does not know either the reason for the consultation or the pronouncements that Mardonius received; he only knows what happened next.

Mardonius read what, in fact, the oracles were saying, and afterwards he sent Alexander the Macedonian and son of Amyntes as a messenger to Athens... For in this way, he was especially minded to win over the Athenians, when he was hearing that they were numerous and strong among the rest of the peoples, and he knew that the Athenians had caused the great misfortunes that had happened to them at sea. He was hoping, after they were added, that he would easily seize control of the sea, which indeed would have been

these to be false prophetic statements. The second is about the Achaeans and their attempted sacrifice of Athamas "in accordance with an oracle" (#92). Athamas was saved from this fate in the end by the intervention of Cytissorus, whose family is cursed for his trouble. The story is a myth, as is clear from the fact that this traditional story is told by guides at Halos in Achaea to Xerxes. We do not have enough context either from Herodotus or other extant Greek literature to determine whether the oracle went totally unfulfilled, and in any case, failure to follow through with an oracle's advice is a completely different thing from the non-fulfillment of a predicted outcome. Moreover, the curse of Cytissorus suggests that interference with an oracle's fulfillment was sacrilegious.

⁵⁵ In another example, Herodotus reports a Sybarite tale of Doreius' death, which to them represents a μαρτύριον μέγιστον (Hdt. 5.45.1). Apparently, they thought that his death in Sicily was proof that the oracle about him taking "the land to which he set out" (Hdt. 5.43, #55) had been fulfilled in helping the Crotoniates in battle against them. Interestingly, the Crotoniates debate about the terms of the claimed fulfillment of the oracle and not the validity of the oracle itself. Since they did not, in fact, give over any land to Doreius (and they would have done so if he had participated), he must not have helped them. Herodotus tells his readers to believe what they like but goes on to describe how the expedition to Sicily did have some minor success in capturing Minoa (5.46–7). The Crotoniates could have pointed this way for the fulfillment of the oracle.

right, and he was thinking his forces by land to be superior by far. Thus, he was reasoning that his forces would beat the Greeks. Perhaps the oracles would predict these things for him, counselling him to make the Athenians his ally. Being, in fact, obedient to these, he was sending Alexander.⁵⁶

In this tale, Herodotus is trying to explain Mardonius' effort to seek an Athenian alliance in a way that makes sense in terms of a practical strategy in his position at that time and in terms of his knowledge that Mardonius sought oracles. The challenge is obviously that Herodotus cannot access the mind of Mardonius, nor does he have any knowledge of what the oracles said. Instead, Herodotus must rely on reasonable supposition. This place is where the framework of the 'oracular tale' comes in handy. According to the structure of the 'oracular tale', what is missing are the episodes of pronouncement and conjecture. It is no coincidence that Herodotus provides exactly these two pieces with his guesses at the advice of the oracle and his reasoning behind Mardonius' actions. Fascinatingly, Herodotus fills in the blanks of an oracular story that he heard in exactly the same way that he seems to have expected his audience to do it. This account is a clear instance in which his belief has influenced the story.

Herodotus even challenges stories that he has heard by promoting stories of his own creation that he believes to be more believable. In one such instances, it is not so much that he disbelieves the narrative that he received about a particular oracle and its fulfillment but that he thinks the oracle to have even greater significance than might have been supposed.

And when time passed, there came about a son for him [Polymnestus], weak-voiced and stammering, by the name Battus, as the Theraeans and the Cyrenaeanes say, but as I think some other name. He adopted the name Battus when he came into Libya, both from the

⁵⁶ Μαρδόνιος δὲ ἐπιλεξάμενος ὃ τι δὴ λέγοντα ἦν τὰ χρηστήρια, μετὰ ταῦτα ἔπεμψε ἄγγελον εἰς Ἀθήνας Ἀλέξανδρον τὸν Ἀμύντεω ἄνδρα Μακεδόνα, ... Τοὺς γὰρ Ἀθηναίους οὕτω ἐδόκεε μάλιστα προσκτῆσεσθαι, λεῶν τε πολλὸν ἄρα ἀκούων εἶναι καὶ ἄλκιμον, τὰ τε κατὰ τὴν θάλασσαν συντυχόντα σφί παθήματα κατεργασαμένους μάλιστα Ἀθηναίους ἐπίστατο. Τούτων δὲ προσγενομένων κατήλπιζε εὐπετέως τῆς θαλάσσης κρατήσῃν, τὰ περ ἂν καὶ ἦν, πέζῃ τε ἐδόκεε πολλῶ εἶναι κρέσσων· οὕτω τε ἐλογίζετο κατύπερθε οἱ τὰ πρήγματα ἔσεσθαι τῶν Ἑλληνικῶν. Τάχα δ' ἂν καὶ τὰ χρηστήρια ταῦτά οἱ προλέγοι, συμβουλευόντα σύμμαχον τὸν Ἀθηναῖον ποιέεσθαι· τοῖσι δὲ πειθόμενος ἔπεμπε. Hdt. 8.136.1–3, #101. See also Herodotus' explicit reframing of the history of Battus' name as an oracular tale in light of the fact that "Battus" means "king" in Libyan. The Pythia, therefore, in her address of this man as "Battus" predicted that he would be a king in Libya. Hdt. 4.155 (#42)

oracle he received in Delphi and from the honor that he was considering the name to be. For the Libyans call a king (βασιλέα) *battus* (βάττον), and on account of that, I think that the Pythia, while prophesying (θεσπίζουσιν), invoked him in the Libyan language, having known (εἰδυῖαν) that he would be a king in Libya. For when that man was of age, he came to Delphi about his voice. When he was asking, the Pythia declares to him the following things: “Battus (Βάττ’), you have come for your voice, but Phoebus Apollo sends you as a founder to flock-nourishing Libya,” just as if she might have said in the Greek language, declaring, “King (βασιλεῦ), you have come for your voice.”⁵⁷

The story that Herodotus received from the Theraeans and the Cyrenaeans was that Battus had been born with that name. After suffering until adulthood from a frail voice and some sort of speech impediment, he went to ask Delphi about a remedy, and he was greeted by the Pythia by name and told to found a colony in Libya. As the story goes on to say, Battus does eventually go on to found Libyan Cyrene just as the oracle told him he should. Herodotus, however, believes that the Pythia’s pronouncement was prophetic of more than just his later foundation of Cyrene as an *oecist*. The historian finds it especially significant that the word for king in the Libyan tongue happens to be *battus*. Thus, he supposes that Battus was not the given name of the founder and later king of Cyrene, and that he adopted this name after he arrived in Libya in memory of the oracle he received and on account of the honor of the name “King” itself. By accounting for the interesting coincidence between the name of the man and the Libyan word for king in this way, Herodotus pushes beyond the traditional limits of the story and concludes that the Pythia prophesied (θεσπίζουσιν) and foreknew (εἰδυῖαν) that Battus would be a Libyan king. His incorporation of additional correspondences between the words of this pronouncement and

⁵⁷ Χρόνου δὲ περιόντος ἐξεγένετό οἱ παῖς ἰσχόφωνος καὶ τραυλός, τῷ οὐνομα ἐτέθη Βάττος, ὡς Θηραῖοι τε καὶ Κυρηναῖοι λέγουσι, ὡς μέντοι ἐγὼ δοκέω, ἄλλο τι· Βάττος δὲ μετωνομάσθη, ἐπεῖτε ἐς Λιβύην ἀπύκετο, ἀπὸ τε τοῦ χρηστηρίου τοῦ γενομένου ἐν Δελφοῖσι αὐτῷ καὶ ἀπὸ τῆς τιμῆς τὴν ἔσχε τὴν ἐπωνυμίην ποιεύμενος. Λίβυες γὰρ βασιλέα βάττον καλέουσι, καὶ τούτου εἵνεκα δοκέω θεσπίζουσιν τὴν Πυθίην καλέσαι μιν Λιβυκῇ γλώσσῃ, εἰδυῖαν ὡς βασιλεὺς ἔσται ἐν Λιβύῃ. Ἐπεῖτε γὰρ ἠνδρώθη οὗτος, ἦλθε ἐς Δελφοὺς περὶ τῆς φωνῆς· ἐπειρωτῶντι δὲ οἱ χρᾶ ἢ Πυθίῃ τάδε·

Βάττ’, ἐπὶ φωνὴν ἦλθες· ἄναξ δέ σε Φοῖβος Ἀπόλλων

ἐς Λιβύην πέμπει μηλοτρόφον οἰκιστῆρα,

ὥσπερ εἰ εἴποι Ἑλλάδι γλώσση χρεωμένη· Ὡ βασιλεῦ, ἐπὶ φωνὴν ἦλθες. Hdt. 4.155.1–3, #42.

its fulfillment show that the 'oracular tale' is not simply a pattern of thought used to fill in apparent gaps in different accounts or to evaluate the truth or falsehood of particular tales. It is also the pattern to which all data must be reconciled in order to be believable and by which the knowledgeable may locate and explicate deeper prophetic meaning.

CHAPTER THREE: THE 'ORACULAR TALE' IN THE EPIGRAPHIC EVIDENCE AND THUCYDIDES

Introduction

Modern scholarship on oracles and divination in ancient Greece has viewed Herodotus too skeptically. His apparent legitimation of prophetic power and of divine operation in the physical world by his marvelous tales of oracular fulfillment has negatively affected his modern reception in our post-Enlightenment world. On this point, I can do no better than quote from Fontenrose's conclusion at some length.

The issue in effect reduces itself to the trustworthiness of the Delphic oracles that Herodotos reports; readers want to believe his stories of remarkable oracles. Crahay (1956) has carefully studied all the oracles that Herodotos quotes or reports and has come to the conclusion that most are not authentic, at least in the form which Herodotos reports them. If anyone objects (see Nilsson 1958: 247) that the form of an authentic response must be like that of genuine oracles (since it would be modeled on them), I can only reply that this was definitely not the case in ancient Greece. Narrative oracles take the forms established in narrative and chresmologic tradition, not the form of demonstrably genuine responses. It was on this tradition that Herodotos and his sources drew.¹

It is Fontenrose's study of Delphic oracles, I contend, that truly solidified what modern scholars have perceived as a clear schism in ancient Greek thought between a socially constructed, storybook world of oral tradition and what had actually happened and was still even then happening around them. A number of scholars even around the time of the book's publication thought that Fontenrose's conclusions forced too great a wedge between Herodotus and his audience—How could Herodotus have gotten away with telling stories about oracles that his contemporary audience should have recognized as not in keeping with actual practice?² Yet,

¹ Fontenrose, *The Delphic Oracle*, 234.

² Brenk, "The Delphic Oracle. Its Responses and Operations, with a Catalogue of Responses," 702; Pollard, "Review of The Delphic Oracle"; Forrest, "Review of The Delphic Oracle"; Bremmer, "The Delphic Oracle. Its Responses and Operations, with a Catalogue of Responses."

scholarship is still reeling from this staggering blow to Herodotus' reliability,³ and Fontenrose's conclusions have had a far-reaching effect on the study of Greek oracles.

However, Fontenrose's methodology for evaluating genuineness had fallen under sharp criticism even earlier, and it is worth reconsidering the issue here again.⁴ In his thinking, only sources that report contemporary oracular consultations (within the lifetime of the author) have serious claim to authenticity.⁵ Thus, he begins by charting the question formulae, occasions for consultation, modes of response, and topics of response for these "Historical" consultations, and then uses this general picture of what is "demonstrably genuine" as a rubric for judging the authenticity of oracular consultations in other texts.⁶ As for the literary texts that do not follow those trends, he dismisses them as falling credulously under the influence of an imaginative oral tradition. There are two important consequences of this methodology. First, since the great majority of contemporary witnesses for oracular consultations are epigraphic, trends in the inscriptions heavily affect Fontenrose's conception of genuine. In this way, texts inscribed on stone are set in an adversarial relationship with texts that ended up in medieval manuscripts. The overwhelming majority of extant literary witnesses to oracular consultations do not report on

³ Naerebout and Beerden present a useful case study on the consequences of its ongoing impact. Naerebout and Beerden, "Gods Cannot Tell Lies."

⁴ "There is no reason to suppose that the answers of an oracle would be in legal formulae of precisely the sort found on the inscriptions, before the time of Solon, or that they would be in prose in a period immersed in the oral tradition." Dobson, "Oracular Language," 12. "F.'s theses, implied or stated, raise major questions, some of which he never addresses himself to. The major one would be the validity of the 'historical' oracles as a touchstone for the genuineness of the oracles." Brenk, "The Delphic Oracle. Its Responses and Operations, with a Catalogue of Responses," 701. "First, the statistical results are not nearly so striking in themselves and cease to be striking in the least when we pause to take into account the difference between the nature of the evidence for the two extremes. Literature does not tend to record the unembellished, the uncolorful; chanceries do not spout romance. Nor is Fontenrose always persuasive when he tries to delete some of the apparent exceptions to his characterization..." Forrest, "Review of *The Delphic Oracle*," 429. "Just as students of Athenians finance have erred seriously in failing to realize that the chief type of financial record inscribed on stone was limited to borrowings from the gods, so some scholars have made the mistaken assumption that, because oracles recorded in inscriptions related chiefly to cult foundations and sacrifices, this epigraphical evidence reflects the complete activity of the oracle. The argument that epigraphical oracles can be used as criteria to establish what oracles were genuine and what fictitious is an erroneous one." Pritchett, "Military Oracles," 301–2n22.

⁵ Fontenrose, *The Delphic Oracle*, 7–10.

⁶ Fontenrose, 11–57.

contemporary events, and Fontrose finds nearly all to be irreconcilable with the trends he observes among the “Historical” consultations. Second, an author like Thucydides gains over Herodotus just because he happened to write on events that occurred for the most part in his own lifetime, which means that his style of narrating oracular tales actually helps set the standard by which the rest of the evidence is judged. Oddly, this methodology not only puts the “rational” historian at odds with Herodotus’ idea of how oracles worked, but also occasionally with himself when he reports oracular consultations from earlier times, even ones that happened only a single generation before him. What seems to be lost in framing their relationships in this way is the fact that the same Greek culture produced both the extant inscriptions and the extant literature. Given this fact, it would seem to be a preferable historical methodology to evaluate both classes of evidence as expressing the same historical, cultural phenomenon in different modes instead of imposing the model gleaned mostly from the sparse and fragmentary epigraphic evidence onto the literary evidence and discounting the literary evidence that does not seem to fit. When all the extant evidence is drawn into such a dialogical relationship, we will better understand the process and functioning of Greek oracular divination.

In the previous chapter, I theorized that the ‘oracular tale’ is a traditional narrative schema and a culturally familiar process of thought apparent in the mind of Herodotus and the historical agents that populate the world of the *Histories*, as well as assumed in the minds of his audience. Although I have demonstrated the existence of the cultural knowledge of the ‘oracular tale’ from Herodotus’ *Histories* specifically, I have argued that the individual oracular tales in his work are only ever particular manifestations of the general cultural concept. Since the ‘oracular tale’ stems ultimately from Greek culture, one may analyze other literary texts and even epigraphic evidence as expressions of the same cultural concept, and in this way, bring both

bodies of evidence into dialogue with each other. Naturally, observations of prominent differences between the epigraphic and literary evidence are not entirely unfounded and without significance, even though prominent similarities have been ignored in scholarship. However, when texts are viewed as providing individual expressions of the ‘oracular tale,’ even sometimes in the process of its full elaboration, the differences scholars have observed may be understood to have more to do with differences between the authors’ narrative styles and their emphases than with differences of how oracular divination was thought about and actually practiced.

Using the same narratological approach as before, I demonstrate that the historian Thucydides and the epigraphic record actually help confirm the picture of oracular consultation and use that Herodotus paints in his *Histories* both in general and in a significant number of particulars. Further, the main apparent difference between the two sets of evidence is reducible to the mode of oracular pronouncements and the near total absence of the conjecture scene in Thucydides and the epigraphic oracular tales. I argue that this difference arises as a result of ‘narrative compression,’ which is motivated by the generic, rhetorical, and perspectival differences between narrators. Thucydides’ oracular tales are typically quite compressed. He is not very interested in explaining how people interpreted an oracle before they acted. Rather, in many of his stories, consultants appear to receive clear directives from oracles and simply obey them, just as is sometimes the case in Herodotus’ *Histories*. Where Thucydides expands his narration, he is more invested in emphasizing the episode of fulfillment, which is an opportunity for him to debate oracular interpretation and show how people commonly reasoned badly when determining fulfillment. In this way, he provides an interesting counterpart to Herodotus, who is keen in his most famous oracular tales to emphasize the episode of conjecture and often seems to be giving moral lessons about people who use oracular divination well or badly. The narrators of

our inscriptions, on the other hand, are very concerned with building a consensus around the issue of oracular interpretation and fulfillment, and so they naturally tend to avoid narrating debates or raising doubts. These texts publish the facts in order to document publicly the decisions reached or the accomplishment of a divine obligation for future verification. Consequently, the oracular pronouncements recorded in epigraphy tend to be reported in indirect speech as straightforward interpretive claims, rather than in direct speech as longer verse oracles. These claims, of course, only came after the meaning of the oracle and a plan of action had been decided upon by a particular community. Herodotus, though, is generally writing well after the time when community consensus regarding oracular fulfillment had solidified. In his stories, therefore, he is freer to draw attention both to disagreements and “failures” in oracular interpretation.

Before turning to the epigraphic evidence for oracles in the ancient Greek world, there are a few more points that I should make clear. I have not limited this study to the evidence of one particular site of special importance like Delphi. Rather, I consider evidence for oracular activity at a number of sanctuaries (Delphi, Didyma, Dodona, and others) in comparison in order to understand better how Herodotus and other Greeks consulted and used of oracles. Second, the epigraphic evidence for oracular activity is with only few exceptions quite a bit later than Herodotus’ epoch. However, even the few hints of oracular activity in the Classical period help demonstrate continuity with later periods. Third, the epigraphic evidence is incomplete and fragmentary in many places. This fact makes it difficult to guess at what originally may have been included in the numerous and occasionally extensive lacunae. In such sets of evidence, the notable exceptions become as important as the rules, and they demand explanations that help us make sense of the evidence as a whole.

Part One: Epigraphic Narrators and the ‘Oracular Tale’

Herodotean Narrators in Epigraphic Texts

Although all of the inscriptions that I examine reflect the ‘oracular tale’ in different ways, only a few extant inscriptions are totally consistent with the fully narrated tales of Herodotus.¹

One example comes from the *Iamata* stelae at Epidaurus, which were inscribed in the fourth century BCE.

Thersander of Halieis about consumption: This man, since he did not see a dream while sleeping, was going back again to Halieis on a cart, but a snake from the temples was settled on the cart and lasted much of the journey wrapped around the axle. When they came to Halieis and Thersander was reclining in his home, the snake, after coming down from the cart, healed Thersander. When the city of the Halicians reported what happened and [A] were at a loss about the snake, whether they should return it to Epidaurus or allow it to stay in their land, [B1a] it seemed to the city to send delegates to Delphi in order to inquire of the oracle which of the two they should do. {P} And the god declared that they let the snake stay there and, after founding a sanctuary of Asclepius and making a statue of (the snake), to dedicate it in the temple. [B1b] When the oracle was reported, [D] the city of the Halicians founded a sanctuary of Asclepius there and [E] fulfilled (ἐπετέλεσε) the things prophesied (μαντ[ευ]σθέντα) by the god.²

The narrative order of the episodes of the ‘oracular tale’ follows the chronological order of events, and all of the episodes appear in it except conjecture. The Halicians’ *crisis* [A] is that they are unsure whether they would show more reverence to the snake by returning it to Epidaurus or by keeping it in Halieis. So, they decide on a *consultation* [B1a] at the Delphic

¹ See also (Delphi) *SEG* 15.517 (mid-third BCE); (Delphi) *IM* 17 (late-third BCE).

² [Θ]έρσανδρος Ἀλικὸς φθίσιν. οὗτος, ὡς ἐγκαθεύδων [οὐ]δεμίαν ὄψιν | [ἐ]ώρη, ἐφ’ ἀμάξας [ἄμπαλ]ιν ἀπεκομίζετο εἰς Ἀλιεῖς, δράκων δέ τις | [τ]ῶν ἱερῶν ἐπὶ τ[ᾶς] ἀμ[α]ξας καθιδρυμένος ἦς, τὸ πο[λ]ὺ τᾶς ὁδοῦ περιη[[λι]γμένος περ[ὶ] τ]ὸν ἄξονα διετέλεσε. μολόντων δ’ [α]ὐ[τ]ῶν εἰς Ἀλιεῖς | [κα]ὶ τοῦ Θεοσ[ά]νδρου κατακλιθέντος οἵ[κο]ι, ὁ δράκων ἀπὸ τᾶς ἀμ[α]ξ[ας] καταβά[ς] τ]ὸν Θέρσανδρον ἰάσατο. [τᾶς] δὲ πόλιος τῶν Ἀλικῶν | [ἀγγε]λ[λ]ούσας τὸ γεγενημένον καὶ διαπορ[ουμένας] περὶ τοῦ ὄφι[ος], πό[τε]ρον εἰς Ἐπίδανρον ἀποκομίζοντι [ἢ] αὐτὸν κα[τὰ] χώραν ἐῶν[τι], ἔ[δο]ξε τᾷ πόλι εἰς Δελφοὺς ἀποστεῖλαι[ι] χρησομέ[νους], πότερα | [π]οιῶντι· ὁ δὲ θεὸς ἔχρησε τὸν ὄφιν ἐῖν αὐ[τ]εῖ καὶ ἰδρυσσάμενου[ς] | [Α]σκληπιοῦ τέμενος καὶ εἰκόνα αὐτοῦ πο[ι]ησαμέ[νους] ἀνθέμεν [εἰς] | τὸ ἱερόν. ἀγγελλέντος δὲ τοῦ χρησ[μ]οῦ, ἡ πόλις ἡ τῶν Ἀλικῶν | ἰδρύσατο τέμενος Ἀσκληπιοῦ [αὐτεῖ καὶ τὰ ὑπὸ το]ῦ θεοῦ μαντ[ευ]σθέντα ἐπετέλεσε. *IG* IV².122.xxxiii.69–82. Lynn LiDonnici thinks that this inscription originally derives from an official inscription that was commissioned and set up by the community of Halieis, noting as well that it is unique in the collection. Lynn R. LiDonnici, *The Epidaurian Miracle Inscriptions: Text, Translation and Commentary* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1995), 36,61, 73–4.

oracle and commission delegates to inquire there about which of the two they should do. Then, the god declares the pronouncement {P}, which apparently orders them to keep the snake in Halieis, build a temple to Asclepius, and dedicate a statue of the snake in it. Continuing the consultation episode [B1b], the delegates presumably brought back the oracle, and then the community performed *actions* [D] on the advice that they received. Finally, the narrator concludes the story with an explicit claim of prophetic *fulfillment* [E], which shows again quite nicely that the ancient Greeks had a different idea of prophetic fulfillment from us.³

A Delphic dedicatory inscription dating to the mid-fourth century BCE provides another example of a more robust narration of an oracular tale. The inscription is composed in lines of dactylic hexameter verse.

Phoebus gave offspring (γενεᾶμ) by his prophecies (μαντεύμασι), hearing my prayer, and he ordered me to tend (κομίσαι) the hair. In the eleventh month, a viable daughter was born, unblemished, and having hair from her head all the way to her eyes. In the first year, it came in length to her chest. And neither was my wife sick being pregnant as she was formerly, nor did she endure terrible birth pains, by the advice of childrearing Loxia and the perfect Moirae and on account of the counsel (μῆτιν) of Phoebus. Her parents named her Delphis on account of the oracle and as a memorial of Delphi. In the fourth (year?) [...] to beget [...] faring daily [...] until they named [...] of lovely Pytho [...] [ful]filling[?], Pythian Apollo, [...] bearing birthday gifts [...] they inscribed as a memorial of [moth]er.⁴

³ See “*Typical Features*” under “Fulfillment” in chapter two.

⁴ [...] Φοῖ]βος γενεᾶμ μαντεύμασι δῶκεν
 εὐχῆς ἐξαΐων, κομίσαι τε κόμας προσέταξεν·
 εἰς μῆνα ἐνδέκατον θυγάτηρ γόνιμος γεγένητο
 [ἄ]σκηθῆς τρίχας ἐκ κεφαλῆς ὅσσωμ μέχρι ἔχουσα·
 [ἐ]ν δὲ ἔτει πρώτῳ στήθους ἐπὶ μήκος ἵκοντο,
 [κ]αὶ οὐτε κύουσα γυνὴ νούσοις ἔχετο ὡς τὸ πάροιθ[εν],
 [ο]ὐδὲ πόνους δεινούς τεκνογεννήτους ὑπέμειν[εν],
 βουλαῖς κουροτρόφου Λοχίας Μοιρῶν τε τελείων
 [κ]α[ὶ] Φοῖβου διὰ μῆτιν· ἐπωνόμασαν δὲ γονῆες
 Δελφίδα μαντείας ἔνεκεν μνημεῖά τε Δελφῶν.
 [εἰ]ς δὲ τέταρτ[ον] ἔτος [...] (ς)ε τεκν[ῶ]σαι
 ..ΓΙΑ[...] κα]θ’ ἡμαρ ἔχουσα
 [...]α {—μ?} μέχρι τ[ῶ]ν ὀνόμαζαν
 [...]οι Πυθοῦς ἐρατεινῆς
 [...]τε]λοῦντες, Πύθι’ Ἀπολλων,
 [...] γε]ν[έ]θλια δωροφοροῦντες
 [...] μη]τρὸς μνημεῖ’ ἀνέγραψαν. *FD* III.1.560.

This dedicatory inscription is quite fragmentary, but many of the episodes of the ‘oracular tale’ are present. The references to “offspring” (γενεὰμ) and the “prophecies” (μαντεύμασι) of Apollo imply an oracular *consultation* about a *crisis* probably relating to difficulties in producing children. Regarding the *pronouncement*, there is some indication of its content in the command “to tend the hair,” but after that, only a sense that Apollo granted that the consultant would have a child and that his “counsel” (μῆτιν) allowed the consultant’s wife to go without terrible birth pains. In the episode of *action*, the consultant’s activity is a bit vague. However, it seems that the remark about the miraculous length of his daughter’s hair at birth confirms a subtle prediction that the consultant would have a child, and the length of her hair a year later, testifies that he, in fact, *fulfilled* his obligation “to tend the hair.”⁵ Indeed, one may even infer the consultant’s *conjecture*: having noticed the extraordinary length of Delphis’ hair at birth, he determined that “to tend the hair” meant that he should let Delphis’ hair grow long.

There is also a very rich decree from Magnesia on the Maeander recording the events between 221 and 208 BCE. The narrator of this story emplots all of the episodes of the ‘oracular tale.’

And when later, [A] after Artemis Leucophryene appeared to them, [B] they sent Agaristus, {P} the god declares these things to their question: that it is better and more good for them to revere Pythian Apollo and Artemis Leucophryene and to consider the city and the land of the Magnesians on the Maeander to be holy and inviolate. [D1a] When the epiphany of Artemis happened, after receiving the oracle in the stephanephorate of Zenodotus (221 BCE), and during the archonship of Thrasyphon, and in the year before [...] the Boeotian citharode won the Pythian games, and in the year after Agesidamus the Messenian won his third pancration at the Olympic games in the 140th Olympiad, they, first of all those dwelling in Asia, voted to make their competition stephanitic, [C1] taking this to be the interpretation of the oracle: that these (people of Asia Minor) will thus honor Artemis Leucophryene, being otherwise reverent to the divine, if, after going along with the Magnesians to the ancient altar, they should give

⁵ Lisa Maurizio takes κομίσαι to mean “to make a hair-offering.” Maurizio, “Delphic Oracles as Oral Performances,” 319–21. However, there is no hint in the text that the consultant ever fulfilled this command, if he had understood that to have been the oracle’s meaning.

delightful gifts to the Foundress, because even other competitions for prize money were founded at first but became stephanitic later on account of oracles. [D1b] But when they were thwarted, though they eagerly desired this, [D2/E] in the stephanephorate of Moiragoras, who is the fourteenth from Zenodotus, in whose time the oracle came about for them, when they remembered their ancestral friends, they indicated even to others all the things that had been prophesied. And when Moiragoras was the stephanephor, they established the stephanitic competition, with honor equal to the Pythian games, giving a crown of fifty gold staters, with the approval of the kings and with the vote of all the others among the peoples and cities, to whom they sent delegates, that they honor Artemis Leucophryene, and that the city of the Magnesians and land be inviolate on account of the encouragement of the god...⁶

Just as in the Epidaurian inscription, this oracular tale begins with an epiphany of a god. The details of this *crisis* [A] are vaguer, but the Magnesians apparently saw Artemis Leucophryene. The Magnesians then send a man named Agaristus to *consult* [B] the oracle at Delphi, where Apollo gives his *pronouncement* {P} to the effect that they should honor Pythian Apollo and Artemis Leucophryene and regard their city and land as inviolate. In Herodotean fashion, this narrator relates the *action* [D1] scene before explaining their *conjecture* [C1] about how to fulfill the oracle. The Magnesians voted to upgrade their prize-money competition into a stephanitic one in order to honor Artemis. Their *conjecture*, the narrator explains, was that other

⁶ [ἐπειδὴ δὲ | ὅστε]ρον ἐπιφαινομένης αὐτοῖς Ἀρτέμι[δο]ς Λευκοφρυηνῆς ἔπεμψα[ν] Ἀγάριστον, χρηστηριάξει τάδε πρὸς τὴν ἐρώ[τησιν] αὐτῶν | λώ[ϊον] εἶμεν καὶ ἄμεινον τοῖς σε[β]ομένοις Ἀπ[ό]λλωνα Πύθι[ον] καὶ Ἄρτεμιν Λευκοφρυηνήν καὶ τὰ[μ] π[ό]λιν καὶ τὰν χ[ώ]ραν τὰμ | Μαγνήτων τῶν ἐπὶ Μαιάνδρ[ο]υ [ιεράν καὶ ἄσυλ]ον νομιζόντο[ις]· > < ἐπιφανοῦς δὲ γενομένης [Ἀρτέμιδος] | προσδεξάμενοι > < τὸν χ[ρ]ησμὸν ἐπὶ στεφανηφόρου | Ζηνοδότου, ἐν Ἀθήναις δὲ ἄρ[χο]ντος Θρασυφ[ώντος] Πύθι[α] δὲ κιθαρωιδοῦ νικῶντο[ς] τ[ῶ]ι προτέρωι ἔτ[ει] ...]ου Βοιωτίου, Ὀλύμπια δὲ τῶι ὑστέρωι ἔτει τὴν [ἐκατοστήν] | καὶ τετταρακοστήν Ὀλυμπιάδα νικῶντος [τὸ τρίτον | π]αγκράτιον Ἀγισιδάμου Μεσσηνίου, > < πρῶτ[οι] στεφανί[την] ἀγῶνα θεῖναι τῶν κατοικούντων τὴν Ἀσίαν [ἐψηφίσαν]το, τὴν ἐκδοχὴν τοῦ χρησμοῦ ταύτην λαβόντες, [ὅτι οὗτοι] | τιμήσουσι οὕτως Ἄρτεμιν Λευκοφρυηνή[ν], ἄλ[λως] πρὸς | τὸ θεῖον εὐσεβῶς ἔχοντες, ἐὰμ Μάγνησιν ἐπὶ τὸν ἀ[ρχαῖον] ἐπό[μ]ενοι βωμὸν Ἀρχηγέτιδι γέρα κεχαρισμέν[α] ἀποδιδῶσιν,] | ἅτε καὶ τῶν ἄλλων ἀ[γ]ώνων τὴν ἀρχὴν μὲν ἐπ’ ἀρχ[υρίω] τε[θ]έντων, χρόνῳ δὲ ὕστερον διὰ χρησμοὺς στεφαν[ιτῶν] γεγ[ε]ν[ό]των. > < ὥς δὲ ἐπιβαλόμενοι παρηλκύσθησ[αν], ἐπὶ | στεφανηφόρου Μοιραγόρου, ὃς ἐστὶν τετταρακ[αίδεκατος] | ἀπὸ Ζηνοδότου, καθ’ ὃν αὐτοῖς ἐγένε[τ]ο ὁ χ[ρ]ησμ[ός], φιλιῶν μι[μνησ]κόμενοι πατρίων καὶ ἄλλοις ἐπέδειξα[ν] πάντ’ ἃ ἐκέκρησ[το]· > < στεφανηφοροῦντος δὲ Μοιραγόρου τὸν στεφαν[ιτῶν] ἀγῶνα | ἰσοπύθιον, στέφανον διδόντες ἀπὸ πεντήκο[ν]τ[ε] α χρ[υσ]ῶν, ἔθυσαν,] ἀποδεξαμένων τῶν βασιλέων [κ]αὶ τῶν ἄλλ[ων] ἀπάν[τω]ι, πρὸς οὓς ἐπρέσβευσαν, κατὰ ἔθρα καὶ πό[λεις] ψηφισα[μ]ένων, τιμὰν Ἄρτεμιν [Λε]υκοφρυηνήν: κα[ὶ] ἄσυλον εἶναι | τ[ῇ]μ Μαγνήτων πόλιν καὶ χώραν διὰ τὴν παρα[ίνεσιν] | τοῦ θε[ο]ῦ... (Delphi) *IM* 16.4–34 (221 BCE). I accept the emendations and interpretations offered by Slater, Summa, and Thonemann. William J. Slater and Daniela Summa, “Crowns at Magnesia,” *Greek, Roman, and Byzantine Studies* 46, no. 3 (September 25, 2006): 275–99; P. Thonemann, “Magnesia and the Greeks of Asia (I. Magnesia 16.16),” *Greek, Roman, and Byzantine Studies* 47, no. 2 (June 26, 2007): 151–60.

communities originally had prize-money competitions, but later made them stephanitic as a consequence of oracles. They thought that they should do the same. However, their attempt to get other communities to approve the elevation of their games was apparently totally ignored. Only after fourteen years, do they *act* [D2] again, this time by sending their delegates to explain in detail the oracle and their decree. Finally, with the support of the Hellenistic monarchs, other poleis began to line up to approve the decree of the Magnesians, which *fulfills* [E] the oracle.

Fontenrose gives us no real reason, formal or historical, to suspect the authenticity of these consultations. The first part of the snake story may sound like a foundation myth, but the Greeks did believe in divine epiphanies, and in any event, that part of the story is only tangentially related to the oracular tale here.⁷ What gets lost in Fontenrose's aggregate study of oracular authenticity is exactly how Herodotean these narrators are in their adherence to the narrative schema of the 'oracular tale.' Even the element of wonder and marvel is present in them, including future prediction.

The 'Oracular Tale' in Epigraphic Texts

More commonly, the narrators of our inscriptions are not so much storytellers as they are bureaucratic and pious documenters. Just like the three examples above, almost all of our epigraphic evidence of oracular activity comes from civic decrees and dedicatory inscriptions. This fact means that these narrators have emphases different from Herodotus in producing their accounts, and as a consequence, they may sometimes only provide short but detailed glimpses into particular episodes of the 'oracular tale.' Nevertheless, the epigraphic evidence, though scattered, not only confirms the existence of the narrative schema of the 'oracular tale' as a

⁷ Fontenrose, *The Delphic Oracle*, H23, H34, H45.

cultural concept, but also fleshes out details about private and public oracular consultation that Herodotus takes for granted or is less interested in airing. By analyzing these texts through the narratological lens of the ‘oracular tale,’ one can appreciate the fundamental similarities between the stories of Herodotus and the inscriptions both in content and in their use of the same kinds of ‘narrative compression.’ Additionally, we can understand the real-world procedures that anchor the cultural concept of the ‘oracular tale’ in the lived experience of the ancient Greeks.

Crisis

The types of crisis in the inscriptions have already been treated carefully and capably in current scholarship, and so I can do no better than to make reference to that work in passing.⁸ However, it is worth pointing out here that although Herodotus likes to narrate how a particular crisis arises, this episode is most commonly only inferable from information provided in the consultation or the context of the rest of the inscription. Besides the Magnesians’ decree and its epiphany of Artemis, there are few clear examples of a cited crisis.⁹ One case appears in a Milesian decree dated to 180 BCE, and it relates to a political situation.

Since the Heracleians, who are friends and neighbors of the city and have sent their decision and ambassadors, saying that, the *demos* considered it right to come to an agreement with them concerning equality of civic rights and other privileges, and those who were sent by them—Theodorus son of Aeneas, Archedamus son of Delphinus, Maeon son of Hysicleias—when they came to the archons and the *boulē* and the assembly, have set forth point-by-point upon which conditions they were thinking the agreement to be right, ...¹⁰

⁸ Fontenrose, 39–41; Joseph Fontenrose, *Didyma: Apollo’s Oracle, Cult, and Companions* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 91–2; Eidinow, *Oracles, Curses, and Risk*, 125–8.

⁹ See also (Delphi) *SEG* 15.517.a.II.22–47, a.III.42–6 (mid-third BCE); (Delphi) *IM* 17.11–12, 42–5 (late-third BCE); (Delphi) *IM* 215.12–30 (second CE).

¹⁰ ἐπειδὴ Ἡρακλεῶται φίλοι καὶ ἀστυγείτονες τῆς πόλε(ως) ὑπάρχοντες ψήφισμα καὶ πρεσβευτὰς ἀποστέλλαντες ἡξίωσαν τὸν δῆμον συνθέσθαι πρὸς αὐτοὺς ὑπὲρ τῆς ἰσοπολιτείας καὶ τῶν ἄλλων φιλανθρώπων, καὶ οἱ πεμφθέντες ὑπ’ αὐτῶν Θεόδωρος Αἰνέου, Ἀρχέδημος, Δελφίνου, Μαίμων Ὑψικλείου ἐπελθόντες ἐπὶ τε τοὺς ἄρχοντας καὶ τὴν βουλὴν καὶ τὴν ἐκκλησίαν | ἐξέθεντο τὰ κατὰ μέρος, ἐφ’ οἷς ἡξίου τὴν σύνθεσιν, ... *Milet* I.3.150.10–15.

In this situation, some ambassadors from Heracleia have come to town and have proposed to extend a number of rights and privileges to the Milesians upon a set of unspecified conditions. This proposal was what the Milesians then sent to the oracle at Didyma for Apollo's advice. Therefore, the crisis in this situation was apparently whether it would be right to accept. However, in view of the exceptional rarity of the explication of the occasion for a consultation, it is possible to conclude that the inscriptions which record oracular activity are generally far more invested in accounting in some manner for what the crisis is rather than how it arose, which is more often an interest of Herodotus.

Consultation

As I observed in the previous chapters, the episode of consultation in the 'oracular tale' may be divided into three scenes: 1) the commission, in which a consultant arranges for a delegate or delegates to go to an oracle and ask a certain question; 2) the quest, in which the commissioned individual or individuals journey to an oracle, ask the question, receive the pronouncement, and return to the consultant; and 3) the reception, in which the consultant receives the oracular pronouncement. The same scenes in the episode are identifiable among the inscriptions. Moreover, it is demonstrable from more inscriptions than just the testimonia of oracular consultations that Herodotus' distinction between private and public consultation is historical.¹¹ Further, while communities always send delegates, private individuals may either send others in their place or go themselves to ask their question in person.¹²

¹¹ τὸ(δ) δαμόσιον... τὸν δὲ ἴδιον... *CID* 1.8 (c. 400 BCE), 1.13 (360 BCE?). These Delphic inscriptions date to the early half of the fourth century BCE and assign rates of payment due for the different types of consultation.

¹² Private delegation: (at Delphi): *IG* IV².128.32 (c. 280 BCE); *AGIBM* 896.1 (c. 250 BCE). Esther Eidinow has shown from certain of the lamellae from Dodona that family members sometimes consulted on each other's behalf. Eidinow, *Oracles, Curses, and Risk*, 136. Private and in-person consultation: (Delphi): *IG* IV².122.xxxiii.69–82 (pre-320 BCE); *IM* 228 (c. 190–200 CE); *SEG* 15.517 (332–330 BCE); *SEG* 18.329 (250–200 BCE). (Clarus):

There is also evidence for the decision-making process involved in public consultations since these decisions are sometimes registered in decrees. Our most extensive epigraphic evidence relating to the mechanisms of public consultation comes from the Athenian decree dating to 352/1 BCE concerning the Sacred Orgas. This inscription will be useful for giving a frame for understanding the consultation scene where other inscriptions are more fragmentary.

... that the secretary of the *boulē* write on two equal and similar tin tablets—on the first: “whether it is better and more good for the *demos* of the Athenians that the *basileus* rent the land of the Sacred Orgas within the boundaries that is now being worked for the construction of a colonnade and the restoration of the temple of the two goddesses,” and on the other tin, “whether it is better and more good for the *demos* of the Athenians to leave the land of the Sacred Orgas within the boundaries that is now being worked untilled for the two goddesses.” And when the secretary should write them, let the *epistates* of the *proedroi*, after taking them, roll up the tin, and binding them with wool, let him cast them into a bronze jar before the *demos*. Let the *prytaneis* prepare these things, and let the comptrollers of the goddess straightaway bring down a gold and a silver jar to the *demos*. And let the *epistates*, after shaking the bronze jar, draw each tin out individually, and let him set the earlier one into the gold jar, and the latter one, into the silver jar, and let him bind them. And let the *epistates* of the *prytaneis* seal them with the common seal. And let also anyone of the other Athenians who wishes to do so place his seal in addition. And whenever they should have applied their seals, let the comptrollers set the jars up in the Acropolis. And let the *demos* elect (ἐλέσθω) three men, one from the *boulē*, and two men from the Athenians at large, who, arriving (ἀφικόμενοι) at Delphi, will ask (ἐπερ[ήσ]ο[ν]τ[α]ι) the god according to which of the two letters the Athenians should act concerning the Sacred Orgas, either the one from the gold jar or the one from the silver jar. And whenever they should come back ([ῆκ]ωσιν) from the god, let them bring down the jars and let both the oracle and the letters from the tins be read (ἀνα[γ]νῶσθ[ή]τω) to the *demos*. And according to which letter the god declares (ἀ[ν]έ[λ]ηι) to be better and more good for the *demos* of the Athenians, that they act (π[ο]ι[εῖν]) according to those things, in order that the things pertaining to the two goddesses may be as reverent as possible and that there may never come about at any time in the future any irreverent thing concerning the Sacred Orgas and concerning the temples that [for the] Ath[enians]... to the ora[c]le at Delphi (ἐπὶ τὸ μαν[τεῖον] εἰς Δελφοῦς): from private individuals: [someone from some place], Eudidactus of Lamptrae... [from the *boulē* someone] of Lamptrae.¹³

Reinhold Merkelbach and J. Stauber, “Die Orakel des Apollon von Klaros,” *Epigraphica Anatolica* 27 (1996): 33–34, #19. (Didyma): *Iscr. di Cos* EV 232 (c. 100 BCE); *Milet* I.7.205a (c. 130 CE); *Milet* I.7.205b (c. 130 CE); *DI* 577*5 (early third CE); *DI* 575 (early third CE); *DI* 579 (third CE); *DI* 581.4–16, 19–31 (285–305 CE). Some private consultations turn into public issues that require community approval when the individual in question does not have the authority to act on the advice of the oracle on his or her own, as in the story of Battus in Herodotus and the famous Cyrenaean inscription (*SEG* 9.3). See also, (at Delphi): *AGIBM* 896; *IG* XII.3.248.

¹³ γρά[ψαι] δὲ τὸν γραμματέα τῆς βουλῆς εἰς δύο κα[τ]ιτέρω ἴσω καὶ [ὁμοίω, εἰς μὲν] τὸν ἕτερον· εἰ λῶιον καὶ ἄμει[νόν] ἐστι τῷ δήμῳ τῷ Ἀθηναίων μισ[θοῦν] τὸμ βασιλέα τὰ νῦν ἐν[ειργασμ[έ]να] τῆς ἱερᾶς ὀργᾶδος τὰ

This decree displays the decision of the Athenians regarding, among other things, a procedure by which to consult the advice of the Delphic oracle about the use of the sacred lands adjacent to the sanctuary at Eleusis. Here, I am not particularly concerned with the reasons why the Athenians adopted the manifest intricacy of these preliminary procedures for this consultation—the reason of distrust of undue influence from Athenian partisans, meddling Delphians, and untrustworthy delegates in such an important matter seems highly likely.¹⁴ The fact of the matter is that the jars never left Athens. They were to be taken up to the Acropolis by the comptrollers after being sealed and were not to be taken down from the Acropolis again until the delegates came back from Delphi. Thus, the jars matter little for understanding the procedure of consultation at Delphi.¹⁵ What is worth noting, however, is that there is no mention of the debate that would seem to have occasioned such a proposal, only the proposal as it was approved by the Athenians.

ἐν]τὸς τῶν ὄρων εἰς οἱ[κ]οδμίαν τοῦ προ[στώιου καὶ ἐπισκευὴν τοῦ ἱεροῦ τοῖν θεοῖν· εἰς δὲ τὸν ἕτερον κ[α]ττί[ε]ρον· εἰ λῶιον καὶ ἄμεινόν ἐστι | τῶι δήμῳ τῶι Ἀθηναίῳ τὰ ν[ῦν] ἐντὸς τῶν ὄρων ἐννεργ[α]σμένῃ τῆς ἱερᾶς ὀργᾶδος ἑᾶν ἄνετα [τοῖν θεοῖν· ἐπειδὴν δὲ ὁ γραμματεὺς γράψῃ, λαβὼν ὁ ἐπ[ι]στάτης ὁ ἐκ τῶν προέδρων συνειλιξάτω [τ]ὸν καττί[ε]ρον· ἐκ[ά]τερον καὶ κατελιξας ἐρίοις εἰς ὑδρ[ί]αν [ἐμ]β[α]λ[έ]τω [χαλ]κὴν ἐναντίον τοῦ δήμου· παρασκευασάντων [δ]ὲ τ[α]ῦ[τ]α οἱ π[ρ]οτάει, οἱ δὲ ταμίαι τῆς θεοῦ κατενευ[κόν]των ὑδ[ρ]ία[ς] χ[ρ]υ[σ]τῆν καὶ ἀργυρᾶν αὐτ[ί]κα μάλ[α] εἰς τὸν δῆμον, ὁ δ' ἐπ[ι]σ[τ]άτης [δ]ιασ[ε]ίσας τ[ῆ]ν ὑδρίαν τὴν χαλκὴν ἐλκέτω τὸν καττί[ε]ρον ἑκάτερον ἐμ μέρει καὶ τὸ μὲν πρότερον εἰς | τὴν ὑδρ[ί]αν τὴν χρυστῆν ἐμβαλέτω, τὸν δὲ ὕστερον εἰς τὴν ἀργυρᾶν καὶ [κα]τα[δ]ησάτω, ὁ δὲ ἐπ[ι]στάτης τ[ῶ]ν πρυτάνεων κατασημ[η]νάσθω τ[ῆ]ν [δη]μοσίᾳ σφραγίδι, παρασημηνάσθω δὲ καὶ τῶν | [ἄ]λλ[ω]ν [Ἀ]θ[η]ναίων [ὁ] βου[λ]όμενος· ἐπειδ[ὴ]ν δὲ κατασημανθῶσιν, | ἀνε[γ]κ[ό]ντω οἱ [ταμ]ιαὶ τὰς ὑδρ[ί]ας εἰς ἀκρόπολιν· ἐλίσθω | δὲ ὁ δ[ῆ]μος [τρ]εῖς ἄνδρας ἐν[α] μ[ὲ]ν ἐκ τῆς βουλῆς, δύο δὲ ἐξ Ἀθην[αίων] πάντων, οἱ τ[ιν]ες εἰς Δ[ελ]φοὺς ἀφικόμενοι τὸν θεὸν ἐπ[ε]ρ[ί]σσο[ν] τ[α]ῖς [κα]θ' ὅπερα τὰ γρ[άμ]ματα ποιῶ[σ]ιν Ἀθηναῖοι περὶ τῆς ἱερᾶς ὀργᾶδος εἰ[τ]ε τ[ῆ]ν ἐκ τῆς [χ]ρυστῆς ὑδρίας εἴτε τὰ ἐκ | τῆς ἀ[ρ]γυρᾶς· ἐπειδ[ὴ]ν [δ]ὲ [ἡ]κ[ω]σιν παρὰ τοῦ θεοῦ, καθελόντωσιν τὰς [ὑδρ]ία[ς] καὶ ἀνα[γ]νῶσθ[ή]τω τῶι δήμῳ ἢ τε μαντεία καὶ τὰ | ἐκ τῶν καττί[ε]ρων γρ[άμ]ματα· καθ' ὅπερα δ' ἂν τὰ γράμματα ὁ | θεὸς ἀ[ν]έ[λ]η λῶιον [καὶ ἄμειν]ον εἶναι τῶι δήμῳ τῶι Ἀθηναίῳ κατὰ ταῦτα ποι[εῖν, ὅ]π[ω]ς ἂν [ὡ]ς εὐσεβέστατα ἔχει τὰ πρὸς τῷ θεῷ [καὶ μηδέποτ' εἰς τὸν λοιπὸν] χρόνον μηδὲν ἀσεβὲς γίγνηται περὶ τῆς ἱερᾶς ὀργᾶδος καὶ περὶ τῶν ἄλλων ἱερῶν τῶν Ἀθ[η]νησιν· ... [ἐπὶ τὸ μαντεῖον εἰς Δελφοὺς· ἐξ ἰδιωτῶν] [...] εὖς : Εὐδίδακτος : Λαμπρεὺς : [ἐκ τῆς βουλῆς· ...]ος : Λαμπρεὺς... IG II².204.23–54, 82–4.

¹⁴ P.J. Rhodes and Robin Osbourne, eds., *Greek Historical Inscriptions: 404–323 BCE* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 280–1; Bowden, *Classical Athens and the Delphic Oracle*, 92–3. The fact that the Phocians were occupying Delphi at this time may also explain why the Athenians seem to have been invested in keeping the precise nature of their question a secret, even from the Pythia. See Scott, *Delphi: A History of the Center of the Ancient World*, 151–2.

¹⁵ *contra* Pierre Amandry, “Convention religieuse conclue entre Delphes et Skiathos,” *Bulletin de Correspondance Hellénique* 63, no. 1 (1939): 196; Matthew Dillon, *Omens and Oracles: Divination in Ancient Greece* (New York: Routledge, 2017), 374. Maurizio, though rightly arguing against the existence of a regular lot oracle at Delphi, nevertheless also misunderstands the inscription to mean that the Athenian delegates took the jars to Delphi with

The fact that the decree imposes a strict procedure that follows closely with the scenes of commission, quest, and reception of the ‘oracular tale’ is of more interest to us here. The decree empowers the *demos* (commissioner) to elect three individuals (commissioned) and to assign them the task (commanding) of going to the Delphic oracle and asking a specifically defined question: “According to which of the two letters the Athenians should act concerning the Sacred Orgas, either the one from the gold jar or the one from the silver jar.” Then, the delegates are to return, bring down the jars from the acropolis, and read the oracle and the tins to the *demos*. At the end of the inscription, the names of the individuals chosen to go to Delphi are appended to the end of the decree, though only one full name, Eudidactus of Lamptrae, is legible. It is notable from this evidence too that just as in the debate that resulted in the proposal of the procedure involving the jars, the procedure of the election of the delegates was not considered worth inscribing, but only who was chosen.

Commission Scene

The Sacred Orgas decree is consonant with other extant inscriptions relating to public consultations. It appears that communities decided in their deliberative bodies how many delegates they ought to send, who specifically should go, to which oracle they should go, and what question to ask. A fragmentary Parian inscription dated to around 180 BCE holds most of these elements in the form of an amendment.

[Aristo?]nous said: the other things [just as (it seemed) to the *boulē*] and the *demos*, and to elect (ἐλέσθαι) [also from all the] citizens six men, [for the purpose of asking?, and to go forth] for the thing that was wished [...] to go as ambassadors to Del[phi]. And that they ask (ἐρωτᾶν) the g[od], sacrificing to whom of the gods or to which goddess [the

them. Lisa Maurizio, “A Reconsideration of the Pythia’s Use of Lots: Constraints and Chance in Delphic Divination,” in *Ancient Divination and Experience*, ed. Lindsay G. Driediger-Murphy and Esther Eidinow (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 121.

demos of the Parians] will keep [without dam]age both the city an[d its country ... or] in other [pla]ces will be made ferti[le in respect to land?].¹⁶

The amendment proposes the election of six men to go to Delphi and to ask a specific question. The fact that the stipulations of the specific question and the number of delegates appear in an amendment strongly suggests that they were not simply taken for granted by the *boulē*. Aspects of this proposal may have been standard among the Parians—we cannot know—but the proper procedure of proposal and approval needed to be followed and registered. In other inscriptions as well, the proposal includes the question to be asked and the election of some number of delegates.¹⁷ Like the Sacred Orgas inscription, a Milesian inscription from around 225 BCE even names those who were elected: “Pheidippus, son of Poseidonius; Automedes, son of Elpenor; Lampis, son of Lampites; Lichas, son of Ermophantes.”¹⁸ Considering that commission decrees for non-oracular purposes often include lists of the people elected or chosen to fulfill the task, it is probably right to expect that such rolls were probably once part of our more fragmentary inscriptions.

While the variables concerning the number of the delegates to be elected, the oracular site to be consulted, and the specific question to be asked would seem to be necessary and common for a deliberative body to consider, it is somewhat surprising to see other aspects of the consultation specifically prescribed in such decrees. In the Sacred Orgas inscription, the

¹⁶ [...]νοὺς εἶπεν· τ[ὰ] μὲν ἄλλα [καθάπερ τῇ βουλῇ] | καὶ τῷ δήμῳ, ἐλέσθαι δὲ [καὶ ἐξ ἀπάντων τῶν] | πολιτῶν ἄνδρας {ας} ἕξ, ἐπερωτήσοντας(?), καὶ ἐξεῖ[ναι τῷ βουλευμένῳ κατ[...]|τας πρεῖζε[ν] εἰς Δελ[φούς· ἐρωτᾶν δὲ τὸν θε]όν, τίτι θεῶν ἢ θεᾶ θύων [ὁ Παρίων δημος ἀβλα]βῆ τὴν τε πόλιν ἕξει κα[ὶ τὴν χώραν ... ἢ τό]πων ἐφ’ ἐτέρων καρπ[ί]σ[ε]ται γῆν(?)... IG XII.suppl.200.14–22.

¹⁷ See also (Didyma) *Milet* I.3.36a.63–5 (223/2 BCE), in which the specific question and, accepting the emendation, the election of five delegates was proposed, and (Didyma) *SIG*² 660.1–10 (c. 225 BCE), in which the specific question and the election of delegates is proposed and the four are named. Two delegates are named in a Magnesian inscription. (Delphi) *IM* 215.9–11 (second CE). Another inscription dating before the first century BCE records the story of the commission after the reception of the oracle and merely states that a man named Imbrius was sent to the oracle of Apollo Gryneius. G.E. Bean, “Notes and Inscriptions from Caunus (Continued),” *The Journal of Hellenic Studies* 74 (1954): 85–6. (pre-first BCE). Another fragmentary inscription from Athens apparently contains only the question to be asked. (Delphi) *IG* II².333 (335/4 BCE).

¹⁸ (Didyma) *SIG*² 660.8–10 (c. 225 BCE).

extraordinary nature of the proposed procedure as a whole insured that some of its regular aspects became recorded. There is yet another hint in the same Milesian decree above in which the delegates are specifically directed to return and, it continues, “Let the delegates report (εἰσαγγελάτωσαν) to the assembly the things that the god may prophesy (θεσπίση).”¹⁹ Surely, this procedure was the usual one, and perhaps there were originally some other special measures proposed in the part of the decree that is missing to explain this stipulation.

There are two important observations to make about the evidence here. First, aside from the specific question to ask at the oracle, there are never any directions given to the delegates about how to navigate the mantic procedure at the oracular sanctuary. This silence, I think, demonstrates again that what was done at oracular institutions was both regular and common knowledge to the Greeks. The expectation was that the delegates would do what was customary. Second, it is important to point out that all of the decrees referred to above, both in the main text and the notes, record the decisions reached in the deliberative bodies in advance of the actual consultation.²⁰ Interestingly, in decisions that are made following the consultation—when the community’s decision about the future is settled—the form of the story told about the commission changes. A late-third-century inscription from Eretria provides an excellent example. “[...] son of Philoxenus said: Since the *boulē* sent (ἔπεμψεν) [to Delphi?] for(?) an oracle when the Eretrians [were asking?] the god about the measures voted upon by the [*demos*... and] the god declared that it was well and [agreeable for the city...] the swiftest, it seemed to the *demos*...”²¹ This inscription is made difficult by the lacunae, but what is clear is

¹⁹ ἅ δὲ ἂν ὁ θεὸς θεσπίσῃ οἱ μὲν θεοπρόποι εἰσαγγελάτωσαν εἰς ἐκκλησίαν... *SIG*² 660.4–6 (c. 225 BCE).

²⁰ That the decrees were inscribed in advance is not likely, but deciding one way or the other is not material to my argument.

²¹ [(*nomen*) —]μπληῖθεν Φιλοξένου εἶπεν· ἐπειδὴ ἡ βουλὴ ἔπεμψεν μαντεῖαν [εἰς Δελφοὺς ἐρωτῶντ]ων τὸν θεὸν Ἐρετριέων ὑπὲρ τῶν ἐνηφισμένων τοῖ | [δῆμοι... καὶ ὁ θεὸς] ἔχρησεν καλῶς ἔχειν καὶ συ[μ]φερόντως τῇ πόλει ... τὴν] ταχίστην, ἔδοξεν | [τοῖ δῆμοι...]. *IG* XII.9.213. See also (Delphi) *AGIBM* 896.1 (c. 250 BCE); (Didyma) *Milet* I.3.150.15–16 (180 BCE).

that this person's prefatory remark about the commission came following the reception of the oracle. Here, there is the same kind of 'narrative compression' that I have shown in Herodotus. There is no mention of the delegates, and instead, there is a seemingly ungrammatical, colloquial phrase "sent for an oracle." It seems that after the reception of an oracle, the manner in which a deliberative body commissioned its delegates was of less importance to the ongoing business of that body with the result that the scene of commission could be told more concisely and economically.

Quest Scene

The Tasks of consultants

As is clear from the evidence above, decrees that record the commission prescribe the basic narrative arc of the entire process of oracular consultation. I have, therefore, already examined some of the epigraphic evidence pertaining to the oracular quest and reception from the perspective of what deliberative bodies expected to be done according to their provisions. When formulated in retrospect, the decrees and dedications do not speak much about the journey involved in oracular consultation, though one occasionally catches short glimpses of this part of the story.²²

We know even less from the epigraphic evidence about what exactly the delegates or consultants did at the oracular sanctuaries when they arrived, apart from asking their questions. Scholarship has tried to piece together the diverse literary evidence and sparse epigraphic evidence relating to mantic officials, preliminaries, and procedures in order to create a self-

²² Delphi: *AGIBM* 896.1–11 (c. 250 BCE); Marcel Dubois and Amédée Hauvette-Besnault, "Inscriptions de Tralles," *Bulletin de Correspondance Hellénique* 5, no. 1 (1881): 340–48, lines 1–4 (c. 250 CE). Apollo Gryneus: Bean, "Notes and Inscriptions," 85–6, lines 1–6 (pre-first BCE). Uncertain: *SEG* 36.1039.2–6 (fourth BCE).

consistent picture of the practice at different oracular sanctuaries. I do not intend to dive fully into the seas of scholarly opinion here, only to sketch out what seems certain from the epigraphic evidence as it pertains to the consultants. As I mentioned above, the consultants would have been expected to perform “the customary things” (τὰ νομιζόμενα). Herodotus only mentions customs twice in the *Histories*, and then only ever as general customs, never specifics. He uses the same grammatical structure both times: “... to those who did the customary things around the temple...” (... ποιήσασι περὶ τὸ ἱερόν τὰ νομιζόμενα...).²³ Our most detailed description of oracular preliminaries comes from a decree relating to consultation at the oracle of Apollo at Corope in Thessaly and dating to the second century BCE.

Whenever the aforementioned persons should be present at the oracle and should complete the sacrifice according to the ancestral protocols and should receive good omens, let the secretary of the god immediately receive the written registers (τὰς ἀπογραφὰς) of those wishing to consult that oracle, and after registering (ἀναγράφας) all the names onto a white board (λευκῶμα), let him immediately post the white board (λευκῶμα) in front of the temple, and calling up according to the order of each written register (ἀναγραφῆς), let him lead them in, unless it has been allowed for certain ones to enter first. But if ever the one called up should not be present, let him lead in the next one, until the one called up is present. Let the aforementioned persons sit in the temple in good order in clean garments, crowned with laurel crowns, being ritually pure and sober and receiving the tablets from the consultants. But whenever the oracle should finish, putting them into a vessel, let them seal it with the seal of both the generals and the guardians of the law and likewise also with that of the priest, and let them leave it in the temple. And on the next day, after bringing the vessel forward and showing the seals to the aforementioned persons, let the secretary of the god open it, and calling up from the register (ἀναγραφῆς), let him give the tablets (πινά[κια]) back to each [...] the oracles (χρησμοῦς) [...]²⁴

²³ Hdt. 1.49, 7.140.1. If the restoration of the text is correct, we find strikingly similar phrasing in (Delphi) SEG 3.108.17 (37/6 BCE).

²⁴ ὅταν δὲ παρα|γένωνται οἱ προειρημένοι ἐπὶ τὸ μαντεῖον καὶ τὴν θυσίαν ἐπι|τελέσωσι κατὰ τὰ πάτρια καὶ καλλιερῆσωσιν, ὁ γραμματεὺς | τοῦ θεοῦ ἀποδεξάσθω ἑξαυτῆς τὰς ἀπογραφὰς τῶν βουλομένων | χρηστηριασθῆναι καὶ πάντα {ς} ἀναγράφας τὰ ὀνόματα εἰς λεύκωμα, | παραχρῆμα προθέτω τὸ λεύκωμα πρὸ τοῦ ναοῦ καὶ εἰσαγέτω κατὰ | τὸ ἐξῆς ἐκάστης ἀναγραφῆς ἀνακαλούμενος, εἰ μὴ τισιν συγ|κεχώρηται πρώτοις εἰσιέναι· ἐὰν δὲ ὁ ἀνακληθεὶς μὴ παρῇ, τὸν | ἐχόμενον εἰσαγέτω, ἕως ἂν παραγένῃται ὁ ἀνακληθεὶς· καθήσθω|σαν δὲ οἱ προγεγ(ρ)αμμένοι ἐν τῷ ἱερῷ κοσμίως ἐν ἐσθῇσιν λαμ|πραῖς, ἐστεφανωμένοι στεφάνοις δαφνίνοις, ἀγνεύοντες | καὶ νήφοντες καὶ ἀποδεχόμενοι τὰ πινάκια παρὰ τῶν μαν|τευσμένων· ὅταν δὲ συντελεσθῇ τὸ μαντεῖον, ἐμβαλόν|τες εἰς ἄγγειον κατασφραγισάσθωσαν τῇ τε τῶν στρα|τηγῶν καὶ νομοφυλάκων σφραγίδι, ὁμοίως δὲ καὶ τῇ | τοῦ ἱερέως καὶ ἐάτωσαν μένειν ἐν τῷ ἱερῷ· ἅμα δὲ τῇ ἡμέρᾳ ὁ γραμματεὺς τοῦ θεοῦ προσενέγκας τὸ ἄγγειον καὶ ἐ|πιδείξας τοῖς προειρημένοις τὰς σφραγίδας ἀνοιξάτω καὶ ἐ|κ τῆς ἀναγραφῆς ἀνακαλὼν ἐκάστοις ἀποδιδότω τὰ πινά|[κια ... τοῦ]ς χρησμοῦς... IG IX.2.1109.30–49. A similar decree from Oropis records the preliminaries for the Amphiareion

It is exceedingly inconvenient that our inscription has a large lacuna precisely at the moment when the decree mentions something about “the oracles.” Nevertheless, it offers a unique look at preliminary procedures at one oracular sanctuary from the perspective of the government, which, as is clear from the context, did not set out so much to educate people about the exact character of these procedures as it did to regulate the behavior of the officials and the consultants as they performed those procedures.²⁵ The inscription clearly prescribes preliminary sacrifices for obtaining good omens, a procedure for maintaining the proper order of consultation, and the manner of dress and behavior of the officials in the sanctuary for maintaining ritual purity and decorum. It is safe, I think, to relate all three of these prescriptions to what was generally done at other sanctuaries. Sacrifice for obtaining omens and ritual purification are common preliminaries for human interaction with the divine.²⁶ Also, the order in which consultants were received was considered so important that certain people and poleis of special significance were granted the right of priority (προμαντεία), and a large number of decrees conferring the privilege survive from Delphi where they were posted in public should a dispute arise.²⁷ Certain of “the customary

there at the beginning of the fourth century BCE. *IG VII.235*. See Eran Lupu, “Sacrifice at the Amphiareion and a Fragmentary Sacred Law from Oropos,” *Hesperia* 72, no. 3 (2003): 321–40.

²⁵ Louis Robert, “Sur l’oracle d’Apollon Koropaios,” *Hellenica* 5 (1948): 16–28.

²⁶ Robert Parker, *Miasma: Pollution and Purification in Early Greek Religion* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983), 18–33. E.g., (Delphi) *SEG* 3.108.17.

²⁷ E.g., *FD III.1.20*. The sources for the times of consultation are murky and should be accepted with caution. Plutarch (*Mor.* 292e–f) refers to the opinions of Callisthenes (fourth century BCE, *FGrHist* 124 f49) and Anaxandrides of Delphi (late-third–early second BCE, *FGrHist* 404 f3), saying that before the Oracle held monthly consultations, it was only open for one day per year during the seventh day of the month Bysius. The exact relationships between these sources is difficult to establish and the time frames involved in this development are extremely vague. The fact that consultations happened once per month in Plutarch’s time is suggested by the interlocutor Boethus in *De Pythiae oraculis* (Plut. *De Pyth. orac.* 398a). There is also evidence of the thought that Apollo went to visit the Hyperboreans during the three winter months, during which time there could be no consultations (Plut. *De Pyth. orac.* 389c, and perhaps alluded to in *Pi. P.* 4.5). If it is true that the oracle at Delphi was only available on one day per month for nine months of the year during the fifth century, the privilege of *promanteia* may have been exceedingly valuable for ensuring that one was able to consult at all. H. W. Parke, “The Days for Consulting the Delphic Oracle,” *The Classical Quarterly* 37, no. 1/2 (1943): 22. Herodotus was familiar with this privilege since he claims that Croesus received it (*Hdt.* 1.54). The question remains what it would mean if preliminary sacrifices failed to show good signs on the only day of the month or year on which consultations were

things” probably differed between oracular sanctuaries, like what animal to sacrifice or what words to use when invoking the deity. However, the common denominators would seem to be ritual purification, sacrifice, and orderly consultation, and to these three may probably be added the payment of any fees associated with consultation.²⁸

The Corope inscription also shows the importance of writing for the consultation. Herodotus himself is clear on this point. He tells us how Croesus commanded his delegates to write down the oracular responses and bring them back, and how he unrolled each one individually, looked over them, and either read them aloud or heard them read.²⁹ Herodotus also says that the Athenian delegates wrote down their oracles and that, at the oracle of Apollo at Ptoeus, Mus took away the tablet (δέλτος) from the three citizens chosen specifically for the task of writing the oracles in order to record the prophet’s Carian pronouncement for himself.³⁰ There are over four thousand published inscriptions from Dodona that contain the questions of consultants and a handful of responses.³¹ There is a building called a *chesmographion* attested at Didyma in the second century BCE, and its name is suggestive of its function.³² A number of

permitted. I think there is a possibility that the temple was more frequently available on days that were not considered inauspicious for other reasons (Eur. *Ion* 417–21).

²⁸ (Delphi): *CID* I.8 (ca. 400 BCE), 13 (c. 375–50 BCE). (Amphiarus): *SEG* 22.370 (early-fourth BCE); *SEG* 47.488 (early-fourth BCE); *IG* VII.235 (early-fourth BCE). See Angeliki Petropoulou, “The Eparche Documents and the Early Oracle at Oropus,” *Greek, Roman, and Byzantine Studies* 22, no. 1 (March 1, 1981): 39–63.

²⁹ Hdt. 1.47.1, 48.1. For what it is worth, a scholion on Aristophanes’ *Wealth*, gives us what I believe to be the only account of the general procedure of Delphic consultation. “When consultants were make inquiries to the god by means of written communication, having written on a tablet what the matter was according to their preference and having crowned themselves with a graceful crown, they were reaching out with their hand to the inspired priestess. And she, as fortune was dictating, was giving a harmonious response to those reaching out.” ἐπεὶ οἱ μαντεύοντες ἐγγράφῳ ἀνακοινώσκει πρὸς τὸν θεὸν τὰς πεύσεις ἐποιῶντο, γεγραφότες ἐν πυκτίῳ τὸ κατὰ προαίρεσιν αὐτοῖς κείμενον, στεφάνῳ τε ἀμφιέσαντες ἄβρῳ, τῇ μαντιπύλῳ ἐχειροτόνουν· ἡ δὲ ἐντυχούσα σύμφωνον τοῖς προτεινομένοις ἐποιεῖτο τὴν ἀπόκρισιν. Schol. Ar. *Pl.* 19.7–12. Though we know little about the mantic mechanisms at the places that Croesus consulted, evidence of an indirect report of an oracle of Trophonius, which is one of the strangest institutions that we know of, shows that the consultants still came away with a verbal pronouncement. *IG* VII.4136 (178–146 BCE). It is not implausible that this was the case of oracles generally, regardless of the difference between their mechanisms.

³⁰ Hdt. 7.142.1; 8.135.2–3.

³¹ See “*The Mantic session: questions and pronouncements*” below.

³² *DI* 107.6, 108.8. Robert Flacelière thinks of the building as a kind of waiting area for consultants, while Fontenrose believes that this building was where the prophet and consultant went to record the oracle in writing.

stone inscriptions demonstrate not only that some oracles were recorded and read out in public,³³ but some actually claim to be receipts (ἀντίγραφα) of oracular proceedings or specifically mention such receipts.³⁴ The Spartan kings held a collection of Delphic oracles that were acquired and safeguarded by appointed officials called *Pythioi*.³⁵ The Peisistratidae gathered a collection of oracles that Cleomenes stole when he left Athens (c. 504 BCE),³⁶ and other written collections of oracles like those of Bacis, Musaeus, and Laius were familiar to the ancient

Flacelière, *Greek Oracles*, 30; Fontenrose, *Didyma*, 80. There is no evidence, however, for a similar building at Delphi. *contra* Flacelière, *Greek Oracles*, 40–1; Scott, *Delphi: A History of the Center of the Ancient World*, 17.

³³ ... καὶ ἀνα[γ]νωσθ[ή]τω τῷ δήμῳ ἢ τε μαντεία... (Delphi) *IG* II².204.48 (352/1 BCE); παρανέγνωσαν δὲ καὶ τὸν χρησμὸν... (Delphi) *IM* 36.10–11 (221/0 BCE); ... ἡ στήλη εἰς ἣν ἀναγραφῆσεται ὁ δεδομένος χρησμός Κυζικηνοῖς ὑπὸ τοῦ Πυθίου Ἀπ[όλ]λωνος καθ' [ὃ] τι καὶ ἐν τῷ ἱερῷ τῷ ἐν Δελ[φοῖς] | ἀναγράφεται... (Delphi) *IG* XI.4.1027.10–13 (late-third BCE); (Claros) Merkelbach and Stauber, “Die Orakel des Apollon von Klaros,” 6–10, #2.1–10.; (Claros) Merkelbach and Stauber, 11–13, #3.1–2. Demosthenes has oracles of Delphi and Dodona read out in some of his speeches. ... τῶν θεῶν ὑμῖν μαντεῖαν ἀναγνώσομαι... Dem. 19.297; ἀνάγνωθι δέ μοι λαβὼν αὐτὰς τὰς μαντείας. Dem. 21.52.

³⁴ M.N. Tod, *A Selection of Greek Historical Inscriptions. Vol. II: From 403 to 323 B.C.* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1948), #158.10. (356 BCE); *IG* XI.4.1027.10–13 (late-third BCE); *IG* XII.3.248.2–3, 22–3 (c. 110–100 BCE). If the emendations are acceptable, we may add *SEG* 3.108.6 (c. 37/6 BCE). Amandry translates ἀντίγραφον as “copie.” Amandry, *La Mantique Apollinienne*, 149. I argue that the word in these contexts does not mean “transcription,” a verbatim record of what was said, but “receipt” or “record,” an official document that registers general facts about the consultation. Demosthenes reads out what appears to be a receipt from a consultation at Delphi, and he refers to it as “the things from the Delphic oracle brought from the god” (... τὰ ἐκ τῆς μαντείας τῆς ἐκ Δελφῶν κοιμισθείσης παρὰ τοῦ θεοῦ...). Ἀγαθὴ τύχη. ἐπερωτᾷ ὁ δῆμος ὁ Ἀθηναίων περὶ τοῦ σημείου τοῦ ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ γενομένου, ὃ τι ἂν δρῶσιν Ἀθηναῖοις ἢ ὅτῳ θεῷ θύουσιν ἢ εὐχομένοις εἴη ἐπὶ τὸ ἄμεινον ἀπὸ τοῦ σημείου. συμφέρει Ἀθηναίους περὶ τοῦ σημείου τοῦ ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ γενομένου **θύοντας** καλλιερεῖν **Διὶ ὑπάτῳ**, Ἀθηνᾶ ὑπάτῃ, **Ἡρακλεῖ**, **Ἀπόλλωνι** σωτήρι, καὶ ἀποπέμπειν Ἀμφιόνεσσι· **περὶ τύχας ἀγαθὰς Ἀπόλλωνι ἀγνιεῖ, Λατοῖ, Ἀρτέμιδι**, καὶ τὰς ἀγνιὰς κνισῆν, καὶ **κρατῆρας ἰστάμεν καὶ χοροὺς, καὶ στεφαναφορεῖν κατὰ πάτρια**· θεοῖς Ὀλυμπίοις καὶ Ὀλυμπίαις **πάντεσσι καὶ πάσαις, δεξιὰς καὶ ἀριστεράς ἀνίσχοντας, μνασιδωρεῖν** κατὰ πάτρια· ἦρ᾽ ἀρχαγέτα, οὗ ἐπώνυμοί ἐστε, θύειν καὶ δωροτελεῖν κατὰ πάτρια· τοῖς ἀποφθιμένοις ἐν ἱκνουμένῃ ἡμέρᾳ τελεῖν τοὺς ποθικόντας κατὰ ἀγῆμενα. Dem. 43.66. This pronouncement bears striking resemblance to another presumably Delphic pronouncement in the Demosthenic corpus that comes from a different consultation:

Αὐδῶ Ἐρεχθεΐδῃσιν, ὅσοι Πανδίωνος ἄστυ
ναίετε καὶ πατρίοισι νόμοις ἰθύνεθ' ἐορτάς,
μεμνησθαι Βάκχοιο, καὶ εὐρυχόρους κατ' ἀγνιῶς
ἰσάναν ὥραιον Βρομίῳ χάριν ἄμμιγα πάντας,
καὶ κνισᾶν βωμοῖσι κάρη στεφάνοις πυκάσαντας.

Περὶ ὑγείας θύειν καὶ εὐχεσθαι **Διὶ ὑπάτῳ, Ἡρακλεῖ, Ἀπόλλωνι** προστατήρι· **περὶ τύχας ἀγαθὰς Ἀπόλλωνι ἀγνιεῖ, Λατοῖ, Ἀρτέμιδι**, καὶ κατ' ἀγνιὰς **κρατῆρας ἰστάμεν καὶ χοροὺς καὶ στεφαναφορεῖν κατὰ πάτρια** θεοῖς **Ὀλυμπίοις πάντεσσι καὶ πάσαις, †ιδίας† δεξιὰς καὶ ἀριστεράς ἀνίσχοντας**, καὶ **μνασιδωρεῖν**. Dem. 21.52. If these verse and prose responses are part of the same consultation, it is possible that, just like the fifth-century ostrakon from Salamis discussed below, receipts might include an interpretation of standard form, which could be called a prophecy (μαντεία), with or without the actual words of the oracle (χρησμός).

³⁵ Hdt. 6.57.2–4, Xen. *Lac.* 15.5.

³⁶ Hdt. 5.90.2. Peisistratus and his sons were well known for their interest in oracles. Peisistratus was given the epithet “Bacis.” Suda.B.47. Herodotus also names Hippias as a man with the most precise knowledge of oracles. Hdt. 5.93.2.

Greeks.³⁷ From this wealth of evidence, it must be concluded that the Greeks were very familiar with oracles and oracular content as texts and that writing, though perhaps not used at all times or in all cases, was one way in which the words of the gods were preserved.³⁸ The fact that the same oracular tablets have not been found at Delphi—or any other oracular site for that matter—should not be taken as positive evidence that the same thing was not happening at Delphi.

The accuracy or legitimacy of the response was of such great concern that communities sought ways to guarantee that there was no undue human interference during the oracular quest. Both literary and epigraphic texts bear evidence of this anxiety. Theognis' dictum is by far the most famous:

It is necessary that a man who serves as a delegate keep himself straighter than a compass and a rule and a square, to whom the prophesying priestess of the god at Pytho should make a sign of her voice out of the rich *adyton*. For adding nothing at all, you may still find a remedy, nor taking anything away would you avoid error in the eyes of the gods.³⁹

In Herodotus, there are a number of instances in which the reliability of the oracle is called into question on account of faults in its transmission from its divine origin to the consultant.

Aristodicus the Cymaeian suspected that the city's delegates were lying about an oracle, and on

³⁷ We may recall from Herodotus the collections of Laius (probably a collection that circulated under the famous Theban king's name, but nothing else is known of it) and Musaeus used by the oracle-mongers Antichares of Eleon (5.43.1) and Onomacritus of Athens (7.6.3). Herodotus himself mentions some oracles of Musaeus (8.92.2) and Bacis (8.20.2, 8.77, 9.43.2) that do not seem to have entered into a storytelling tradition and probably circulated in familiar collections. In Aristophanes' *Knights*, the Paphlagon carries a "box (κιβωτός) full" of the oracles of Bacis. Ar. Eq. 1000, 1003. On Aristophanes' view of diviners and divination, see Nicholas D. Smith, "Diviners and Divination in Aristophanic Comedy," *Classical Antiquity* 8, no. 1 (1989): 140–58. A fragment of Euripides preserves mention of "many black-marked parchments full of the utterances of Loxias." Eur. fr. 627 (de Nauck).

³⁸ Amandry, *La Mantique Apollinienne*, 149–68 passim; Deborah Steiner, *The Tyrant's Writ: Myths and Images of Writing in Ancient Greece* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 80–6; Veit Rosenberger, *Griechische Orakel: Eine Kulturgeschichte* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2001), 166–72; Flower, *The Seer in Ancient Greece*, 218–19.

³⁹ Τόρνου καὶ στάθμης καὶ γνώμονος ἄνδρα θεωρόν
εὐθύτερον χρῆ (ἔ)μεν, Κύρνε, φυλασσόμενον,
ᾧτινὶ κεν Πυθῶνι θεοῦ χρήσασ' ἱέρεια
ὀμφὴν σημήνηι πίονος ἐξ ἁδύτου·
οὔτε τι γὰρ προσθεῖς οὐδέν κ' ἔτι φάρμακον εὖροις,
οὐδ' ἀφελὼν πρὸς θεῶν ἀμπλακίην προφύγοις. Theognis *El.* 805–10. I think it is worth noting that all of the objects to which the delegate is compared are used for *drawing* perfectly round, straight, and right lines. For this reason, I think it would be better not to abandon too hastily the textual for the oral in interpreting this passage.

two occasions, there was a rumor that the Pythia herself received a bribe from interested third parties to give a particular response.⁴⁰ I have already shown how the Athenians prescribed a complicated procedure in the Sacred Orgas inscription involving writing, seals, and a question that was not actually their question, almost certainly with the goal of obtaining a response uncolored by meddling priests and untrustworthy delegates. Additionally, writing and seals appear to have been built into the process of consultation at the oracle of Apollo at Corope.⁴¹ Clearly, secrecy and security of the consultation and pronouncement were paramount concerns since the consultants must be assured of their obligations to the gods before choosing a course of action.

Our evidence for this careful attention to accuracy in transmission extends even further. There is also a pair of letters between the clan of the Buzygae and the Delphians that testifies to the desire for keeping the oracular pronouncement secure.

[“The clan of the Buzygae to the archons and city of the Delphians, greetings. We have sent to] the [oracle and consultation Theophilus] son of Diodorus, of Halae, [and Pammenes, the son of Zeno, of Marathon] just as is [customary] for [our] clan [concerning the Buzyges] and priest of Zeus in Palladion, [Diotimus, son of Diodorus], of Halae. You, therefore, shall [do] well [to receive] them, and to lead them [into the assembly, and] when the oracle has been given, to send [the receipt] to the clan.”

A letter from the Delphians to the clan:

“The archons and city of the Delphians to the clan [of the Buzygae]: Know that the ones sent by you to the oracle and consultation concerning the Buzyges and [priest of Zeus] in Palladion, Diotimus, son of Diodorus of Halae; Theophilus, son of Diodorus, of Halae; and Pammenes, son of Zeno, of Marathon, [gave] to us the [letter] sent by you, [reflected] and renewed the [intimacy and friendship toward both] our city and the god, and received good omens, and [consulted the oracle]. Therefore, the inquiry [and the oracle of the god] we have sent back to you [sealing it with the common] seal.”⁴²

⁴⁰ Hdt. 1.158.2, 5.63.1, 6.66.2. A similar distrust of the report of oracular pronouncements is implied by Melissa’s sign to Periander and the story of Miltiades’ rise to tyranny in the Chersonese (Hdt. 5.92.η.2, 6.34–37.1).

⁴¹ The Suda has a reference to a terrible punishment meted out to delegates who violated secrecy that their office entailed. “The one who consulted the oracle at Delphi received the oracles sealed, and a loss of one of the three was declared to him, if he will break the seals. For it was necessary that he be deprived either of his eyes, or his hand, or his tongue.” ὅτι ὁ μαντευόμενος ἐν Δελφοῖς σεσημασμένους ἐλάμβανε τοὺς χρησμούς, καὶ προείρητο αὐτῷ, εἰ λύσει, ζημία μία τῶν τριῶν: ἢ γὰρ τῶν ὀφθαλμῶν αὐτὸν ἔδει στερηθῆναι ἢ τῆς χειρὸς ἢ τῆς γλώττης. Suda T.154.

⁴² [Βουζυγῶν τὸ γένος Δελφῶν τοῖς ἄρχουσι καὶ τῇ πόλει χαίρειν. Ἀπεστάλκαμεν ἐπὶ τὰν [μαντείαν καὶ ἐπερώτασιν Θεόφιλον] | Διοδώρου Ἀλαίᾳ [καὶ Παμμένην Ζήνωνος Μαραθώνιον] | καθὼς ἐστὶν τῷ γένει [ἡμῶν

In the first letter, the Buzygae ask that the Delphians assist their delegates Theophilus and Pammenes in obtaining an oracle relating to the issue of the priesthood of Diotimus and that they return them with a receipt of the consultation. In the second letter, the Delphians assure the Buzygae that they complied fully with their wishes, namely that they sent the delegates back and have guaranteed the security of the pronouncement by affixing the common seal to the receipt. There is also a fascinating lead lamella from Dodona, dating to the fourth or third century BCE, in which the consultant asks about the response of an oracle he or she received previously. “[About an oracular resp]onse and the seals that Aris[tolaus did not] seal and did not affix: Whether S[osias, after going t]o Dodona concerning the tablet, commanded that [Aristo]laus not cre[ate the seals, no]r that (the tablet) be written and sealed.”⁴³ The restoration of the text is disputed, but whatever the complete tablet may have read once upon a time, it should be clear there was an issue regarding the reliability of an oracular response and the delegate who was commissioned to get it. Herodotus’ picture of the scrutiny by communities and individuals toward the accuracy of their oracular responses, therefore, is corroborated by the epigraphic

πάτριον ὑπὲρ τοῦ βουζύγου] | καὶ ἱερέως Διὸς ἐμ Πα[λλαδίῳ Διοτίμου τοῦ Διοδώρου] | Ἀλαιέως· ὑμεῖς οὖν καλῶς [ποιήσετε ἀποδεξάμενοι αὐ]τοὺς καὶ εἰσαγαγόντ(ε)ς [εἰς τὴν ἐκκλησίαν καὶ τοῦ δο]θέντος χρησμοῦ διαπεμ[ψάμεν]οι τῷ γέ[νει τὸ ἀντίγραφον]. | Ἐπιστολὴ παρὰ Δελφῶ[ν πρὸς τὸ γένος. | Δ]ε[λφ]ῶν οἱ ἄρχοντες καὶ [ἀ πόλ]ις τῷ γένει τῷ [Βουζυγῶν] | χαίρειν· γινώσκετε τοὺς [ἀπ]εσταλ[μ]ένους ὑφ’ ὑμῶν ἐπὶ | τὰ[ν] μαντεῖαν καὶ περώτασ[ιν ὑ]πὲρ τοῦ βουζύγου κ[α]ὶ ἰ[ε]ρέως | Διὸς] τοῦ[ς] ἐμ Παλλαδίῳ Διοτ[ί]μου τοῦ Διοδώρου Ἀλαιέως | [Θεόφιλ]ον Διοδώρου Ἀ[λ]αίᾳ καὶ Παμμένην Ζήνωνος Μα[ρ]αθώνιον ἀποδ[ε]λ[ω]ν[τ]ος ἀμε[ν]τ[ε]ν τὰ παρ’ ὑμῶν πεμφθέντ[α] | γράμματα καὶ ἐμπεφανικότ[ας] καὶ ἀνανεωμένους τὰ[ν] ὑπάρχουσιν ποτὶ τε τὰν πόλιν ἁμῶν καὶ τὸν θεὸν οἱ[κ]ειότητα καὶ φιλίαν] καὶ κεκαλλιερηκότας κα[ὶ] | ἐπερωτακότας τὸ μαντεῖον. Τὰν οὖν ἐπερώτασιν | [καὶ τὸν τοῦ θεοῦ χρησμὸν ἀπε]στάλμεθα π[ρὸ]ς ὑμᾶς | [σφραγισάμενοι τῇ δαμοσίᾳ σφρα]γεῖδι. SEG 3.108.

⁴³ [περὶ? ὑποκρί]σιος καὶ τῶν σαμῶν, τὰν Ἀρ(ι)στ[ό]λαος οὐκ ἐ[σ]αμάνατο οὐδ’ ἐπ[α]νέθετο: αἱ Σ[ω]σίας ἐλθὼν ἐ[ς] Δωδῶναν περὶ τοῦ πινακίου | [τὸν Ἀριστό]λαον ἐκελήσατο οὐδὲ τεχνᾶ[σθαι] σαμῆα οὐδ’ ἐ[γ]ραφθῆμεν καὶ σαμανθῆμεν. SGDI 1578. I have followed the text of Hoffman for the most part. The first two lines, which Eidinow (*Eidinow, Oracles, Curses, and Risk*, 119–20.) has printed, are Hoffman’s own conjectures for completing the sense of the inscription and are not entirely necessary: there is no evidence for them on the tablet. Lhôte’s (Éric Lhôte, ed., *Les Lamelles oraculaires de Dodone* (Geneva: Librairie Droz S.A., 2006), 134.) transcription appears to be less reliable, and I do not find the arguments in favor of his readings more convincing. A drawing of the tablet was published by Constantin Carapanos. Constantin Carapanos, *Dodone et ses ruines: Planches* (Paris: Librairie Hachette, 1878), XXXVIII.2.

evidence.⁴⁴ Oracular consultations were sometimes so important and secret that writing was used to replicate the words of the divine and that civic and private seals were called upon to assure their authenticity.

As I have said, the epigraphic evidence for the activities of delegates and consultants at oracular sanctuaries both prior and subsequent to the divinatory session is sparse and spotty. Our only evidence comes from 1) a fragmentary inscription from Corope detailing some of the preliminaries at that site, 2) the few decrees relating to public consultations, 3) a handful of testimonia illustrating the importance of authenticity and secrecy in recording and reporting oracles, and 4) a few decrees by communities that provide certain prescriptions relating to the preliminaries of oracular consultation generally. The scarcity of the epigraphic evidence makes it difficult to determine precisely the order of operations at Greek oracular sanctuaries. This lacuna in our sources is quite interesting in and of itself. Neither Herodotus, nor any of the extant inscriptions concerning consultations are particularly invested in describing what rituals the consultants performed or how the priests or priestesses understood the divine will and translated it into a mode that was understandable to the consultants. Although this aspect of the oracular consultation was fundamental in practice, it does not seem to have been very important to the telling of an oracular tale. Therefore, it is clear that ‘narrative compression’ also affects the way

⁴⁴ Pierre Bonnechere has argued convincingly that the historical examples of oracular confirmation by additional oracular consultations have been misread in modern scholarship as impiety on the part of the consultants. Pierre Bonnechere, “Oracles And Greek Mentalities: The Mantic Confirmation Of Mantic Revelations,” *Myths, Martyrs, and Modernity*, January 1, 2010, 115–33; Pierre Bonnechere, “Oracles et mentalités grecques. La confirmation d’un oracle par une seconde consultation au même sanctuaire,” *Kernos. Revue internationale et pluridisciplinaire de religion grecque antique*, no. 26 (October 10, 2013): 73–94. The examples above help support his conclusion since in each of these cases the desire would seem to be to protect the integrity of the divine communication from the influence of the human element. See also Esther Eidinow, “Testing the Oracle? On the Experience of (Multiple) Oracular Consultations,” in *Ancient Divination and Experience*, ed. Lindsay G. Driediger-Murphy and Esther Eidinow (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 44–67.

that epigraphic narrators tell oracular tales.⁴⁵ Again, I suggest that ‘narrative compression’ has more to do with cultural familiarity than with ignorance. The Greeks, as I have said, were very familiar with how these rituals were performed and did not need lengthy lists of the proper procedures every time there was a mention of ritual.

The Mantic session: questions and pronouncements

Although specifics about the mantic session at various oracular sanctuaries are wholly ignored, our epigraphic sources preserve a great wealth of data relating to the questions that consultants submitted and the pronouncements that they received. I have already mentioned in the last chapter that the topics that the consultants of Herodotus’ *Histories* bring to oracles conforms to the trends found in other sources.⁴⁶ There is, moreover, nothing unprecedented about the form in which Herodotus’ consultants ask their questions or the poetic form of the responses.

The long-awaited publication of 4,216 inscriptions on lead tablets from Dodona, which span the sixth and second centuries BCE, has added a wealth of data to our knowledge of the types of questions that oracular institutions fielded.⁴⁷ These tablets, which were probably written by the consultants themselves or with the assistance of priests, record the questions that they posed (in some way) to the Oracle there and, in a few cases, even responses. Even using the less than two-hundred inscriptions that had been published previously, earlier scholarship rightly

⁴⁵ Delphi: *SEG* 9.3.24–5 (late-seventh BCE?); *IG* II².4969 (c. 350 BCE); *AGIBM* 896.1–11 (c. 250 BCE); *IG* XII.3.1349/863 (c. 250 BCE); *IG* II².5006 (c. 125 CE); Dubois and Hauvette-Besnault, “Inscriptions de Tralles.” lines 1–4 (c. 250 CE). (Uncertain): *SEG* 36.1039.2–6 (c. 400 BCE). (Apollo Gryneius): Bean, “Notes and Inscriptions,” 85–6. lines 1–6 (pre-first BCE). (Didyma): *Milet* I.3.150.15–16. I call the producers of these texts epigraphic narrators because these texts may be read as narratives about what has happened (“So-and-so said”) within which it is sometimes narrated what has happened and what will be done next. I call the latter as “future story.” See “Defining Divinatory Thinking” in chapter four.

⁴⁶ See “Consultation” in chapter two.

⁴⁷ For a brief history of the tablets, see Robert Parker, “Seeking Advice from Zeus at Dodona,” *Greece & Rome* 63, no. 1 (April 2016): 71–2.

highlighted two general types of questions that were posed to Zeus and Dione at Dodona: Whether to do X activity? And To whom of the gods or heroes should one sacrifice for success in X activity?⁴⁸ Herodotus and the epigraphic sources from other Oracles corroborate this observation.⁴⁹ It is worth pointing out that, although there is a huge volume of tablets at Dodona expressing the “To whom of the gods” framing, this type of inquiry is comparatively underrepresented in both Herodotus and the extant stone inscriptions. However, there is no reason to suppose that this fact relates to anything more than the anecdotal nature of our evidence.

It was Pierre Amandry who made popular the theory of the existence of a regular lot oracle at Dodona and Delphi.⁵⁰ His argument started from the form of the inscribed questions that appear in the lead lamellae and on stone.⁵¹ In an article from 1939, Amandry dealt with an inscription recording an agreement between Sciathus and Delphi, which suggested to him the existence of a lot oracle at Delphi by “two beans.”⁵² Then, examining the lead tablets from Dodona and some epigraphic receipts of oracular consultations at Delphi, he noticed that the

⁴⁸ Amandry, “Convention religieuse,” 197–8; Lhôte, *Les Lamelles oraculaires*, 336–42; Eidinow, *Oracles, Curses, and Risk*, 132–3; Flower, *The Seer in Ancient Greece*, 102–3; Sarah Iles Johnston, *Ancient Greek Divination* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2008), 68–71. Xenophon’s inquiry at Delphi regarding his planned expedition to the east is familiar example of such a question. Xen. *Anab.* 3.1.

⁴⁹ Whether (or not)? (Delphi): *IG* II².204 (352/1 BCE); *IG* IV².122.xxxiii.69–82 (pre 320 BCE); *IG* IV².128.32–6 (c. 280 BCE); *IG* II².333 (335/4 BCE); *IG* XII.3.248 (c. 110–100 BCE); *SEG* 18.329 (250–200 BCE). (Didyma): *SIG*² 660.1–10 (c. 225 BCE); *Milet* I.7.250a (c. 130 CE); *Milet* I.7.205b (c. 130 CE); Louis Robert, “Addenda aux tomes I–X,” *Hellenica* 11/12 (1960): 543–6. (second CE); *DI* 577*5 (early-third CE); *DI* 575 (early-third CE); *DI* 581 (285–305 CE). (In Herodotus): #2, #5, #6, #14, #22, #55, #57, #60, #72, #74, #81, #89, #95, #100, #105, and perhaps also #21, #33. To whom of the gods? (Delphi): *IG* XII.suppl.200 (c. 180 BCE). (Apollo Gryneius): Bean, “Notes and Inscriptions,” 85–6. (In Herodotus): #11. The evidence from Dodona for both forms of question is too extensive to account for here.

⁵⁰ Lisa Maurizio has recently done a more expansive survey of the scholarship relating to the supposed existence of a lot oracle at the temple of Pythian Apollo at Delphi. She shows the long age and expansive reach of the idea into the fields and subfields of history of art, literature, epigraphy, and cross-cultural anthropology, and demonstrates decisively that the evidence adduced in its support cannot hold up to scrutiny. Maurizio, “A Reconsideration.”

⁵¹ Amandry, “Convention religieuse,” 195–200. His argument also profited from the fact that a common word used of the Pythia’s declaration of an oracle, ἀναρπείν, has the root meaning “to take up,” as one might do with a lot. This suggestion was, I think, first posited by Christian Augustus Lobeck. Christian Augustus Lobeck, *Aglaophamus, sive, De theologiae mysticae Graecorum causis libri tres*, vol. 2 (Regimontii Prussorum: Borntraeger, 1829), 814.

⁵² *CID* 1.13.15–16.

question type, “Whether to do X activity?” seems to expect a yes-or-no response. Consequently, he convinced himself that Dodona and Delphi generally operated by a simple two-bean lot (white/black, yes/no) drawn by the priestesses from a container. The fact that the more open-ended question-form “To whom of the gods?” is quite prominent in evidence posed no real obstacle to his central thesis, since he supposed that there could have been another container filled with lots bearing the names of gods and heroes from which to draw. All the priestess would have to know in advance was the form of the question in order to determine the container from which to draw a lot, or two, or three—the question of when to stop drawing becomes an important one. Subsequent scholars have generally followed Amandry’s conclusions, often mediated by H.W. Parke, in agreeing that the Delphic inscriptions and these question-forms demonstrate the existence of a lot oracle at both Dodona and Delphi, and one has even extended the theory to Didyma.⁵³

However, the evidence for a regular lot oracle at either institution is not as strong as Amandry has made it seem. First of all, his interpretation of “two beans” on the Sciathus-Delphi inscription as referring to the method of consultation is almost certainly incorrect. Another Delphic inscription, which has received little attention in scholarship, assures us that the reference to beans must be understood in the context of an offering and not that of the mantic mechanism.⁵⁴ There is, therefore, no epigraphic evidence whatsoever for a regular lot oracle at

⁵³ Delphi: Parke and Wormell, *The Delphic Oracle*, 1956, 1:18–19; Flacelière, *Greek Oracles*, 48–50; Johnston, *Ancient Greek Divination*, 2008, 51–5; Palmisciano, “Varianti di riformulazione,” 272. Dodona: H.W. Parke, *Greek Oracles* (London: Hutchinson, 1967), 91–3; H.W. Parke, *The Oracles of Zeus: Dodona, Olympia, Ammon* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1967), 109–11; David Edward Aune, *Prophecy in Early Christianity and the Ancient Mediterranean World* (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1983), 25; Johnston, *Ancient Greek Divination*, 2008, 68–71; Parker, “Seeking Advice from Zeus,” 89. Didyma: Alan M. Greaves, “Divination at Archaic Branchidai-Didyma: A Critical Review,” *Hesperia* 81, no. 2 (2012): 177–206.

⁵⁴ Georges Daux, “Un Règlement cultuel d’Andros: (Vème siècle avant J-C.),” *Hesperia* 18, no. 1 (1949): 68–9, face A, lines 6–8.

Delphi, although consultants may, on occasion, have brought their own lots in containers from which the Pythia could select on behalf of the god.⁵⁵

With Delphi factored out of the calculus,⁵⁶ all that remains to support a regular lot oracle at Dodona is a single story about a Spartan consultation, a handful of the lamellae, and the common forms of inquiries. Among the fragments of Callisthenes is a story about how the Spartans went to Dodona to ask about the possibility of victory at Leuctra. Apparently, while the Spartan delegates were setting up a jar containing *sortes*, the pet monkey of the king of the Molossians toppled it and scattered the lots.⁵⁷ Among the lamellae, on the other hand, Robert Parker has recently noted a very small number of tablets that bear a question-form that he relates to Egyptian ticket oracles. For example, “If no one (a woman), pick this one (tablet).”⁵⁸ The idea is that there would have been a corresponding positive ticket, which also could have been drawn from a container. Given the volume of evidence from Dodona, though, the paucity of examples is noteworthy; even Parker hesitates to suggest how common the practice was. However, none of this evidence demonstrates the existence of a regular lot oracle as Parker seems to want.

⁵⁵ F. Sokolowski, “Sur un passage de la convention Delphes-Skiathos,” *Revue Archéologique* 31/32 (1948): 981–84; Fontenrose, *The Delphic Oracle*, 219–23; Irad Malkin, *Religion and Colonization in Ancient Greece* (Leiden: Brill, 1987), 29–30; Emilio Suárez de la Torre, “Divination: 1. Delphes,” in *Thesaurus Cultus et Rituum Antiquorum*, vol. 3 (Los Angeles: J. Paul Getty Museum, 2004), 17. We only have two stories about such consultations in extant literature. Amandry tried to corroborate his point about lots being used at Delphi with the story of a sixth-century BCE consultation by the Thessalians. Amandry, “Convention religieuse,” 196. The story goes that the Thessalians brought beans inscribed with the names of prospective kings from which the Pythia was supposed to choose. When the Pythia chose the bean of Aleuas, which was secretly added by his uncle, the people were in disbelief and sent back to the oracle for confirmation. The confirmation, though, comes in verse (Plut. *De frat. amor.* 492b). See also Arist. *AP* 21.6. As I have shown in above (“Consultation”), the Athenian consultation about the Sacred Orgas cannot be understood as such an example of sortition because the delegates did not actually take the jars with them to Delphi.

⁵⁶ Parker still relies on Amandry’s “two beans” and attendant arguments to support the existence of a lot oracle at Delphi. Robert Parker, “The Lot Oracle at Dodona,” *Zeitschrift Für Papyrologie Und Epigraphik* 194 (2015): 111.

⁵⁷ Callisthenes (*FGrHist* 124 f22a) *via* Cic. *De div.* 1.34.76.

⁵⁸ αἱ δὲ μηδενίαν, ταύταν ἄνελε. DVC 1410. Parker, “The Lot Oracle,” 111–14. See also DVC 1170A, 2222A, 2229A, 3032, 3128. Perhaps add even DVC 2203B and 3942B. DVC 226B certainly refers to a κλᾶρος, but the tablet may have been a “lot” in a lottery procedure for determining the order of consultation comparable to that at the oracle of Apollo at Corope (see above). There is evidence of a system of numbers used on the tablets to designate the order of consultation. C. Robert, “Ein antikes Numerierungssystem und die Bleitäfelchen von Dodona,” *Hermes* 18, no. 3 (1883): 466–72; Lhôte, *Les Lamelles oraculaire*, 352–4.

Consultants may occasionally have brought *their own* lots marked with various alternative responses (yes/no, names of gods to whom to sacrifice, etc.) from which the priestess of Zeus could choose after being asked a question, just as was apparently the case at Delphi. However, neither the story from Callisthenes nor the handful of tablets at Dodona demonstrates that there were any number of *official* jars of beans from which the priestess would draw.

In the end, it is only the forms of the questions that can be called in to support the theory that there was a regular lot oracle at Dodona. However, as long as we are appealing to the forms of questions among the lamellae, it is worth noting that there is greater diversity among them than scholarship has generally emphasized.⁵⁹ These question-forms also correspond to those found in Herodotus and the extant inscriptions. Most commonly, the tablets show that περί + genitive was a traditional way for summarizing the nature of the inquiry or prefacing the question itself, and both Herodotus and the other inscriptions often compress their narratives using the same or similar shorthand.⁶⁰ Aside from the framing of the general matter and the two most common types of question, the next most common type is represented well by tablet DVC 261B: “about possessions, what should I do to have good fortune” (περὶ (παμ)πασίας ὅ τι κατὸν χάν[οι]μι πράσ(σ)ων).⁶¹ This form of question is comparatively underrepresented in

⁵⁹ However, a one scholar has drawn some attention to the diversity of the aspects of divine knowledge that consultants try to tap with their questions. For Beerden, for example, these categories are advisory, instructive, indicative, informative. Beerden, *Worlds Full of Signs*, 211–15. See also Parker, “Seeking Advice from Zeus,” 74. However, both Beerden and Parker try to press what are clearly questions seeking future predictions into the advisory and indicative categories, which are more comfortable to modern sensibilities about rationality.

⁶⁰ (περί): Sotiris Dakaris, Ioulia Bokotopulu, and Anastasios-Ph. Christidis, *Τὰ χρηστήρια ἐλάσματα τῆς Δωδώνης τῶν ἀνασκαφῶν Δ. Εὐαγγελίδης: II. Επιγραφές 2221–4216* (Athens: Ἡ ἐν Ἀθήναις Ἀρχαιολογικὴ Ἑταιρεία, 2013), index, s.v. “περί.” Herodotus: #3, #13, #40, #42, #43, #44, #48, #59, #63, #66, #70, #71, #76, #93, #100, #104. (Delphi): *IG* XII.9.213 (c. 210–200 BCE); *IG* II².1096 (c. 37/6 BCE); Dubois and Hauvette-Besnault, “Inscriptions de Tralles,” 340–2. (c. 250 CE). This compression is perhaps also found in (Didyma) *Milet* I.3.132a (late-sixth BCE). Herodotus also uses περί + genitive as a preface to a question: ...ἐμαντεύοντο περὶ τῶν ἱδῶν χρημάτων, εἴτε σφέα κατὰ γῆς κατορύξωσι εἴτε ἐκκομίσωσι ἐς ἄλλην χώραν... (Hdt. 8.36.1, #95, and see also #87). Also compare the usage of ὑπέρ: DVC 1391A, 4077B; Herodotus #90; (Claros) Merkelbach and Stauber, “Die Orakel des Apollon von Klaros,” 34–5, #20.

⁶¹ This form of question is securely attested also in DVC 1415A with the participle (ποέων), and there are a number of other fragmentary inscriptions in which the expression might possibly be restored (the participles of πράσσειν,

Herodotus and among our other inscriptions, but it is there.⁶² Indeed, one of the most famous consultations in the *Histories* appears to be a play on exactly this form of question—in his famous test of the oracles, Croesus has his delegates ask, “What does Croesus, son of Alyattes, happen to be doing?” (...ὅ τι ποιέων τυγχάνοι ὁ Λυδῶν βασιλεὺς Κροῖσος ὁ Ἀλυάττεω.)⁶³ There is also good evidence for other open-ended interrogatives like “What?” “Where?” and “How?” and these are also supported by the rest of our sources.⁶⁴ There is even a pair of inquiries that are framed as requests, and thus, Herodotus’ story about the Spartans asking the Delphic oracle “for all the land of the Arcadians” (ἐπὶ πάσῃ τῇ Ἀρκάδων χώρῃ) does not seem implausible on its face.⁶⁵

It should be apparent from the variety of open-ended questions that one cannot reliably conjecture an official lot oracle from the forms of the questions on the Dodona tablets. Such a mantic procedure would have required many more containers and an inestimable number of lots. Further, there is evidence that some consultants asked many questions of the oracle at once. For example, one nervous man named Epilytus wrote one such inquiry that is perfectly preserved for us:

God. Good fortune. Epilytus asks Zeus Naeus and Dione doing what and having sacrificed to whom of the gods will he have good fortune, and whether I should continue working the skill that I was taught or start something else, and whether I will succeed if I

ποιεῖν, and δρᾶν being interchangeable). DVC 43A, 45B, 496A, 600B, 612A, 828B, 839B, 928A, 1070A, 1100B, 1595A, 1690B, 1764A, 2647, 3319B, 3465B, 3690B, 3789A, 3834A, 3846A, 3913A, 3930A, 3981B, 4036A. See also the comparable expressions: ... ὅ τι δρῶν ἢ ποιῶν λῶιον καὶ ἄμεινον ἔσται αὐτῶι... (Lhôte 107); ... τί κα δραόντοιν ἡγία κῆ γενία κἀνδρογένεια γινύο(ι)το... (DVC 313A), παῖδα ἄλλον ἢ τύ[χ]οιμι κα ποι[έ]σῶν (DVC 401B), ... τί κα] ποήσαντί οἱ [γ]εν[ε]ῖ ἄ γένοιτο ἐ[ρ]σεν]τέρα (DVC 2441A), ... [τί] κα ποιήσας ἡγιάινω (DVC 2525A), [περὶ ἐντ]υχίας αὐτῶ, γενε[ᾶς] τί κα ποι(οῖ); (DVC 3445A).

⁶² (Delphi): *AGIBM* 896.2–5 (c. 250 BCE); Herodotus #15.

⁶³ Hdt. 1.47.1, #4.

⁶⁴ What? DVC 43A, 45B, 227B, 268A, 313A, 352A, 380A, 385A, 481, 496A, 612A, 771A, 828A, 839B, 995A, 1003A, 1070A, 1099B, 1100B, 1103A, 1217A, 1349B, 1415A, 1545A, 1595A, 1690B, 1754A, 2441A, 2525A, 2586A, 2647, 2747A, 3022A, 3259A, 3319B, 3362A, 3445A, 3465B, 3690B, 3789A, 3834A, 3846A, 3913A, 3930A, 3981B, 4036A; Lhôte 20 and perhaps 154; Herodotus #20, #38, #47, #73, #82, #108 (cf. [Didyma] *DI* 581 [285–305 CE]). Where? DVC 1360A; Herodotus #12 (cf. Hdt. 5.92.η.4, #67); (Didyma) *DI* 573 (c. 190–200 CE). How? DVC 361, 2473, 2763A, 3047B, 3276B, 3849A; Herodotus #88.

⁶⁵ DVC 95A, Lhôte 23. Herodotus #10.

attempt it, and whether I should marry Phaenomena or another woman, and whether in fact I should marry at all or remain single.⁶⁶

In order to help Epilytus plan the rest of his natural life, the priestess would have needed to have at hand at least three different containers (things to do, gods, and yes/no) and to have drawn at least six different times. To explain another response tablet, one would also have to suppose that there was another jar full of nouns that one might offer to the gods—at least, “kid,” “piglet,” “libation,” and “statue”—and would have required at least sixteen draws to furnish the combinations of gods and offerings provided on the inscription.⁶⁷ What seems to have been imagined as a way to simplify the oracular consultation ends up making it complex to the point of absurdity. There is, moreover, another issue. One study has pointed out that consultants were generally pointed in the direction of gods who fit their needs—an Athenian is told something about Erechtheus, and someone asking about debts is told to offer a goat to Zeus Ctesius (“of property”).⁶⁸ However, such apparent non-randomness is evidence against the use of lots, and the preposterous explanation that this is due to priestly manipulation of the lots will hardly do since it would violate the very principle that made sortition divinatory—only the gods could influence the selection of the lots. Clearly, then, it is hazardous to guess at the mantic mechanism or form of the pronouncement from the form of the question alone.

Herodotus’ oracular tales would not allow such a conclusion either. Consider Croesus’ consultation at Delphi about “whether his monarchy will be long-lasting” (εἰ οἱ πολυχρόνιος ἔσται ἡ μοναρχία). While a simple yes or no would seem to have sufficed, the Pythia responds

⁶⁶ Θεός τύχα ἀγαθὰ: Ἐπίλυτος ἐπερωτῇ τὸν Δία τὸν Νάϊον | καὶ τὰν Διώναν τί κα ποιῶν εὐτυχοῖ καὶ τίνι θεῶν θύσας | καὶ πότερα τὰν τέχνην ἡν ἐπαιδεύθην ἐργάζομαι ἢ ποτ’ ἄλλο τι ἠορμάσω καὶ ἢ λαμπρῶμαι αἶ κ’ ἐπιχρηῇ καὶ πότερα τὰν | Φαινομένην γυναικὰ λάβω ἢ ἄλλαν καὶ πότερα καὶ δὴ | λάβω ἢ ποτιμένω. DVC 2367.

⁶⁷ Lhôte 142. The original tablet appears to have been lost or destroyed, but Lhôte provides a reconstruction of tablet based on a published German translation.

⁶⁸ Jan-Mathieu Carbon, “Five Answers Prescribing Rituals in the Oracular Tablets from Dodona,” *Grammateion* 4 (2015): 73–87.

with what is instantly identifiable as an oracle: “But whenever a mule should become king of the Medes, even then, tender-footed Lydian, flee from the much-pebbled Hermus and do not remain nor feel ashamed to be a coward.”⁶⁹ Herodotus would not have us believe that the Pythia gave responses in anything other than extended utterances,⁷⁰ and he gives us good reason to think that the priestesses at Dodona were not substantively different in that way.⁷¹

Herodotus also tells several stories in which the consultants do not get the opportunity to ask their question before the priest or priestess pronounces an oracle. For example, when Eetion went to Delphi to ask about his prospects of becoming a father, “when he was entering, the Pythia immediately (ιθέως) addresses him with such words...”⁷² Fontenrose consistently refuses to give much evidentiary weight to Herodotus on this point since such responses do not appear among “historical” consultations.⁷³ However, there is some evidence for spontaneity even among the inscriptions. The most famous is the fourth-century, “Oath of the Founders” inscription from Cyrene, which appears to report the words of a seventh-century Theraean decree.⁷⁴ The reported

⁶⁹ Ἀλλ’ ὅταν ἡμίονος βασιλεὺς Μήδοισι γένηται, καὶ τότε, Λυδὲ ποδαβρέ, πολυψήφιδα παρ’ Ἑρμον φεύγειν μὴδὲ μένειν, μὴδ’ αἰδεῖσθαι κακὸς εἶναι. Hdt. 1.55.2, #6.

⁷⁰ This is a point emphasized by Fontenrose and has gained more appeal after a seminal article by Maurizio. Fontenrose, *The Delphic Oracle*, 212–24, 228; Maurizio, “Anthropology and Spirit Possession.”

⁷¹ Πρόφαντα δέ σφι ἐν τε Δωδώνῃ καὶ ἐν Δελφοῖσι ἐγένετο, ἐπεῖτε ἐπειρώτων τοὺς προφῆτας τὸ αἷτιον τοῦ παρεόντος κακοῦ, οἱ δὲ αὐτοῖσι ἔφραζον ὅτι ἀδίκως τὸν φύλακον τῶν ἱρῶν προβάτων Εὐήνιον τῆς ὄψιος ἐστέρησαν· αὐτοὶ γὰρ ἐπορμῆσαι τοὺς λύκους, οὐ πρότερόν τε παύσεσθαι τιμωρέοντες ἐκείνῳ πρὶν ἢ δίκας δῶσι τῶν ἐποίησαν ταύτας τὰς ἂν αὐτὸς ἔλῃται καὶ δικαιοῖ· τούτων δὲ τελεομένων αὐτοὶ δώσειν Εὐηνίῳ δόσιν τοιαύτην τὴν πολλοὺς μιν μακαριεῖν ἀνθρώπων ἔχοντα. Τὰ μὲν χρηστήρια ταῦτά σφι ἐχρήσθη... Hdt. 9.93.4–94.1, #108. There is a new tablet from the first half of the fourth century that would seem to shed light on the issue of the mantic mechanism at Dodona. [Θε]ὸς τύχα ἀγαθὰ: ἐ[π]ερωτῶντι Δ(ι)ωδωναῖοι Δία Νάϊον καὶ Δ[ιὼν]α[ν] ἢ ἐ[ν] τῷ δρυὶ σαμῆον ἔστι. DVC 2519B, cf. 3179B. Stella Georgoudi has argued convincingly that both signs and speech were always present in the divinatory procedures at Dodona. Stella Georgoudi, “Des sons, des signes et des paroles: La divination à l’œuvre dans l’oracle de Dodone,” in *La raison des signes: Présages, rites, destin dans les sociétés de la Méditerranée ancienne*, ed. Stella Georgoudi, Renée Koch Piettre, and Francis Schmidt (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 55–90.

⁷² Ἐσιόντα δὲ αὐτὸν ιθέως ἡ Πυθίη προσαγορεύει τοῖσδε τοῖσι ἔπεσι· Hdt. 5.92.β.2, #63. See also (Delphi) #9, #63, #86; (Ptoeus) #101.

⁷³ Fontenrose, *The Delphic Oracle*, 38, 116, 125. By “historical,” he means oracles that are reported in our evidence within the lifetime of the recorder or not long before it was carved in an inscription. Fontenrose, 7–8.

⁷⁴ See Russell Meiggs and David M. Lewis, eds., *A Selection of Greek Historical Inscriptions: To the End of the Fifth Century BC*, rev. ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), 5–9.

decree begins: “Since Apollo αὐτομάτιζεν to Battus and the Theraeans that they should colonize Cyrene...”⁷⁵ A late inscription from Didyma has a similar expression for an oracle given there: “... the god ἐ[π’ αὐ]τοματισμῷ declared...”⁷⁶ H.W. Parke argues that the expression means something like “speak spontaneously,” while Fontenrose tries to argue on the basis of the inconsistency with Herodotus’ account of Battus’ consultation that these words actually describe a kind of response that does not directly answer the question that was asked.⁷⁷ However, what Fontenrose does not consider here is the fact that if the Pythia, or any priest or priestess for that matter, could produce a response that did not respond to the question asked, there is no reason to disbelieve that she could not have given a response to someone without being asked a question. His response that “the Pythia did not” is hardly satisfactory, since it just casts all of the evidence aside.⁷⁸ The terms αὐτοματίζειν and αὐτοματισμός may have a more technical meaning in these contexts as Fontenrose suggests, but it would still not exclude the possibility that the priests and priestesses of oracular sanctuaries sometimes gave spontaneous responses to consultants even before they were asked a question, just as Herodotus says happened at Delphi and Ptoeus.

As far as the forms of consultants’ questions and the mode of the responses are concerned, there is nothing with which to object in Herodotus’ narratives about oracular consultation. However, the fiercest battle is over the character of the pronouncements, and the related question of authenticity is also contentious. Fontenrose tried to lead this charge against our literary accounts by following the map that Amandry charted. He concludes:

As far as the evidence shows, there was only one kind of mantic rite and session at Delphi. The Pythia gave her answers directly and orally to the consultant without any intermediaries or interpreters, unless she was called upon to draw a lot or point to an urn,

⁷⁵ ἐπεὶ Ἀπόλλων αὐτομάτιζεν Β[άτ]τωι | καὶ Θηραίοις ἀποι[κί]ζαι Κυράναν... *SEG* 9.3.25–6.

⁷⁶ ... ὁ θεὸς ἐ[π’ αὐ]τοματισμῷ ἔ[χρησε·] *DI* 390.7.

⁷⁷ H. W. Parke, “A Note on Αὐτοματίζω in Connexion with Prophecy,” *The Journal of Hellenic Studies* 82 (1962): 145–46; Fontenrose, *Didyma*, 103.

⁷⁸ Fontenrose, *Didyma*, 103.

when she probably accompanied her act with speech. She would certainly have had no difficulty in speaking most of the Historical responses [those generally drawn from the epigraphic evidence]: all that she had to do was to repeat the words of the question when sanctioning a proposal, and to name the gods that the consultant should worship if he had asked what he should do for success in his undertaking.⁷⁹

What Fontenrose apparently means by “directly” and “orally” is explained by his claim that all the Pythia would have to do is repeat the wording of the question in the form of a positive command or list a handful of gods with an injunction for performing certain rituals. With the issue of historicity at stake, those who privileged the epigraphic evidence seemed to hold the high ground armed with the principles of source criticism, and those who studied literary texts, for the most part, were forced to retreat into the fields of literature, socio-politics, philosophy, and psychology of religion, and they all but abandoned the issue of historicity per se. Amandry and Fontenrose have been countered by a number of scholars on theoretical, methodological, and even anthropological grounds, but this resistance has had difficulty facing up to the weight of the inscriptions.⁸⁰

The fact of the matter is that Amandry and Fontenrose noticed something real and important about our epigraphic evidence: it seems that inscriptions about oracular consultations sometimes relate the message of the oracle to the phrasing of the question. By considering more of the evidence for inscribed oracular pronouncements, not just Delphi in isolation, in the light of the ‘oracular tale,’ I can demonstrate that what Amandry and Fontenrose are observing is the

⁷⁹ Fontenrose, *The Delphic Oracle*, 223. See also Amandry, *La Mantique Apollinienne*, 149–68.

⁸⁰ Catherine Morgan, *Athletes and Oracles: The Transformation of Olympia and Delphi in the Eighth Century BC* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 155–6; Todd Compton, “The Herodotean Mantic Session at Delphi,” *Rheinisches Museum Für Philologie* 137, no. 3/4 (1994): 217–23; Maurizio, “Anthropology and Spirit Possession”; Oswyn Murray, “Herodotus and Oral History,” in *The Historian’s Craft in the Age of Herodotus*, ed. Nino Luraghi (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 31–2; Kindt, “The Inspired Voice”; Flower, “Understanding Delphi.”

effect of ‘narrative compression.’⁸¹ When understood in this way, the epigraphic evidence marshalled against Herodotus’ verse oracles is less decisive than scholars have believed.

A Hellenistic inscription from Epidauros provides a good starting point. “Isyllus appointed Astylaedes to inquire at the oracle in Delphi for him about the paeon that he composed for Apollo and Asclepius, whether it would be better for him to inscribe the paeon. He [Apollo] declared that it was better and more good both now and in the future for him to inscribe it.”⁸² Amandry’s and Fontenrose’s observation is clearly in evidence here and holds reasonably well in a few other examples: the content of the pronouncement appears to be a reflection of the question with relatively minor expansion.⁸³ Fontenrose uses a handful of similar inscriptions as a basis to conjecture the form of questions from extant responses where evidence is lacking—now working in the opposite direction—thus, creating a far greater volume of examples.⁸⁴ However, this interpretive move is not entirely justified. Although it would seem to be the case that pronouncements should follow closely to the questions that were asked, the evidence does not allow us to conclude this as a rule. A mid-third century inscription from Halicarnassus recounts a consultation at Delphi by the delegate of a man named Poseidonius.

When Poseidonius dispatched (a delegate) in order to ask Apollo what would be better and more good for him and his children, both the males and the females, to do and accomplish, the god declared that it will be better and more good for them in the manner

⁸¹ Lisa Maurizio has suggested this possibility, saying, “We may imagine that the details contained in an inscription have been worked out by the city-state either before or after a consultation, and that this description of details did not depend on the particular words of approval the Pythia used, only the fact of her approval. In this sense, inscriptional evidence may give us less information about what happened during a consultation than literary evidence. An inscription may contain an ‘oracle’ which bears little relation to the *ipsissima verba* of the Pythia, in part because the purpose of such inscriptions may have been to authenticate the details of a decision. In this context, the exact words of the Pythia may not appear important...” Maurizio, “Delphic Oracles as Oral Performances,” 31 In 11. I intend to show how her supposition is probable.

⁸² (Delphi) *IG* IV².128.32–6 (338–335 BCE).

⁸³ (Delphi): *IG* IV².122.xxxiii.69–82 (pre 320 BCE); *IG* XII.3.248 (c. 110–100 BCE); perhaps also (Delphi) *IM* 16 (221/0 BCE) and (Delphi) *SEG* 18.329 (250–200 BCE).

⁸⁴ Delphi: *IG* I².80 (430–420 BCE); Tod, *A Selection of Greek Historical Inscriptions*, 158. (356 BCE); *IG* II².204 (352/1 BCE); *IG* II².4969 (c. 350 BCE); Louis Robert, *Études épigraphiques et philologiques* (Paris: Champion, 1938), 294. (fourth BCE); *FD* III.3.342 (early-third BCE); *IG* XI.4.1298 (early-third BCE); *FD* III.3.343 (second BCE); *SEG* 15.517 (332–330 BCE). Didyma: *Milet* I.3.150 (180 BCE).

of their ancestors to propitiate and honor Zeus Patrous and Apollo of Telemessus the counsellor and the Moirai and the Mother of the gods, and to honor and propitiate also the Agathus Daemon of Poseidonius and Gorgis, and that it will be more good for them to safeguard and do these things.⁸⁵

We might have suspected from the response that the consultant would have asked a question about whether he should sacrifice to these gods or to whom of the gods he should sacrifice, but his question is actually about what he should do to ensure the fortune of himself and his family.

Indeed, in the rare instances that the lead lamellae at Dodona record both a question and what is likely to be representative of a pronouncement, it is not regularly the case that the two are so neatly reflective of each other, and there are some fairly extreme differences.⁸⁶ I list here a short assemblage of questions and responses that other scholars have identified more securely as paired:

DVC 24A Question: “God. Good fortune: About (the transfer) of possessions and household to Croton, whether it is better and more good for himself, and his family, and his wife?

DVC 26B Response: “In Croton.”⁸⁷

DVC 92A Question: “... and to Pharc[edon...?]”

DVC 93B Response: “Phyrcon, be careful.”⁸⁸

DVC 107A Question: “Should I wage war by land?”

DVC 108B Response: “keep to land, completely.”⁸⁹

DVC 244A Question: “whether I should cohabit or not.”

DVC 245B Response: “(It is) better...”⁹⁰

⁸⁵ Απο[στ]είλαντος Πο[σ]ειδ[ωνίου] χρ[η]σα[μέν]ου | τῷ Ἀπόλλωνι, τί ἂν αὐτῷ τε καὶ τοῖς ἐξ αὐτοῦ | γινομένοις καὶ οὖσιν ἕκ τε τῶν ἀρσένων καὶ τῶν θ|ηλείων εἴη λώϊον καὶ ἄμεινον ποιοῦσιν καὶ πράσ|σουσιν, ἔχρησεν ὁ θεός, ἔσσεσθαι λώϊον καὶ ἄμεινον αὐτοῖς ἱλασκομένοις καὶ τιμᾶσιν καθάπερ | καὶ οἱ πρόγονοι Δία Πατρῶν καὶ Ἀπόλλωνα Τελε|μεσσοῦ μεδέοντα καὶ Μοίρας καὶ θεῶν Μητέρα, | τιμᾶν δὲ καὶ ἱλάσκεσθαι καὶ Ἀγαθὸν Δαίμονα Ποσειδωνίου καὶ Γοργίδος, τοῖς δὲ ταῦτα διαφυλάσσουσιν | καὶ ποιοῦσιν ἄμεινον ἔσσεσθαι. (Delphi) *AGIBM* 896.1–11 (c. 250 BCE).

⁸⁶ On a similar point, see Flower, “Divination and the ‘Real Presence,’” 213–15.

⁸⁷ A: Θεὸς τύχα ἀγαθὰ: | περὶ παντασίας καὶ περὶ φοικέσιος | ἰς Κρότωνα ἔβέλτιον καὶ ἄμεινον | αὐτοῖ καὶ γενεᾷ: καὶ γυναικί;

B: ἐν Κρότονι.

⁸⁸ A: [...] καὶ ἰς Φαρκ[αδόνα].

B: Φύρκον| παρτεροῖο (= παρατηρέομαι).

⁸⁹ A: στρατεύομαι | κατὰ γᾶν;

B: ἐπὶ γῇι σχέθε: τέλος.

⁹⁰ A: αἱ συνναῖο ἢ μ[ή].

DVC 272A Question: “And if not, whether the captain is poisoned by drugs/spells, and whether it will be possible for him to find business [alwa]ys, and without business, whe[ther] Aristobia makes ha[ste] (to take?) the things whi[ch] this [On]asiphorus will have.”

DVC 274B Response: “[... to Athena P]olias [...] to Good [Fortune], to Just[ice...].”⁹¹

DVC 1156B Question: “[X asks Zeus] Naeus [and Dione] whether he should farm in Actium or go somewhere else.”

DVC 1154A Response: “There.”⁹²

DVC 2416A Question: “[...] in Sellas[ia...]?”

DVC 2419B Response: “in the city tha[t ...].”⁹³

DVC 3211B Question: “God: [X a]sks [...] according to judgement [...]”

DVC 3210A Response: “Eidarus: the god [...] is fulfill[ed...]; that which Nicea[s...]; Eidon to Zeus Patrous [...] not to sacrifice [...] the goddess.”⁹⁴

DVC 3625A Question: “[...] and before [which god?] should he attend [...] and pr]aying to whom of the gods or h[eroes] will they d[o] better.”

DVC 3626B Response: “[befo]re me.”⁹⁵

DVC 4079A Question: “[...] whether it will [be] better [and more good for him to go] and make has[te] to Olympia.”

DVC 4080B Response: “to wait (for going) to Olympia.”⁹⁶

Lhôte 68

Question: “Gods. Good fortune: Antiochus asks Zeus and Dione about the health of himself, his father, and his sister, honoring whom of the gods or heroes would it be better and more good for him.”

Response: “for him going to Ermion.”⁹⁷

B: βέλτιον [...]

⁹¹ A: εἰ δὲ μὴ εἰ κακουργεῖται ναύκληρος ὑπὸ φαρμάκων μηδὲ | ΔΕ [ἐς αἰ] ἐν πραγματεύεσθαι ἄλλ' ἐσσεῖται αὐτῶι | καὶ ἄνευ πραγματείας εἰ[ι] Ἀριστοβία σπε[ύδει] ἅ[περ] | Ὀν]ασιφόρος οὗτος ἔξει;

B: [... Ἀθάναι Π]ολιάδι, [...] | Τύχαι] Ἀγαθᾶ: Δίκ[αι...]. I have followed the text of Éric Lhôte, “Correspondre avec les dieux, d’après les nouvelles lamelles oraculaires de Dodone: les cas de réponse de l’oracle,” *Semitica et Classica* 10 (2017): 155.

⁹² B: [ὁ δεῖνα ἐπερωτῆι Δία] Νᾶον [καὶ Διώναν] | ἧ γαοργῆς ἐ[ν] Ἀκτίωι ἢ ἀλλοῖ πο[ρευόμενος].

A: αὐτεῖ.

⁹³ A: [...] ἐ]ν Σελλασί[αι ...]

B: ἐν ταῖ πόλει τᾶ[ς ...]. See Lhôte, “Correspondre avec les dieux,” 152.

⁹⁴ B: θεός: ἐπερωτῆι [ὁ δεῖνα ...] | κατὰ γνώμαν [...]

A: Εἰδαρος: τέλλε[ται ...] | ὁ θεός: ὁ τι Νι(κ)έα[ς ...] | Εἰδων Δι πατρώϊωι ...] | ἰος: μὴ θύειν [...] | τὰν [θ]εόν.

⁹⁵ A: [...] ΒΕΝΤ]ΟΛΟΠΙΟ[...]ν καὶ ἔμπροσθ[εν ...] ἐπιμελεῖσται [...] τίνι κα θεὸν ἔ] ἡ[ερόον] | εὐχ]όμενοι λόιο(ν) π[ράσ]ο[ιεν].

B: [ἔμπροσθ]έν μου.

⁹⁶ A: [...] Α] ἔλ[όιον] | [καὶ ἄμεινο]ν Ὀλυμπ[ιαν]δε | [ἔ]ρποντι καὶ ἐπέγον[τι αὐτῶι] ἐσσε[ται];

B: Ὀλ(υ)μπ[ιαν]δε [περ]ιμ[έν]εν.

⁹⁷ A: Θεοί. Τύχα ἀγα[θ]ά. [Ε]ρ[ω]τεῖ Ἀντί[οχος] τ(ὸ)ν Δί(α) καὶ τὰν Διώναν ὑπ[ε]ρ ὑγι[είας] [α]ὐτοῦ καὶ πα[τρ]ὸς καὶ ἀδελφ[ε]ῖς τ(ί)να θεῶν | ἢ ἡρ[ώ]ων τιμᾶν[τι] λ[ῶ]ιον καὶ ἄ[μ]ε[ι]νον εἶη.

Lhôte 95

Question: “Gods. Good fortune: Zeus, declare to Timodamus: to conduct business both by land and sea from his capital for however much time he should choose, are these things best?”

Response: “Gods. Good fortune: to live in the city and to trade and conduct business, but to concede his interests[?] in the boat, and taking the money to conduct business both by land and sea, selling and buying.”⁹⁸

Lhôte 141

Question: “God. Fortune: Should Nike, daughter of Eumenes, arbitrate on behalf of [X], son of Aristogeitus with his opponents and deal with the houses?”

Response: “God. To Zeus Patrous [...], a libation to Fortune, to Heracles, to Erechthes, to Athena Patroa.”⁹⁹

First of all, the length and variety of these responses recommend that they be understood as verbal utterances communicated by the priestesses rather than the result of a predetermined lot mechanism.¹⁰⁰ Second, despite the fragmentary nature of the evidence, it should also be clear that the recorded responses actually diverge from the questions asked by consultants. In minor cases where the response seems to pertain more directly to the question, the recorded responses show that prepositions, nouns, and verbs may be altered: “to Croton”/“in Croton”; “wage war by land”/“keep to land”; “in Sellasia”/“in the city that”; “make haste”/“to wait.” In others, the recorded response may even seem to answer to a completely different form of question, go beyond its scope, or avoid giving an answer entirely. Two of our tablets appear to advise offerings, prayers, and sacrifices to a list of deities, but the consultants do not seem to have phrased their questions expecting this kind of advice.¹⁰¹ Further, the advice of going to Ermion

B: Εἰς Ἑρμιόνα ὀρμάσα{α}ντι.

⁹⁸ A: Θεοί. Τύχαν ἀγαθάν. | Ὁ Ζεῦ, ἀναίρει Τιμοδάμῳ: ἐμπ[ο]ρεῦσθαι | καὶ κατὰ γ[ᾱ]ν καὶ κατὰ θάλασσαν | ἀπὸ τοῦ [ᾱ]ργυρίου, ὅσον | κ' αὐτὸς [h]έλῃται χρόνον, | ταῦτα κράτιστα;

B: Θεοί. Τύχαν ἀγαθάν. Ἐν τοῖ | ἄσκει οἱ[κ]ῇν καὶ καπηλεύῃν καὶ ἐμπ[ο]ρεῦσθαι, τὰ δ' ἐῖν τοῖ γαύ[λοι] ἐγδιδόμεν: | ἐμπορε[ύ]σθαι δὲ χρήματα | ἄγοντα [καὶ] κατὰ γᾶν καὶ κατὰ θάλασ[σα]ν, πώλοντα καὶ ὠνόμ[ε]νο(v).

⁹⁹ A: Θεός. Τύχα. Διαιτᾷ IK | Εὐμένος Νίκε ὑπὲρ τοῦ ΧΟ|ΕΟΥ (=Εὐόχο?) τοῦ Ἀριστογείτο ΣΑ|ΠΙΕΔΟΙΟΧΙ τὸς ἀντιδίκος καὶ τὰς φοικίας.

B: Θεός. Διὶ Πατρόιῳ ΠΙΕΠ... IO | Τύχα λοιβάν, | Ἡρακλεῖ, Ἐρεχθε(ι), | Ἀθάναι Πατρία(ι).

¹⁰⁰ Eidinow, *Oracles, Curses, and Risk*, 138; Lhôte, *Les Lamelles oraculaire*, 427–8; Georgoudi, “Des sons, des signes et des paroles,” 85; Dillon, *Omens and Oracles*, 327–30; Lhôte, “Correspondre avec les dieux.”

¹⁰¹ An example of another such tablet is now apparently missing. Lhôte 142.

does not exactly correspond to the form of the question, “To whom of the gods?” In light of all of this evidence, it would not be safe to guess at the form of the question from a response or to think that oracles ever simply repeated the words of the question that was posed in the form of a positive or negative statement or command.

Amandry and Fontenrose are, therefore, misguided in assuming that the oracular pronouncements reported in indirect speech in a few inscriptions record anything like the precise wording of the oracle. The Greeks were apparently quite comfortable with summarizing in a decree the content of oracles in indirect speech as affirming a plan that they had resolved to implement. One of the key bits of evidence comes again from the Athenian decree about the Sacred Orgas. The response to this consultation is not recorded in our inscription but in a fragment of Androton of Athens (late-fifth–mid-fourth BCE) and Philochorus of Athens (mid-fourth–mid-third BCE): “... when the god declared that it would be better and more good for them not to work (the land), and it was demarcated with stones laid in a circle, when Philocrates proposed it.”¹⁰² The mention of the proposal of Philocrates suggests that our Attidographers, or at least Androton, are working from official records of some kind, whether those actually inscribed as stipulated in the Sacred Orgas decree or those registered in the archives.¹⁰³

What is interesting here is the fact that the Pythia, barring actual divine knowledge of course, almost certainly said nothing of the sort. First, according to the Sacred Orgas decree, she was to be asked not *what* they ought to do concerning the Sacred Orgas, but *which* of the two jars

¹⁰² ... ἀνελόντος τοῦ θεοῦ λῶιον κ(αὶ) ἄμεινον (εἶναι) μὴ ἐργαζομένοις· κ(αὶ) στήλαις ὥρ[ι]σθη κύκλοι λιθίναις Φιλοκράτους εἰπόντος. *FGrHist* 324 f30, via Didymus of Alexandria *On diction of Demosthenes* 13.7.col.14.37–9. C.f., ... τοῦ ἱεροῦ χρη[ι]σαντος ἰλῶιον κ(αὶ) ἄμεινον ἀν(ε)ῖσι κ(αὶ) μὴ ἐργαζομ(έν)οις’. | [(καὶ)] ἀφώρισαν κύκλοι στήλαις κατὰ [ψ]ήφισμα Φιλοκράτους. *FGrHist* 328 f155 via Didymus of Alexandria *On diction of Demosthenes* 13.7.col.13.55–8.

¹⁰³ *IG* II².204.54–5. On the messy relationship between the fragmentary sources, see Felix Jacoby, *Die Fragmente der griechischen Historiker*, vol. 3b: (Supplement) Nos. 323a–334, Volume I–Text (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1954), 529–31.

contained the words according to which they should act concerning the Sacred Orgas. It is important to note that the recorded responses, though, do not address the question that was asked but the question that the Athenians actually wanted to be answered, which were written on the two tins and sealed in jars. Second, while it is clear the Pythia knew that the inquiry was about sacred land—and even that it was likely about how it was to be used as Pierre Bonnechere has pointed out—the reply that it was better for them not to work the land would not have responded directly to other questions that might have been posed: whether to transfer a cult, modify its status, and anything else a polis might do to land without “working” it. Such an answer would have been a somewhat risky guess.¹⁰⁴ What Androtion and Philochorus provide for us, therefore, is almost certainly not the actual words of the oracle but what the *boulē* determined and decreed the meaning of the oracle to be in light of the real issue surrounding the Sacred Orgas. The same effect is noticeable in the *lex sacra* of Cyrene, which is prefaced with the phrase, “Apollo declared, ...”¹⁰⁵ I find it difficult not to agree with Fontenrose, who concludes, “This code is expressed in direct prose, but it is surely not part of the response as such: the Pythia approved it, but did not read it from the tripod. Probably the code was presented to the Pythia with the question, ‘Is it better for the Cyrenaeans to adopt this code?’”¹⁰⁶ What is reported in these inscriptions is not the oracles themselves; it was only what the oracles were understood to have communicated to the consultants. Therefore, it appears from both of these inscriptions that divine oracles have undergone a process of interpretation in which their meaning was understood to support a decision made by a *boulē*.

¹⁰⁴ Pierre Bonnechere, “Oracles et grande politique en Grèce ancienne : Le cas de l’orgas sacrée et de la consultation de Delphes en 352/351 avant J.-C.1 (1ère partie),” in *Dossier : Serments et paroles efficaces*, Métis (Paris: Éditions de l’École des hautes études en sciences sociales, 2017), §16. Given the extent to which the procedure goes to maintain secrecy, Bonnechere’s suggestion that the Pythia and priests could have squeezed more precise information about the nature of their consultation from the Athenian delegation seems highly improbable.

¹⁰⁵ [A]πόλλων ἔχρη[σε]... *SEG* 9.72.

¹⁰⁶ Fontenrose, *The Delphic Oracle*, 253.

Nino Luraghi has recently drawn attention to the apparent disparity between actual oracles and what the Greeks reported of oracles.¹⁰⁷ He argues convincingly, and against prevailing interpretations, that while the Greeks were especially careful to transmit their oracles accurately during consultation, they did not seem to have had religious scruples about altering oracular words outside of this context. To extend his excellent point, it is worth noting that all of the texts that show such manipulation were composed at a time when the exact language of the oracle was no longer considered of central importance for helping consultants determine what to do. In terms of the ‘oracular tale,’ this period of time falls after the first conjecture that leads to an action and the second conjecture that determines fulfillment. This observation helps to sharpen an important distinction: the attention in our evidence to the strict verbal accuracy of an oracle when it is considered active, and the apparent lack of attention to it following the moments of conjecture.

It is exceedingly rare that pronouncements are reported in direct speech and prose. Aside from the Cyrenaean *lex sacra* above, all of our epigraphic examples come from the early record of Didymaeon oracles.¹⁰⁸ These three boustrophedon inscriptions date from the sixth century BCE:

... I dissuade [...] I spoke on the earlier night, and it will be [better and m]ore good [for the one who obeys], but for the one who does not obe[y, the opposite.]¹⁰⁹

[...] pirates/robbers[?]. And the g[od] said: “It is just to do as your fathers.”¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁷ Nino Luraghi, “Oracoli esametrici nelle Storie di Erodoto: Appunti per un bilancio provvisorio,” *Seminari Romani di Cultura Greca* 3, no. 2 (2014): 12–17. I account further for the difference between an oracle and a report of an interpretation of an oracle below.

¹⁰⁸ The text of (Delphi) *IG* XI.4.1298 (early-third BCE) has been restored to reflect direct speech, but the text is too fragmentary to insist on it.

¹⁰⁹ [... ἀπ]ομυθέομ[αι· τ]ῇ[ι] ἀρ[...]...]τεως τῇι προτέρῃι | νυκτὶ εἶπον· καὶ [τῶι μὲν πειθομέ|νωι λῶιον καὶ ᾗ]μεινον ἔσται, τῶι | δὲ μὴ πειθομένω[ι τοῦναντίον.] *Milet* I.3.178.1–5.

¹¹⁰ λῆϊστοί· θε[ὸς] δὲ ἔπεν· δίκ|αιον ποιεῖν | ὥς πατέρες. *DI* 647.2–5.

... [abou]t the [temple?] of Heracl[es...]. And the god said: “Women into the [temple?] of Heracles [... N]o [ea]ting of vegetables. Wome[n...] a going [... w]oman...”¹¹¹

However, the first inscription is too fragmentary to say anything for certain—the only thing suggesting an oracular context, in fact, is the fragmentary word ἄμεινον; the second need not even be considered direct speech; and the third, which apparently deals with the regulations of a temple of Heracles, reminds us of the *lex sacra* of Cyrene, and the same argument may be applicable here as well.

It is fair, then, to wonder whether contemporaries of Herodotus would have been so confused as to think that indirect reports necessarily conveyed the actual words and form of oracles. In other words, would they have recognized a difference between what an oracle said (direct) and what an oracle meant (indirect), just as Herodotus suggests? I have already argued that when Herodotus says that “the Pythia commanded them [the Epidaurians] *that* they set up statues of Damia and Auxesia and [told them] *that* things will go better (ἄμεινον) for them when they set them up,”¹¹² he should not be taken to mean that the Pythia spoke to them in prose—both the immediate and greater context of the passage argue against such an interpretation. Yet, this kind of indirect report is exactly analogous in its overall tenor and use of the term “better” with the general impressions of oracular reports found in the epigraphic record that Amandry and Fontenrose prefer as evidence. Herodotus’ audience must have understood the difference. That they did is also made clear not just by stereotypically oracular phrases—“but whenever” (ἀλλ’

¹¹¹ [περ]ὶ τὸρα κλέ[ος ...] θεὸς ἔπεν· γυν[α]ῖκας εἰς τὸρα κ[λέος ...] λαχάνων : [ο]ὐ [β]ρ[ω]σιν : γυναι[...]ων : ἔσιν [...] γυνή ... *Milet* I.3.132.a1–7.

¹¹² ἡ δὲ Πυθίη σφέας ἐκέλευε Δαμῖν τε καὶ Αὐξήσιος ἀγάλματα ἰδρύσασθαι καὶ σφι ἰδρυσαμένοισι ἄμεινον συνοίσεσθαι. *Hdt.* 5.82.1, #59. There are a number of other examples in which the classically oracular words for better appear in both indirect and direct reports of oracles. *Hdt.* 1.85.2, #13; 4.15.3, #38; 4.156.2, #44; 4.157.1–2, #45. It is on the basis of these words for “better,” common to both prose and poetic reports of oracles, that Dobson has argued for greater similarity between the literary evidence and the epigraphic evidence. Dobson, “Oracular Language,” 26–32.

ὅταν, /-~~/) and “better and more good” (λῶιον καὶ ἄμεινόν, -/-~~/-×), both of which scan neatly into hexameter verse—but also by dactylic-hexameter verse, poetic language, and even by the way that oracles are privileged spatially where they are recorded epigraphically.

The best evidence for the clear difference is found on a fifth-century ostrakon that bears a receipt of a consultation of the oracle of Zeus at Salamis in Cyprus.¹¹³ The inscription is centered, drawn in relatively neat lines, and records a Greek oracle in Cypriot script: “I delight in this object of ambition and am gracious to you, but I strike down enemies with fire. I preserve with the trenches of the little creek, the sweet flow for flourishing the pasture, for my cattle in the spring. I am the one prayed to by him in doubt, who pursues with a prayer.”¹¹⁴ Though perhaps in prose for the most part, the clearly poetic expression of this response builds into a neat dactylic-hexameter line at the very end: ἤμ’ ἀρατὸς δοῖαρθ, σὶς μαίεται ἰαῖῃ (/ - / - / - / - / - ~~/-×).¹¹⁵ However, this inscription is not the only writing on the ostrakon. In addition to other notes related to offerings, there is a note in the upper right-hand corner and in smaller script that reads, “Decision of the god: I forbid unequivocally the damming of the little creek.”¹¹⁶ The hierarchy of space on the ostrakon supports Richard Meister’s conclusion that the centered text of this at least partial verse response was prior to the more straightforward inscription in the upper right-hand corner.¹¹⁷ It must be concluded, then, that the shorter text is an interpretation of

¹¹³ Richard Carl Meister, *Ein Ostrakon aus dem Heiligtum des Zeus Epikoinios im kyprischen Salamis*, Abhandlungen der Philologisch-Historischen Klasse der Königlich Sächsischen Gesellschaft der Wissenschaften 27 (Leipzig, 1909). It is interesting to note that Herodotus gives us some evidence for an early connection between Salamis in Cyprus to Delphi. Euclithon was the ruler of Salamis in the last quarter of the sixth century, and Herodotus says that he dedicated a censor at Delphi (then in the treasury of the Corinthians) that is very much worth seeing. Hdt. 4.162.3.

¹¹⁴ Φιλέω ζάλωμα τόδε κά τ’ ἰλέω ἐχθρῶς δὲ πυρὶ παρίω. Σώζω ἀμίραφι ρόφω μικῶ βωσὶ νᾶμα φαδύ, ὃ ρῆρι νομύσιφα ὃ πίφαρι. ἤμι ἀρατὸς δοῖαρθ, σὶς μαίεται ἰαῖῃ.

¹¹⁵ Meister, *Ein Ostrakon aus dem Heiligtum des Zeus Epikoinios im kyprischen Salamis*, 322. For the scansion of ἀρατὸς, cf. ἀρητὸν δὲ τοκεῦσι γόον καὶ πένθος ἔθηκας. *Il.* 17.37, 24.741.

¹¹⁶ Τέλος σεῶ: ἀπαυδάω νήλιτος ἰνχῶσις ρόφω μικῶ.

¹¹⁷ Meister, *Ein Ostrakon aus dem Heiligtum des Zeus Epikoinios im kyprischen Salamis*, 307–8. See also Dobson, “Oracular Language,” 11–12n18.

the oracle for the benefit of the consultant and not the original oracle that was later versified and written in the center, as Amandry and Georges Roux suggest.¹¹⁸ Not only is there a manifest quantitative and qualitative difference between the oracle and the interpretation, but the greater place of honor is reserved for the oracle.

One dedicatory inscription from Magnesia, though quite late, clearly shows its narrator transitioning from indirect speech to direct speech.

... after saying to her *that* she propitiate Hera. Where should she propitiate her? The god declared: “Where a man revered for long ages was always accustomed to bathe his limbs suffering with old age, where girls who are uninitiated to the bedroom arrange a chorus rhythmically to the sweet song of the flute, revere Hera in the house of a feminine man.”¹¹⁹

The first fragmentary sentence, which appears to set the stage for her main question, terminates with the advice of an oracle given indirectly. This advice in indirect speech must either be a summary of an earlier consultation, to which the later consultation is a follow-up, or less likely, a summary of the oracle that follows. Our consultant’s question, then, is followed by an oracle given in direct speech and five dactylic-hexameter lines. Whatever the case may be, I think it is safe here to think that she was not confused about the difference between an actual oracle and an indirect report of what an oracle meant.

The volume of evidence for verse oracles in our epigraphic sources has been underemphasized in scholarship. This fact is perhaps because almost all of the evidence, with the notable exception of the fifth-century ostrakon, is Hellenistic or later and, therefore, somewhat problematic for building an argument about earlier periods. However, the evidence is there, and

¹¹⁸ Amandry, *La Mantique Apollinienne*, 167; Roux, *Delphes*, 159.

¹¹⁹ ... αὐτῇ εἶπας: Ἦραν ἰλάσασθαι: ποίαν ἰλάσεται; Θεὸς ἔχρησεν: ἔνθα μακροῖσι χρόνοισι σεβάσμιος εἶθισεν αἰών | λουτροῖσιν χρῆσθαι τετιμημένα σώματα γήρως, | οὗ χορὸν ἰστασιν κοῦραι θαλάμων ἀμήτοι | εὐρύθμως λωτοῖο πρὸς εὐφθογγοῖ μέλος ἡδύ, | θηλυπρεποῦς φωτὸς μελάρθοις Ἦραν προσεβάζου. (Didyma) *IM* 228 (c. 190–200 CE). See also (Delphi) Werner Peek, “Neues von Archilochos,” *Philologus* 99, no. 1 (1955): 4–10.

it is worth keeping in mind that there is very little epigraphic evidence for oracular consultations earlier than the middle of the fourth century BCE anyway.¹²⁰ An early example is a decree of Paros dating to the early-second century BCE. Here, a decree that commissions an oracular consultation at Delphi prefaces an oracle set off by the heading, “The god declares,” in enlarged letters. The oracle itself is very fragmentary. Only three lines, apparently dactylic hexameters, can be identified, and only part of the first is very legible: “The Pa[rrians?] to send Praxiepes/man good at speaking [...]. Toward the setting sun(?), Philius/the friendly one sends [...].”¹²¹ In another example from Miletus in the third century BCE, the questions presented to the oracle of Apollo at Didyma are set off from the main text, and the two verse oracles are set off even further. Both oracles are fragmentary, but the first two lines of the first read: “[Receive wa]rmlly the men as helpful inhabitants [into yo]ur [city], for it is better and more good.”¹²² There is even an oracle of Dodona inscribed on an iron strigil that has been found dating to the first century BCE. “The house of Zeus and tem[ple of Dio]ne declares to King Zeniketes: ‘Wealth and labor [rema]in yours for all time, [whenever] you yourself, having fulfilled [all, defend] with skillful hand. [But being bold], keep, stranger, a limit honorable [more by its condition?].”¹²³ For reasons

¹²⁰ Fontenrose only counts three Didymaeon oracular consultations from the sixth century (*Milet* I.3.178, *DI* 647, *Milet* I.3.132a) and four Delphic consultations from the fifth century (*IG* I².77, *IG* I².80, *IG* I².76, *IG* I².78) attested epigraphically. To this list we may add a fourth-century Cyrenaean decree (*SEG* 9.3) that appears to report the words of a seventh-century Theraean decree regarding the colonization of Cyrene that was sanctioned by a Delphi oracle. Meiggs and Lewis, *A Selection of Greek Historical Inscriptions*, 5–9.

¹²¹ χρῆι θ[εός].

Πραξιέπη πέμπειν Πα[ρίους ...]

πρὸς δυσμὰς [πέμ]πει Φίλιος [...] (Delphi) *IG* XII.suppl.200 (c. 180 BCE). This reading of the second line is disputed, but it is agreed that this inscription contains a fragment of a hexameter oracle.

¹²² [Δεξασθ’ ἀσπ]ασίως οἰκίτορας ἄνδρας ἀργούς
[ἐς πόλιν ὑμετ]έρην: καὶ γὰρ λῶιον καὶ ἄμεινον. *Milet* I.3.33f.11–12. See also *Milet* I.3.33g.11–12.

¹²³ Ζηνικέτη βασιλεῖ χρῆι δῶμα Διὸς να[ός τε Διῶ]νας·

χρήμα καὶ ἐργασία σὰ πᾶσ[α]ν [μίμν]ει ὅραν,

αὐτὸς ἐπισταμένα τελέσας χερ[ὶ] πᾶν ὅταν ἀρκῆς].

σχέσθα[ι δὲ θρασ]έων πέ[ρ]ας, ὃ ξένε, τίμ[ι]ον ἔξει]. W. Peek, “Orakel aus Dodona für den Piratenkönig Zeniketes,” *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik* 30 (1978): 247–48. There may also be a fragment of another pronouncement given directly and in first person that now reads: [...ETO?] μαντήϊαν ἐγὼ χρ[ή]ω [...]. The extant fragment, with the supplied verbal ending, scans into hexameter (–/–~~/– [–/–]). Carapanos had read “ETO” and

of space, I cannot provide a detailed account of all the inscribed verse oracles that come down to us from the ancient world, only a partial catalogue.¹²⁴ Nevertheless, the evidence is clear, even if most of it is later than one might like: verse oracles do appear in the epigraphic evidence, and where they do, they generally receive special treatment in their display on the medium. This privileging of oracular speech allows us to conclude that the Greeks generally understood a clear difference between a report of an actual oracle and the gist of what an oracle meant.¹²⁵ Just as in Herodotus, the narrators among the inscriptions compress their narratives by summarizing oracular meaning with an indirect report of the pronouncement. While some oracles may have been given in prose (and the evidence of epigraphically attested prose oracles reported in direct speech is extremely limited), the evidence for verse oracles is much stronger than has typically been acknowledged.

χρήω on the tablet in 1878, but these have not been confirmed by Lhôte's study, who points out that Carapanos was working in an era before the electric light bulb and apparently also confused an alpha for an omicron. Lhôte, *Les Lamelles oraculaire*, 284–6, #136.

¹²⁴ Delphi: *SEG* 15.517.a.II.50–2, a.III.47–50 (mid-third BCE); *IM* 17.16–23, 27–35, 38–41 (late-third BCE); *SEG* 19.399.a5–11, b.8–14 (late-second BCE); *IG* II².5006 (c. 125 CE); *IM* 215.12–30 (second CE); Dubois and Hauvette-Besnault, “Inscriptions de Tralles,” 340–2. (c. 250 CE). Didyma: *DI* 570.2–7 (late-second BCE); *Milet* I.9.345.9–13 (c. 100 CE); *Milet* I.7.205a.10–12 (c. 130 CE); *Milet* I.7.205b (c. 130 CE); *IDid* 496a.8–10 (second CE); *IDid* 496b (second CE); *DI* 649.1–7 (second CE?); *Milet* IV.2.935.9–12 (c. late-second or early-third CE); *DI* 574.6–10 (c. 200 CE); *DI* 390.8–10 (202 CE); *DI* 577*5.15–17 (early-third CE?); *DI* 575 (early-third CE?); *DI* 579.13–20 (third CE); *DI* 577 (third CE?). Claros: Merkelbach and Stauber, “Die Orakel des Apollon von Klaros.” #1 (second CE), #2 (c. 166–215 CE), #3, #4, #5, #6, #7, #8, #9, #11, #13, #14, #15, #16, #17, #18, #19, #20, #25. Apollo Gryneius: Bean, “Notes and Inscriptions.” (pre first BCE). There is also a third-century BCE dedicatory inscription from Thera that relates a Delphic oracular tale in two hexameter lines (*IG* XII.3.1349/863), and a paeon hymn by Aristonous of Corinth from the middle of the fourth century BCE that pairs the μαντοσύνα and χρησμοί of Apollo with a “well-tuned lyre,” which suggests poetry in the mantic session (*FD* III.2.191.9–14).

¹²⁵ It is extremely odd that Plutarch's Theon in his dialogue *On the Pythia not giving oracles in verse* makes the opposite interpretation a number of times explicitly. He points particularly to Thucydides (1.118, 5.16.2) and examples in Herodotus, Philochorus, and Ister (*Mor.* 403a–f), who were themselves especially interested in verse oracles. In most cases, it is clear from the sources, as far as we can locate them, that the authors reported these “prose” oracles indirectly (Philochorus *FGrHist* 328 f116, 191, 215), except for a handful in Herodotus (#14, #17, #48, #82?, #89, #99?). I have already discussed the Atthidographer Philochorus and the fact that he seems to have recorded words in indirect speech that the Pythia could not possibly have spoken as an oracle. However, he may have written a now lost work on prophecy in which more were included. A number of oracular pronouncements recorded by Thucydides show dactylic phrases and poetic expressions, on which, see “Part Two: Thucydides and the ‘Oracular Tale’” below. It is worth remembering, though, that Plutarch is writing about 500 years after Herodotus and Thucydides, and the history of Delphic oracles may have looked much different from a time in which the Pythia was, in fact, giving oracles in prose.

Finally, it is not improbable that the Pythia and prophets at other Oracles gave extemporaneous responses in verse. However, it is often supposed that the Pythia, at least, could not have done this. The old notion that the Pythia uttered incomprehensible speech that was then interpreted and versified by attendant priests has thankfully almost died out.¹²⁶ It is now commonly accepted that the Pythia spoke in distinct words directly to the consultant, but the nature of those words, as I have illustrated, remains debated in scholarship. Beyond the issues relating to the epigraphic evidence for oracles, the problem is disbelief that an uneducated woman from a modest family, as was the case with the Pythia of Plutarch's time,¹²⁷ had the requisite education to produce extemporaneous meters. Thus, Hugh Bowden, following the lead of Amandry and Crahay, believes that the Pythia's plain prose responses were in keeping with her status as a "poor girl" and were rendered into verse either by versifiers around Delphi or the consultants themselves only at some point after the consultation. This was done, according to Bowden, in order to lend a sense of grandeur and to keep up with the competition from oracle-mongers and their collections.¹²⁸ "In a society where oracular responses in hexameter verse, with elaborate and obscure phrasing, were valued, oracular shrines will have needed to produce verses of their own to maintain their own status."¹²⁹

¹²⁶ This theory was ubiquitous in scholarship before the 1980s. E.g., Auguste Bouché-Leclercq, *Histoire de la divination dans l'antiquité*, vol. 3 (Paris, 1880), 94–7; Parke and Wormell, *The Delphic Oracle*, 1956, 1:34–41; Hugh Lloyd-Jones, "The Delphic Oracle," *Greece & Rome* 23, no. 1 (1976): 66–8. This theory seems owes itself to a tradition developing out of a misunderstanding of Plato's association of *mania* (madness) with *mantike* (divination) in the *Phaedrus* (244d–e), translated as *furor* in Latin, that was picked up in literary depictions of various prophets, particularly by Christian Apologists. For excellent counterarguments to this theory, see Amandry, *La Mantique Apollinienne*, 41–56; Fontenrose, *The Delphic Oracle*, 202–24; Maurizio, "Anthropology and Spirit Possession."

¹²⁷ Plut. *De Pyth. orac.* 405c–d.

¹²⁸ Bowden, *Classical Athens and the Delphic Oracle*, 33–8. The problem with this interpretation of the evidence is that it does not seem likely that any party would have benefitted from versifying a Delphic oracle if people generally knew that Delphic oracles were always given in plain prose and were

¹²⁹ Bowden, 37.

There are a couple of issues with Bowden's interpretation of the evidence here. First, his idea that the Pythia was uneducated and, therefore, could not extemporize in verse improperly predicates orality on literacy. In this judgement, he closely follows the claim of Plutarch's Theon who prefaces his reference to the uneducated Pythia at that time, saying, "Thus, it is impossible that one who is unlettered (ἀγράμματος) and who has not heard (ἀνήκοον) poetry converse poetically..."¹³⁰ The problem with this statement about poetry is that, while it seems to hold true in the Roman Imperial epoch when poetry was a studied undertaking commonly done by and through writing, it is not commensurate with the prevailing theory of oral poetic composition in Archaic and Classical Greece. Oral composition of poetry, as demonstrated for the Homeric epics by the oralists, preceded and was completely independent from writing until the arrival of that technology. Thus, I cannot agree with Theon or Bowden that being unlettered has anything to do with the ability to compose extemporaneously in verse. Moreover, there have been recent studies to demonstrate the strong probability that Delphic oracles were, in fact, products of oral composition. Lisa Maurizio has helpfully contextualized the oral production of Delphic oracles with a tradition of women's poetry extemporaneously and orally expressed in lamentation.¹³¹ Michael Flower has made some noteworthy cross-cultural comparisons with the oral poetry of Tibetan oracles.¹³² A number of other studies draw attention to the formulaic language, metrical habits, and prosodic similarities shared between the surviving corpus of Delphic verse oracles and the Archaic oral poetry of Homer, Hesiod, and the Homeric hymns.¹³³ Although this

¹³⁰ Οὕτως ἀδύνατον διαλέγεσθαι ποιητικῶς τὸν ἀγράμματος καὶ ἀνήκοον ἐπῶν... Plut. *De Pyth. orac.* 405c. It is also unreasonable for Bowden to think that the Pythiae were always uneducated like the Pythia of Plutarch's time. This cannot be Theon's meaning. He insists that the Pythiae at various times in history did speak in verse, which, in fact, implies that some of them must have been lettered according to the speaker's own assertion.

¹³¹ Maurizio, "Shared Meters and Meanings."

¹³² Flower, "Understanding Delphi."

¹³³ McLeod, "Oral Bards at Delphi"; Dobson, "Oracular Language," 40–60; Nieto Ibáñez, "Fórmulas Homéricas y Lenguaje Oracular"; Jesús M. Nieto Ibáñez, "Estudio Estadístico del Hexámetro de los oráculos de Delfos," *Revue informatique et statistique dans Sciences humaines* 25 (1989): 139–55; Jesús M. Nieto Ibáñez, "La Prosodia del

evidence is suggestive to a certain extent, I would not like to claim that any extant Delphic verse oracle in particular was really the original oral production of the Pythia. Still, the evidence does suggest that an unlettered Pythia could have composed verse extemporaneously in the same way that other oral poets could and that the oracles themselves could have been composed in that way.

If the Pythia could have given oracles in verse, there is no real reason to think with Bowden that certain people at Delphi had invented all of them, adapting their wording to events in the past. In a world steeped in written oracular collections containing hexameter and riddling pronouncements, he argues, the propaganda machine at Delphi developed verse oracles specifically to keep pace with the prestige accorded to those collections.¹³⁴ However, it is just as likely that the oracles of the collections were made in imitation of Delphic oracles. Resolving this question of originality and imitation, though, is immaterial. I argued earlier that the reason for our epigraphic narrators' collective silence on the activities of consultants at oracular institutions and the character of the preliminaries is because of a cultural familiarity with doing "the accustomed things." This principle of familiarity extends to the mantic mechanism at the different oracular institutions. Herodotus himself uses this familiarity to ground his descriptions of more unfamiliar oracular institutions. For example, he says, "The rite of divination both in Egyptian Thebes and in Dodona happen to be similar to each other";¹³⁵ "...it is possible there

Hexametro Delfico," *Minerva* 4 (1990): 53–73. However, I should note that neither McLeod nor Nieto Ibáñez think that the Pythia was ultimately responsible for these verses. The former suggests that oral bards at Delphi were responsible, while the latter thinks that these poets need only to have been poets who were working orally or in writing within an Archaic tradition of verse. *Non vidi* L.E. Rossi, "Gli oracoli come documenti di improvvisazione," in *I poemi epici rapsodici non omerici e la tradizione orale*, ed. C. Brillante and M. Cantilena (Padua, 1981), 203–221; José A Fernández Delgado, *Los oráculos y Hesíodo: poesía oral mántica y gnómica griegas*. (Cáceres: Univ. de Extremadura, 1986).

¹³⁴ Bowden, *Classical Athens and the Delphic Oracle*, 36–8.

¹³⁵ Ἡ δὲ μαντήϊη ἥ τε ἐν Θήβῃσι τῇσι Αἰγυπτίῃσι καὶ (ἡ) ἐν Δωδώνῃ παραπλήσια ἀλλήλῃσι τυγχάνουσι εὐδοῖσαι. Hdt. 2.57.3.

[Ismenus] just as in Olympia to consult the oracle by means of sacrifices”;¹³⁶ and most importantly for our purposes here, he says “...the prophetess [of Satraean Dionysus] declares oracles just like in Delphi, and there is nothing more complicated.”¹³⁷ Herodotus was not confused about how divination was done in these sanctuaries, and he clearly expected his audience to be familiar with how it was done at the most famous places at least. If Herodotus was just repeating stories told by Delphic priests for the aggrandizement of the god and his sanctuary, one has to wonder whether the aggrandizement that scholars like Bowden suppose could still have been accomplished if Herodotus and his audience knew that this was not how the oracles actually worked. Practices may have changed through time as Plutarch’s Theon suggests, but historians should all be prepared to accept the unanimous judgement of antiquity that the Pythia at Delphi and other priests and priestesses at other oracles could, and at times did, speak in verse.¹³⁸

¹³⁶ ... (ἔστι δὲ κατὰ περ ἐν Ὀλυμπίῃ ἐμπύροισι αὐτόθι χρηστηριάζεσθαι), ... Hdt. 8.134.1.

¹³⁷ ...πρόμαντις δὲ ἡ χρέωσα κατὰ περ ἐν Δελφοῖσι, καὶ οὐδὲν ποικιλότερον. Hdt. 7.111.2.

¹³⁸ An objection is sometimes raised that Plutarch’s reference to the judgement of Theopompus of Chios calls into question the historicity of verse oracles from Delphi. The story is an anecdote about a disagreement between Theopompus and his contemporaries over whether the Pythia spoke oracles in verse at the time (Plut. *De Pyth. orac.* 403e–f). Apparently, Theopompus investigated the issue and found very few verse oracles and a number of prose ones. Theopompus’ works come down to us in a fragmentary state, but William S. Morrison suggests that the anecdote comes from a digression at the beginning of his account of the Third Sacred War in the *Philippika* (*FGrHist* 115 f336). There are some references to oracles in the fragments, but they generally show an indirect form, “The Pythia declared that...” (*FGrHist* 115, f344, 358, 392). There is nothing else about the supposed disagreement in the fragments, though. Some scholars have picked up on this passage from Plutarch to argue that there really were never any authentic verse oracles to begin with, and that the ones that did exist must have been later poetic elaborations made once the oracles became part of traditional oracular tales, since Theopompus could locate few. There are, I think, three counterpoints to this argument. First, Theopompus did in fact find some verse oracles that were issued in his own time. The strength of this evidence for the fact that the Pythia was speaking in verse at least occasionally can, I think, be observed in Fontenrose’s carefully worded treatment of the passage, where he takes license to conclude that the Pythia “seldom or never did so.” Fontenrose, *The Delphic Oracle*, 236 (my emphasis). Moreover, Theon goes on to say: “Some oracles *even now* run out in meters...” (ἐνιοὶ δὲ νῦν μετὰ μέτρων ἐκτρέχουσιν... Plut. *De Pyth. orac.* 403f) Second, Theopompus’ arguments are confined to evidence he found for oracles from his own time (κατὰ τὸν τότε χρόνον), which is the middle of the tumultuous fourth century. To give the highlights, the temple at Delphi had not yet been fully repaired from the devastating damage it sustained in an earthquake in 373 BCE, and the Phocians had plundered it over the course of a decade (356–46 BCE) when they seized control of the sanctuary. Scott, *Delphi: A History of the Center of the Ancient World*, 139–62. Thus, the debate about whether the Pythia *still* spoke oracles in prose would seem to be a fitting topic in such a time of turmoil and should not be taken as a prevailing skepticism toward traditional verse oracles. Further, the major disruptions at Delphi during this time cause one to wonder to what extent the Oracle was operational. Third, there is some room to

Reception Scene

When oracular tales have a commission scene in Herodotus' *Histories*, they sometimes have a reception scene in which the consultant, whether a council or an individual, receives the oracle from the commissioned delegates. I suggested before that the commission implies the reception, even if it is compressed out of the story. The same holds true in the epigraphic evidence for oracular consultations. Similarly, a Milesian inscription from around 225 BCE proposes, "Let the delegates report (εἰσαγγελάτωσαν) to the assembly the things that the god may prophesy, and when the *demos* has heard it..."¹³⁹ Here, the Milesians anticipated both the reporting and learning phases of oracular reception before either had actually happened. There are only a few more inscriptions that bear evidence of a reception scene that had actually happened. One text relating to an Erythraean consultation of an uncertain oracle in the fourth century BCE has an oracular reception as an introductory clause to the main proposal of the decree: "S[ince ... a]nd the delegates have re[port]ed (ἀπ[ήγγειλ]αν) concerning the st[atu]e an[d] the temple of Aphrodite of [Pande]mus that they should buil[d a temple a]nd to make a statue f[or the salvat]ion of the *demos* of the Erythraeans, ..." ¹⁴⁰ Far more often, decrees and dedicatory inscriptions seem to prefer a more compressed narrative of the oracular consultation and simply present it as though the god had spoken directly to the person or community who consulted. Such is the case with an Athenian dedicatory inscription from around 350 BCE, which begins, "The

think that the ability to produce verse extemporaneously may have been less cultivated in the fourth century than in the fifth century or even the Archaic period before that on account of the increasing influence and prevalence of writing over those periods. See Flower, *The Seer in Ancient Greece*, 221.

¹³⁹ ἃ δὲ ἂν ὁ θεὸς θεσπίσῃ οἱ μὲν θεοπρόποι εἰσαγγελάτωσαν εἰς ἐκκλησίαν, ὁ δὲ δῆμος ἀκούσας... (Didyma) *SIG*².660.4–6 (c. 225 BCE). See also Sacred Orgas decree for an anticipation of the reporting phase. Delphi: *IG* II².204.47–54 (352/1 BCE); *IM* 16.11 (221 BCE).

¹⁴⁰ ἐπειδὴ οἱ [...] καὶ οἱ θεοπρόποι ἀπ[ήγγειλ]αν ὑπὲρ τοῦ ἀγάλματος καὶ τοῦ ναοῦ τῆς Ἀφροδίτης τῆς [Πανδῆ]μου ἐπὶ σῶτηρ[ί]νι τοῦ δήμου τοῦ Ἐρυθραίων οἰκοδομήσ[αι ναὸν] [ὄν καὶ ἄγαλμα ποιήσασθαι,... *SEG* 36.1039.2–6. See also (Delphi) *IG* IV².122.xxxiii.80 (pre 320 BCE).

god declared to the *demos* (ἔχρησεν τῷ δήμῳ) of the Athen[ians that they dedicate t]he house of Demon and the gar[den that is adjacent] to the Asclepion and that Demon himself [be its priest].”¹⁴¹ Although the reception scene is an essential part both of the ‘oracular tale’ and of the actual process of oracular consultations and is occasionally expressed in a few inscriptions, the evidence indicates that inscribed texts composed after the conclusion of the consultation tended to prefer the more economic form of the ‘oracular tale’ that leaves the reception scene implied.

While generally oracles seem to have been closely guarded secrets, there are instances in which the report of an oracle goes beyond the original consultant. Herodotus, for example, has the Thebans approach the Aeginetans as their nearest in order to ask for assistance in their revenge against the Athenians. In Aegina, the Thebans urge the Aeginetans to help them “in accordance with the oracle” (κατὰ τὸ χρηστήριόν).¹⁴² Our epigraphic evidence also supports this kind of extended oracular reception and intercity cooperation as well, mostly concerning grants of honorific inviolability (ἄσυλία).¹⁴³ The Magnesian decree, which I analyzed above, and the decrees of the other poleis that accompany it provide excellent insight into the sharing of oracles.¹⁴⁴ Indeed, a number of other inscriptions relating to grants of inviolability involve the citation of oracles.¹⁴⁵ The decision to declare one’s own city holy and inviolate was apparently

¹⁴¹ [ὁ] θεὸς ἔχρησεν τῷ δήμῳ τῷ Ἀθην[αίων ἀναθεῖναι | τ]ὴν οἰκίαν τὴν Δήμωνος καὶ τὸν κῆ[πον τὸν προσόντα] | τῷ Ἀσκληπιῷ καὶ αὐτὸν Δήμωνα [ιερέα εἶναι αὐτοῦ]. (Delphi) *IG* II².4969.1–3 (c. 350 BCE). See also Delphi: *FD* III.3.342.1 (early-third BCE); *IG* XII.3.1349/863 (c. 250 BCE). Didyma: *Milet* I.3.150.16–17 (180 BCE).

¹⁴² Hdt. 5.80.2, #58. See also the story of Croesus seeking the Lacedaemonians as allies according to the oracle (Hdt. 1.69.2).

¹⁴³ Kent J. Rigsby, *Asylia: Territorial Inviolability in the Hellenistic World* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996).

¹⁴⁴ Magnesia (Delphi) *IM* 16–87; Henri Van Effenterre, “Inscriptions de Delphes,” *Bulletin de Correspondance Hellénique* 77, no. 1 (1953): 168–9.

¹⁴⁵ There are many other examples of oracles being cited that relate to the granting of inviolability. Apparently, such oracles were either being given out like candy, or we are seeing that this interpretation of diverse oracular responses became a popular way of thinking in the third century. Delphi: *FD* III.3.342 (early-third BCE); *IG* XI.4.1298 (early-third BCE); *IG* XII.5.802 (c. 250 BCE); *IG* XII.5.868 (c. 250 BCE); *OGIS* 234 (210–200 BCE). Delphi and Didyma: *ICr* I.xix.2.1–10. Didyma: *SIG* 590 (205–200 BCE). Trophonius: *IG* VII.4135–6 (178–146 BCE). Apollo Chresterius: *SEG* 17.540 (third BCE).

understood to involve a broader consensus about the honor of a place. It was for this reason that these communities sent representatives, armed with oracles, out to other communities in order to get their decrees ratified.

Conjecture

In the ‘oracular tale,’ there are three phases of the conjecture episode: interpreting the words of the oracle in conjunction with known facts, framing an expectation of what will happen, and developing a plan of action to realize or avoid that expectation. It is an episode about thinking and feeling. There are only the slightest hints of these phases in the extant inscriptions. That they generally happened is not only reasonable but confirmed by the two commission decrees about which I have said much already. The Milesian decree of around 225 BCE states, “... and let the *demos* deliberate (βουλευσάσθω), after hearing [the oracle], how all things will be done pursuant (ἀκολούθως) to the counsel of the god.”¹⁴⁶ The Athenian Sacred Orgas decree implies the same deliberation by its stipulation that they should act in accordance with which letter the Pythia should choose as better and more good.¹⁴⁷

Most commonly, though, our epigraphic narrators only frame their thoughts or feelings about oracles in vague terms of expectation. For example, in a preamble to one of their own decrees, the Delphians cite a decision by King Seleucus II. “Since King Seleucus, son of King Antiochus, having sent a letter to the city, deems it worthy that both the temple of Aphrodite Stratonice and the city of the Smyrnaeans be holy and inviolate, being himself persuaded

¹⁴⁶ ... ὁ δὲ δῆμος ἀκοῦσας βουλευσάσθω ὅπως πάντα πραχθήσεται ἀκολούθως τῇ τοῦ θεοῦ συμβουλ[ι]α[ι]. (Didyma) *SIG*².660.6–7 (c. 225 BCE).

¹⁴⁷ (Delphi) *IG* II².204.49–54 (352/1 BCE).

(πεπεισμένος) earlier by the oracle of the god...”¹⁴⁸ That Seleucus was persuaded by an oracle points to the rhetorical use of oracles in arguing one’s position before an audience. As I mentioned above, delegates from communities trying to have decrees of inviolability ratified by others came armed with oracles in support of their claims. The decree of the Mallaeans allows us to look just a bit closer at how this kind of persuasion looked.

Since the Teans, who are friends and have a common ancestry from their forefathers, sent a decree and elders—Herodotus, son of Menodotus; Meneclēs, son of Dionysius—who, when they went into the assembly, both handed over the decree and conversed pursuant to the matters stipulated in the decree concerning the fact that their land was holy and inviolate, which they concluded/conjectured (συνέστησαν) from the oracles of Apollo in Delphi and in Didyma, ...¹⁴⁹

The narrator of this story uses language associated with oracular interpretation (συνιέναι) to describe how the Teans understood the meaning of their oracles. The use of this term here may not necessarily be so charged as to indicate that they performed the interpretive act of “putting it together” by connecting oracular words to particular circumstances, but it is not outside the realm of possibility. Whatever the case may be, they clearly supported their communities claims with an appeal to at least two different oracles from different institutions.¹⁵⁰ What is clear from the epigraphic evidence is that, just as in Herodotus, oracles were powerful and authoritative utterances and were cited in order to persuade others about a particular course of action.

¹⁴⁸ ἐπεὶ βασιλεὺς Σέλευκος βασιλέως | [Ἀντιόχ]ου ἀποστείλας γράμματα ποτὶ τὰν πόλιν ἀξιοὶ τὸ τε ἱερὸν τὸ | [τᾶς] Ἀφροδίτας Στρατονίκιδος καὶ τὰν πόλιν τῶν Συμυρναίων | [ἱερ]ὰν καὶ ἄσυλον εἶμεν, αὐτὸς πρότερον πεπεισμένος τῷ τοῦ θεοῦ | χρησμῷ... (Delphi) *OGIS* 228.1–6 (246 or 242 BCE). Other examples: ... καὶ νῦν ποτελιηφῶς χρησμὸν παρὰ τοῦ θεοῦ, | κατακολουθέων δὲ τούτῳ... (Delphi) *OGIS* 234 (210–230 BCE); ... κατακολουθοῦντες τοῖς τοῦ Ἀπόλλωνος χρησμοῖς... (Delphi) *IG* XI .4.1061.14 (172–167 BCE); ... τοῖς τε χρησμοῖς καὶ ταῖς ἱστορίαις [ἄ]|κολούθως... (Delphi) *FD* III.2.47.5–6 (138 BCE); ... φάμα Δελφίδι πειθόμενοι... (Delphi) *IG* VII.52.2 (first CE?).

¹⁴⁹ ἐπειδὴ Τήιοι φίλοι | καὶ συγγενεῖς ὑπάρχοντες διὰ [πρ]ογ[όνων] ψάφισμα καὶ πρεγ[γ]γευτὰς ἀπέσταλκαν Ἡρόδοτον Μην[οδότῳ], Μενεκλῆν Διονυσίῳ, | οἱ καὶ ἐπελθόντες ἐπὶ τὰν ἐκκλησίαν [τό τε ψάφισμα ἀπέδωκαν] | καὶ αὐτοὶ διελέγην ἀκολούθως τοῖς ἐν [τῷ] ψαφίσματι κατακε[κ]χωρισμένοις, ὑπὲρ τε τοῦ εἶναι ἱερὰν κα[ὶ] ἄσυλον τὴν χώραν αὐτῶν, ὅ | συνέστησαν διὰ τε τῶν χρησμῶ[ν] τῷ Ἀπόλλωνος τῷ ἐν | Δελφοῖς καὶ ἐν Διδύμοις,... (Delphi and Didyma) *ICr* I.xix.2.2–9 (post 170 BCE).

¹⁵⁰ On confirming oracles with other oracles, see Bonnechere, “Oracles And Greek Mentalities”; Bonnechere, “Oracles et mentalités grecques.” Bonnechere, “Oracles And Greek Mentalities.”

However, whereas Herodotus gives us deeper insight into *how* and *what* his characters think and feel when dealing with oracles, our epigraphic evidence generally only leaves us with the indication *that* they did think and feel about them.

There is, however, one very notable exception. I have already discussed the Magnesian decree of 208 BCE about the epiphany and games of Artemis Leucophryene, but this decree is totally unique in giving us a glimpse of *how* the Magnesians thought with their oracle. For this reason, it deserves closer analysis here. The narrator tells us that the Magnesians voted to establish a stephanitic competition as a result of receiving their oracle. He goes on to explain why.

... taking this to be the interpretation of the oracle (τὴν ἐκδοχὴν τοῦ χρησμοῦ ταύτην λαβόντες): that these (people of Asia Minor) will thus honor Artemis Leucophryene, being otherwise reverent to the divine, if, after going along with the Magnesians to the ancient altar, they should give delightful gifts to the Foundress, because even other competitions for prize money were founded at first but became stephanitic later on account of oracles.¹⁵¹

The thought process involved here is clearly a conjectural interpretation. First, the Magnesians understood the oracle at Delphi (indirectly) to have told them “that it is better and more good for them to revere Pythian Apollo and Artemis Leucophryene and to consider the city and the land of the Magnesians on the Maeander to be holy and inviolate.”¹⁵² Their next interpretive step, which is marked by the participle λαβόντες, was to connect that understanding of the oracle’s meaning to their immediate context. The most pressing consideration was how to show reverence to Artemis, and on this question, the narrator’s language shows that they identified two

¹⁵¹ ... τὴν ἐκδοχὴν τοῦ χρησμοῦ ταύτην λαβόντες, [ὅτι οὕτοι] | τιμήσουσι οὕτως Ἄρτεμιν Λευκοφρυηνή[ν], ἄλ[λως] πρὸς | τὸ θεῖον εὐσεβῶς ἔχοντες, ἐὰμ Μάγνησιν ἐπὶ τὸν ἀ[ρχαῖον ἐπό]μμενοι βωμὸν Ἀρχηγέτιδι γέρα κεχαρισμέν[α ἀποδιδῶσιν,] | ἅτε καὶ τῶν ἄλλων ἀ[γ]ώνων τὴν ἀρχὴν μὲν ἐπ’ ἀργ[υρίωι τε]θέντων, χρόνῳ δὲ ὕστερον διὰ χρησμοὺς στεφαν[ιτῶν γεγο]νόντων. (Delphi) *IM* 16.18–24 (221 BCE). I follow the emendations and interpretations offered by Slater, Summa, and Thonemann. Slater and Summa, “Crowns at Magnesia”; Thonemann, “Magnesia and the Greeks.”

¹⁵² λῶ]ιον εἶμεν καὶ ἄμεινον τοῖς σε[β]ομένοις Ἀπ[όλλωνα Πύθι]ον καὶ Ἄρτεμιν Λευκοφρυηνήν καὶ τὰ[μ] π[όλιν] καὶ τὰν | χ[ώραν] τὰμ Μαγνήτων τῶν ἐπὶ Μαιάνδρ[ο]υ [ιεράν καὶ ἄσυλ]ον νομίζοντες. *IM* 16.7–10.

important, contextual facts: first, that they already had a prize-money competition in honor of their “Foundress”; and second, that other prize-money competitions of old were later given the honor of awarding crowns to victors on the authority of certain oracles. They, therefore, concluded on that analogy that the goddess would be duly honored if they should similarly enhance the prestige of their competition by voting stephanitic rights for themselves and appeal to others in Asia Minor to honor their decision. The only significant difference between Herodotus’ narrations of this kind of scene and the Magnesians history here is that oracular interpretation for Herodotus famously begins most often with the exact language of the oracles themselves. However, I have also drawn attention to instances in which he uses an indirect report of the oracle in order to elucidate an interpretive conjecture. Similarly, the Magnesians interpretation began with what may generously be described as an indirect paraphrase. This understanding of the oracle may well represent the gist of its actual language, but one cannot know for sure. What should be clear, however, is that the Magnesians employed the same synthetic process of thought in interpretation: the connection of oracular words to particular circumstances.

The fact that there is only one text among the inscriptions that specifically describes the synthetic process of thought involved in interpreting oracles in any significant detail raises an important issue. The narrators of our inscriptions, with only one exception, do not include the very episode that is responsible for the famed ambiguity of oracles in Herodotus’ *Histories*. In the ‘oracular tale,’ it is in the episode of conjecture that one finds the interpretation of individual words and phrases debated, the meaning of which (valid or invalid) only time and reflection make clear. At this point, there seems to be two options left: to side with the relative silence of the epigraphic evidence on the act of interpretation and think that oracles were generally

straightforward commands and advice, or to side with the positive epigraphic evidence for verse and poetically phrased oracles and the prevailing notion in ancient Greece that oracles required interpretation. The former must rely on an argument from silence; the latter requires an explanation to account for the difference between Herodotus' narrative style and that of the epigraphic narrators. I argue, however, that this disparity can be explained by appealing to the generic differences between them. The evidence, though limited to just this Magnesians inscription, suggests that narrators of epigraphic texts are working with the same cultural concept of oracular interpretation that Herodotus knows and that the historical agents of his *Histories* enact. As I have claimed already, Herodotus is more interested in the process of inquiry. He gives his audience insight into the qualitative aspects of *how* his characters think, which nicely mirrors the emphasis he puts on unpacking his own reasoning as an investigator. Epigraphic texts, on the other hand, are on the whole more interested in indicating, verifying, and publishing facts relating to actions taken by communities and individuals. Decrees document decisions that are reached, not the debates that flared in the process of making them; dedicatory inscriptions communicate the follow-through on religious obligations, but they avoid opening up a dialogue about whether the obligation was properly understood. In a word, the interpretation of the oracle, if there was one to interpret, was considered a settled issue by the time that these narratives were carved in stone. Herodotus and this Magnesians inscription give us a look at the messier business of oracular conjecture in that moment of time before an official record applies its imprimatur and attempts to build community consensus. Expressing the actual words of the oracle or indicating the terms of a debate over interpretation might hazard fomenting dissent, which is the opposite of the purpose of these texts. The essential differences between Herodotus and the epigraphic evidence that Fontenrose and others have noticed can be accounted for not by a neat schism

between a socially-constructed story-world (a “Delphi of the mind”) and a historical reality (a “Delphi of fact”),¹⁵³ but by the different emphases of narrators in telling oracular tales.

Action

I have defined the action episode as the part of the ‘oracular tale’ in which the consultant acts on the advice of oracles according to their interpretation, expectation, and plan. For all of the reasons that I enumerated in my discussion about the action episode in Herodotus,¹⁵⁴ a full account in the epigraphic evidence of the kinds of actions that individuals and communities take in response to oracles would be tedious and unproductive. I will, therefore, confine my remarks to the kinds of ‘narrative compression’ that the narrators of the inscriptions utilize.

I noted in chapter two that sometimes it is only a single prepositional phrase that gives a clue about the involvement of an oracle. There, I argued that the phrase ἐκ θεοπροπίου serves to summarize a much greater narrative, of which Herodotus is knowledgeable, by framing certain actions as being done “in accordance with an oracle.” Although the epigraphic evidence tends to prefer different terms for oracles, like μαντήιον/α and χρησμός,¹⁵⁵ the narrators of these texts also compress oracular tales with comparable phrasing. The prepositional phrase with κατὰ sometimes appears in dedicatory inscriptions, like the following example from Calymna in around 100 BCE: “To Delian Apollo, ruler of Calymna, according to a Didymaeian oracle (κατὰ

¹⁵³ I have used these phrases of Roger Lipsey to argue that this schism manifests much later in the literary texts of the Roman period, when presumably fewer people would have had the opportunity of inclination to travel to the famous oracular sanctuaries of old Greece and the Early Church Fathers began their barbed apologetics. Roger Lipsey, *Have You Been to Delphi?: Tales of the Ancient Oracle for Modern Minds* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2001), 2; Daniel J. Crosby, ““Arrows Fletched from Our Own Wings”: Discovering a ‘Delphi of the Mind’ in the Early Church Fathers,” in *Prophets and Profits: Ancient Divination and Its Reception*, ed. Richard Evans (Oxford: Routledge, 2017), 114–129.

¹⁵⁴ See “Action” in chapter two.

¹⁵⁵ Herodotus also uses κατὰ τὸ μαντήιον (cf. Hdt. 1.91.4, 8.51.2) and κατὰ τὸν χρησμόν (cf. Hdt. 7.142.2) in a similar way, but he only uses ἐκ θεοπροπίου when compressing an oracular tale to only an action scene.

χρησζμόν Διδυμέως), Lochus, son of Lochus, but natural son of Xenocrates, with the children of Nicomedes: Olympichus, also son of Cleuthenes; Xenocrates, also son of Bolius; and his wife Polle, the daughter of Alexander; and Chrestopus, son of Lochus, son of Lochus.”¹⁵⁶ However, it is even more common in decrees, like the Athenian one of 423/2 BCE which stipulates that their people should offer first fruits to the goddesses of Eleusis “according to their ancestral customs and the oracle from Delphi” (κατὰ τὰ πάτρια καὶ τὴν μαντείαν τὴν ἐγ Δελφοῦν).¹⁵⁷ A number of phrases that are similar in meaning also appear: “with respect to the oracle given,” “just as the god declared,” and even “pursuant to the oracle of the god.”¹⁵⁸ These phrases occur so frequently in the epigraphic record as to suggest that they perform a function that is fundamental to the reason for their public display. Within the tales that the documents tell, these phrases serve to guarantee to their audiences that the actions taken were done properly in consideration of the oracles. This evidence confirms what I suggested above about the general lack of detail regarding conjecture in our inscriptions. The intent behind displaying these inscriptions is partly to advance a claim about the interpretation and potential fulfillment of the oracle and to build

¹⁵⁶ Ἀπόλλωνι Δ[α]λίου Καλύμνας | μεδέοντι, κατὰ χρησζμόν | Διδυμέως, Λό[χ]ος Λόχου φύσι | δὲ Ξενοκράτ[ο]υς, μετὰ τῶν | τέκνων Νικομήδους, Ὀλυμπίχου τοῦ καὶ Κλευσθένους, Ξενοκράτους τοῦ καὶ Βωλίου, | καὶ τῆς γυναικὸς Πώλλης | [τ]ῆς Ἀλεξάνδρου, καὶ | [Χρ]ηστόπου τοῦ Λό[χ]ου Λόχου. (Didyma) *Iscr. di Cos* EV 232 (first BCE–first CE). See also Delphi: *IG* II².4969 (c. 350 BCE); *IG* XII.5.913 (c. 177 BCE); Jean Bousquet, “Dropion, roi des Péones,” *Bulletin de Correspondance Hellénique* 76, no. 1 (1952): 136–40. (c. 240 BCE). Claros: Merkelbach and Stauber, “Die Orakel des Apollon von Klaros,” #3, #10, #12, #19. Didyma: *DI* 129 (third CE?); *SEG* 1.427 (c. 300 CE). Apollo Ptoeus: *IG* VII.4156 (post 312–304 BCE). There is also an inventory of dedications from Lindos that explains that a man named Pyrrhus dedicated his own armor “according to the oracle of Dodona” (κατὰ τὴν ἐκ Δωδώνας μαντείαν). *Lindos* II.2.114–21. Christian Blinkenberg, *Lindos: Fouilles et recherches, 1902–1914*, vol. 2 (Copenhagen: De Gruyter, 1941), #2. (99 BCE).

¹⁵⁷ (Delphi) *IG* I².76.4–5, 25–6, 34 (423/2 BCE). Delphi: *SIG*³ 270 (344/3 BCE); *IG* XII.5.802 (c. 250 BCE); *IG* XII.5.868 (c. 250 BCE); *FD* III.4.372 (230–200 BCE); *IM* 28, 33, 41, 44, 61, 62, 72, 73b, 87 (c. 208 BCE); *IG* II².1326 (176/5 BCE); *IG* XI.4.1061.17–20 (pre 167 BCE); *FD* III.2.48, 54 (pre 128 BCE); *FD* III.2.66 (first CE) probably also *IG* I².77 (c. 440–430 BCE); *IG* I².80 (430–420 BCE); Van Effenterre, “Inscriptions de Delphes,” 168–70. (c. 208 BCE). Dodona: *IG* II².1283 (pre-mid-3rd BCE). If we accept the restoration, (Didyma) Mario Segre, “Tituli Calymnii,” *Annuario Della Scuola Archeologica Di Atene* 6–7 (1945 1944): #71. It is also used on Athenian priest lists ([Delphi] *IG* II².1933–5 [330 BCE]), and again with a different preposition but similar meaning in a decree from Calymnus.

¹⁵⁸ E.g., ...πρὸς τ[ὸν ἐγδεδομέν]ον χρησμ[ὸν]... (Didyma) *DI* 113.10–11, *DI* 115.10–11 (130–100 BCE); ...καθὰ καὶ ὁ [θεὸς ἔχ]ρησεν. (Delphi) *IM* 48.17 (c. 208 BCE); ...ἀκολούθως τῷ τοῦ θεοῦ χρησμῶτι... (Delphi) *IM* 85.9 (c. 208 BCE).

community consensus, not to complicate the issue with alternative interpretations. For Herodotus, on the other hand, consensus around interpretation and fulfillment had already solidified over time and is presumed.

Fulfillment

Just as in Herodotus, fulfillment is hardly ever claimed in so many words in our epigraphic sources. These narrators, as I have shown, tend to prefer the formulations above. However, verbs of fulfillment do appear in a couple of these tales, and where they do, they carry the same meaning as they do for Herodotus. For both sets of evidence, oracular fulfillment occurs when obligations in an oracle are determined to have been met, like paying out the balance of a debt.

There are only two examples to which to turn for specific claims of oracular fulfillment. I have already mentioned the first in the tale of Thersander of Haleis. In the Epidaurian inscription, we are told:

And the god declared that they let the snake stay there and, after founding (ἰδρύσασθαι) a sanctuary of Asclepius and making a statue of (the snake), to dedicate it in the temple. When the oracle was reported, [D] the city of the Halicians founded (ἰδρύσατο) a sanctuary of Asclepius there and fulfilled the things prophesied by the god (τὰ ὑπὸ τοῦ θεοῦ μαντ[ευ]σθέντα ἐπετέλεσε).¹⁵⁹

In this story, the obligation to establish a sanctuary to Asclepius parallels their actions directly, and the other obligations are claimed to have been met in a more summary form that uses the familiar verb of fulfillment, ἐπιτελεῖν. The idea of fulfillment as paying out the balance due is both implied in the repetition of “founding” (ἰδρύσασθαι/ἰδρύσατο) and made explicit in

¹⁵⁹ ὁ δὲ θεὸς ἔχρησε τὸν ὄφιν εἶναι αὐ[τεῖ καὶ ἰδρύσασθαι] | [A]σκληπιοῦ τέμενος καὶ εἰκόνα αὐτοῦ πο[ιησάμε]νους ἀνθέμεν [εἰς] | τὸ ἱερόν. ἀγγελθέντος δὲ τοῦ χρησ[μοῦ, ὁ πόλις ὁ τῶν Ἀλικῶν | ἰδρύσατο τέμενος Ἀσκληπιοῦ [αὐτεῖ καὶ τὰ ὑπὸ τοῦ θεοῦ μαντ[ευ]σθέντα ἐπετέλεσε. (Delphi) *IG* IV².122.xxxiii.78–82 (pre 320 BCE).

this verb. Another example comes from a decree of Achraephia in honor of a local benefactor named Epaminondas. In this text, we are told that, after becoming *agonothetes* of the Ptoean games, “he was immediately fulfilling (ἐπετέλει) the sacrifices and the oracles of the god.”¹⁶⁰ In this case, there is same flexibility of the verb ἐπιτελεῖν as is found in Herodotus. What the sacrifices and the oracles have in common is that both are viewed as obligatory. Epaminondas receives praise for having paid what was due in the circumstance of reestablishing games that were allowed to fall into obsolescence. Herodotus’ concept of oracular fulfillment as “filling up” what is expected, “bringing to an end” what is determined, or “paying out” what is due is, therefore, not unique to him but is apparently a more pervasive understanding of oracular fulfillment in his culture.

Conclusion: Between Herodotus and the Epigraphic Narrators of Oracular Tales

I have argued that the narrators of our inscriptions are working with the same cultural concept of the ‘oracular tale.’ Taken in the aggregate, the epigraphic evidence for oracular activity shows that the diverse narrators understood the same basic narrative schema as Herodotus. In fact, a few narrators are storytellers very much like Herodotus. Whether in a dedicatory inscription or a decree, these storytellers put a premium on telling the full oracular tale as something of importance in and of itself. However, even where our narrators are not as focused on an oracular tale itself, there are deeper similarities between these narratives and Herodotus’ *Histories* than just the appearance of the expected episodes. Particularly in the most developed and frequently encountered episode, consultation, there is evidence or very strong

¹⁶⁰ ... εὐθέως ἐπετέλει τὰς θυσίας καὶ | τὰ τοῦ θεοῦ μαντεῖα... (Apollo Ptoeus) *IG* VII.2712.59–60 (post 37 CE) . Another inscription may contain a hint of explicit fulfillment but is too fragmentary to be of much help. (Delphi) *FD* III.1.560 (c. 360 BCE).

implication for the same scenes and the same actions often indicated with the very same terminology as those seen in Herodotus: commission (delegates, commanding, sending), quest (going, asking, recording, bringing back), pronouncement (declaring), and reception (reporting, receiving, learning). This evidence suggests again that these narrators, including Herodotus himself, are drawing on the same cultural concept of the ‘oracular tale’ and that this concept comes not only with a traditional narrative schema as its grammar, but also a traditional vocabulary relating to familiar actions.

Further, the narrators of these inscriptions apparently felt as free as Herodotus to compress their narratives when they did not feel that certain information was as important for their audience’s understanding. There are the same kinds of colloquialism in the commission scene, the same ‘narrative compression’ of the commission and reception scenes in the consultation episode, and the same use of indirectly reported oracular meaning to stand in the place of directly reported oracular words. Such ‘narrative compression’ relies on a familiar pattern for making itself comprehensible to an audience. Also, our epigraphic narrators, just like Herodotus, see no need to indicate the precise nature of the preliminaries, consultation procedures, or the mantic mechanisms at the various oracular sanctuaries. This silence, coupled with the fact that the selection of delegates in commission decrees does not indicate any specialized or prerequisite knowledge, suggests that oracular procedures and their mechanisms were common knowledge, at least with regard to the most famous sanctuaries.¹⁶¹ A number of our epigraphic narrators, just like Herodotus, compress the entirety of an oracular tale into a short prepositional phrase when the emphasis of their narratives is not on the oracular tale itself. Finally, just as in Herodotus, oracular fulfillment is often left as a claim implied by the

¹⁶¹ As I have argued, Herodotus also expected his audiences to be familiar with the procedures at the most famous oracular institutions in Greece, including Dodona, Delphi, and Olympia. Hdt. 2.57.3, 7.111.2, 8.134.1.

reasonable correspondence between oracular words or meaning and certain actions that consultants take. Where these narrators claim fulfillment explicitly, they use the familiar verb ἐπιτελεῖν to express the same concept of paying obligatory debts.

My argument for the essential similarity between Herodotus and the epigraphic evidence is only somewhat complicated by what happens with the episode of conjecture. As I have shown, the episode of conjecture, in which consultants ponder the meaning of oracular words and decide on a plan to fulfill that meaning, is exceptionally rare in extant inscriptions. Only the Magnesian decree relating to the games of Artemis Leucophryene shows evidence of the interpretive, synthetic thinking that typifies the scene as narrated by Herodotus and famously gives the impression of oracular ambiguity. Given that this episode is the one so often missing among the inscriptions, it is no wonder that scholars like Amandry and Fontenrose have drawn an adversarial relationship between the two sets of evidence and preferred the picture of clarity that seems to be offered by a selective reading of the inscriptions. They observed a lack of discussion about oracular interpretation in these texts and concluded that Greek oracles tended to offer clear advice to consultants, often just repeating the words of the question in the form of a positive or negative statement or command. On the contrary, I have shown that there is more evidence for poetic language and meter among the inscriptions than has generally been acknowledged. Moreover, I have argued that Amandry and Fontenrose have drawn an unsupportable equation between indirect reports of oracular meaning and direct reports of oracular speech. Their preference for epigraphy imposes a false hierarchy on the evidence.

Nevertheless, Amandry and Fontenrose, as I have shown, have observed a real difference between Herodotus and the epigraphic evidence, though not the one they thought they identified. The concept of ‘narrative compression’ that I have been developing also helps us account for this

difference. Epigraphic narrators were not interested in indicating ambiguity of meaning, diversity of opinion, or irresolution. In order to explain this difference of emphasis, one may appeal not just to the practical necessity of brevity for inscriptions—stonecutters seem to have charged by the letter,¹⁶² and the size of the stone itself presented a spatial limitation as well as additional expense—but also to the generic differences between Herodotus’ *Histories* and inscriptions. Inscriptions tend to be more indicative and procedural; their emphasis is on displaying a confirmation of propriety in an attempt to foster consensus. When it comes to oracles, they emphasize what crisis arose, not how it happened; that they should consult, not whether anyone argued against consultation;¹⁶³ who to send, not how they were chosen; where to go, not where else they considered going; what to ask, not how else it could be phrased. In short, they indicate *what* was decided, but almost never any kind of discussion, debate, or explanation about *how* it came to be decided. Names, dates, procedures... Expressions of diversity would only fracture the consensus that these narrators attempted to build with their texts, and publishing the words of an oracle might hazard reopening the issue of interpretation that had already formally been closed.¹⁶⁴ Herodotus, on the other hand, is far less interested in the names of delegates, dates, and procedures and far more invested as a narrator in the qualitative aspects of his stories. How the Athenians settled on the meaning of the “wooden wall” oracle is of fundamental importance to his claim that the brave Athenians saved Greece in the face of fearsome oracles.¹⁶⁵ He does not have to worry about complicating his narrative with diverse ideas since the deeds are done, the

¹⁶² See for example, IG XI.2.161a.118–19 (Delos: early-third BCE) which set the rate at one drachma per three-hundred letters.

¹⁶³ We are told that Demosthenes once argued against Delphic consultation following certain divine signs. Aeschin. *In Ctes.* 130.

¹⁶⁴ Susan Satterfield gives a similar reason for why the Roman senate would have chosen in only a few select cases to publish oracles. In all cases, these oracles either prescribed a well-known ritual or were believed to be too specific in their language to admit of reinterpretation. Susan Satterfield, “Notes on Phlegon’s Hermaphrodite Oracle and the Publication of Oracles in Rome,” *Rheinisches Museum Für Philologie* 154, no. 1 (2011): 117–24.

¹⁶⁵ Hdt. 7.139.

oracle has been convincingly fulfilled, and time has already proven which interpretations were valid and which ones were not.

Part Two: Thucydides and the ‘Oracular Tale’

Just as the epigraphic narrators and Herodotus tend to emphasize different elements of the ‘oracular tale,’ Thucydides offers still another style of the same narrative pattern. The fifth-century historian of the Peloponnesian War is justly said to be scrutinizing and skeptical. However, his skepticism is aimed at the question of verifiable oracular fulfillment and not at the fact that metrical oracles from Delphi and the oracular collections were circulating in his own time or the fact that his contemporaries regularly interpreted oracles in the same way as Herodotus depicted in his *Histories*. In fact, his skepticism not only ensures that the common style of oracular interpretation finds expression as something to be criticized, but it also shows that he himself uses the very same mode of reasoning to review more carefully and to temper the claims his contemporaries were making on the basis of oracles.

First, it will be helpful to establish that the narrative pattern of the ‘oracular tale’ obtains for Thucydides’ history just as well as elsewhere. Take for example the first story about an oracle to appear in the work.

[A] Since the Epidamnians knew that they were to have no help from Corcyra, they were in a bind about what to do next, [B] and when they sent to Delphi, they asked the god whether they should hand over the city to the Corinthians, since they were its founders, and should attempt to get some help from them. And he declared to them {P} to hand it over and make them their leaders. [D/E] When the Epidamnians went to Corinth, they handed over the colony in accordance with the oracle, and after pointing out that their founder was from Corinth and explaining the oracle, and they were asking that they not ignore them while they were being destroyed, but protect them.¹

The story goes on to describe why the Corinthians chose to help the Epidamnians and how they encountered Corcyraean and Athenian resistance, but this passage is a complete oracular story in

¹ Γνόντες δὲ οἱ Ἐπιδάμνιοι οὐδεμίαν σφίσιν ἀπὸ Κερκύρας τιμωρίαν οὔσαν ἐν ἀπόρῳ εἶχοντο θέσθαι τὸ παρόν, καὶ πέμψαντες εἰς Δελφοὺς τὸν θεὸν ἐπήροντο εἰ παραδοῖεν Κορινθίοις τὴν πόλιν ὡς οἰκισταῖς καὶ τιμωρίαν τινὰ πειρῶντ’ ἀπ’ αὐτῶν ποιῆσθαι. ὁ δ’ αὐτοῖς ἀνεῖλε παραδοῦναι καὶ ἡγεμόνας ποιῆσθαι. ἐλθόντες δὲ οἱ Ἐπιδάμνιοι εἰς τὴν Κόρινθον κατὰ τὸ μαντεῖον παρέδωκαν τὴν ἀποικίαν, τὸν τε οἰκιστὴν ἀποδεικνύοντες σφῶν ἐκ Κορίνθου ὄντα καὶ τὸ χρηστήριον δηλοῦντες, ἐδέοντό τε μὴ σφᾶς περιορᾶν φθειρομένους, ἀλλ’ ἐπαμῦναι. Thuc. 1.25.1–2.

itself. The *crisis* [A] in Epidamnus was the fact that factional strife had induced a costly war and its primary metropolis, Corcyra, was unwilling to do anything to mediate the parties and bring the war to an end. Since they did not know what to do, they undertook an oracular *consultation* [B] at Delphi in order to ask Apollo whether they should ask Corinth, a city that might technically be considered their true metropolis, to be their protectors. The *pronouncement* {P} of the god indicated that they should hand their colony over to the Corinthians and make them their leaders. Finally, in the episode of *action* [D], the Epidamnians go to Corinth, and after explaining their reasoning and the oracle they received, they hand over the colony to them, thus bringing about what would seem to be *fulfillment* [E] of the oracle's meaning as the Epidamnians understood it. Here, Thucydides presents an oracular tale in a matter of fact way with no complications or disagreements about the oracle, just as Herodotus himself does a number of times.²

One may fairly object that the episode of conjecture is missing in Thucydides' account. Some scholars, as I mentioned in the introduction, have supposed that the account that Thucydides gives of oracles confirms their reading of the epigraphic evidence: Delphi and other oracular institutions offered advice in prose that required no interpretation. However, this conclusion cannot be maintained, since Thucydides does actually include the episode of conjecture in some of his oracular tales. His story of Cylon's attempt at tyranny in Athens is a case in point. Here, Thucydides uses an oracular tale to explain the origin of the curse of the Alcmaeonidae that the Spartans demanded to be expelled from Athens.

The curse was such a thing: Cylon was an Athenian Olympic victor, both noble-born and powerful among those long ago, and he had married a daughter of Theagenes the Megarian who was ruling Megara as a tyrant at that time. [B] When Cylon was consulting the oracle in Delphi, the god declared to Cylon that {P} he will capture (καταλαβεῖν) the acropolis of the Athenians during the greatest festival of Zeus (ἐν τοῦ

² E.g., Hdt. 8.134.2, #102.

Διὸς τῇ μεγίστῃ ἑορτῇ). [D1a/E] After he received a force from Theagenes and persuaded his friends, when the time of the Olympic Games in the Peloponnesus arrived, he captured (κατέλαβε) the acropolis for establishing a tyranny, [C1] since he reckoned both that this festival of Zeus was the greatest (νομίσας ἑορτὴν τε τοῦ Διὸς μεγίστην εἶναι) and that it was something fitting (προσῆκειν) for himself as one who had won at the Olympic Games. [C2] Neither did that man yet comprehend, nor did the oracle make clear, whether the greatest festival named was the one in Attica or perhaps somewhere else. For the Athenians also have the Diasia, which is called the greatest festival of Zeus Meilichius (Διὸς ἑορτὴ Μειλικίου μεγίστη), outside of the city, in which the people as a body (πανδημεῖ) sacrifice not many victims but bloodless offerings of a local type. [C1] But thinking that he understood correctly, [D1b] he attempted the deed. When they perceived what was going on, the Athenians brought help as a body (πανδημεῖ) from the field against them, and setting up opposite, they were laying siege. As time went on, many Athenians, now wearied by the siege, departed after handing over guard duty to the nine archons with full authority to settle the whole business in what way they would deem best. At that time, the nine archons were performing many of the functions of state. Some who were being besieged with Cylon were faring badly out of a lack of food and water. Therefore, Cylon and his brother run away, but the others, since they were being pressed and some even died of starvation, sit at the altar on the acropolis as suppliants. When they saw them dying in the temple, those of the Athenians to whom the guard duty was handed, after they raised them up on the condition that they do them no harm, led them away and killed them. They even disposed of some who were sitting at the altars of the holy goddesses in the passageway. From this matter, those men and the clan stemming from them were called accursed and offenders of the goddess.³

Thucydides' brings Cylon's *conjecture* [C1] into the story as a way to explain why he attempted to seize tyranny when he did, and perhaps even why he failed in the attempt. His interpretation of

³ τὸ δὲ ἄγος ἦν τοιόνδε. Κύλων ἦν Ἀθηναῖος ἀνὴρ Ὀλυμπιονίκης τῶν πάλαι εὐγενῆς τε καὶ δυνατός, ἐγεγαμήκει δὲ θυγατέρα Θεαγένους Μεγαρέως ἀνδρός, ὃς κατ' ἐκείνον τὸν χρόνον ἐτυράννει Μεγάρων. χρωμένῳ δὲ τῷ Κύλῳ ἐν Δελφοῖς ἀνεῖλθεν ὁ θεὸς ἐν τοῦ Διὸς τῇ μεγίστῃ ἑορτῇ καταλαβεῖν τὴν Ἀθηναίων ἀκρόπολιν. ὁ δὲ παρὰ τε τοῦ Θεαγένους δύναμιν λαβὼν καὶ τοὺς φίλους ἀναπείσας, ἐπειδὴ ἐπῆλθεν Ὀλύμπια τὰ ἐν Πελοποννήσῳ, κατέλαβε τὴν ἀκρόπολιν ὥς ἐπὶ τυραννίδι, νομίσας ἑορτὴν τε τοῦ Διὸς μεγίστην εἶναι καὶ ἑαυτῷ τι προσῆκειν Ὀλύμπια νενικηκότι. εἰ δὲ ἐν τῇ Ἀττικῇ ἢ ἄλλοθι ποῦ ἡ μεγίστη ἑορτὴ εἴρητο, οὐτε ἐκεῖνος ἔτι κατενόησε τό τε μαντεῖον οὐκ ἐδήλου (ἔστι γὰρ καὶ Ἀθηναίοις Διάσια ἃ καλεῖται Διὸς ἑορτὴ Μειλικίου μεγίστη ἔξω τῆς πόλεως, ἐν ᾗ πανδημεῖ θύουσι πολλὰ οὐχ ἱερεῖα, ἀλλ' (ἀγνὰ) θύματα ἐπιχώρια), δοκῶν δὲ ὀρθῶς γινώσκειν ἐπεχείρησε τῷ ἔργῳ. οἱ δὲ Ἀθηναῖοι αἰσθόμενοι ἐβοήθησάν τε πανδημεῖ ἐκ τῶν ἀγρῶν ἐπ' αὐτοὺς καὶ προσκαθεζόμενοι ἐπολιόρκουν. χρόνου δὲ ἐγγιγνομένου οἱ Ἀθηναῖοι τρυχόμενοι τῇ προσεδρίᾳ ἀπῆλθον οἱ πολλοί, ἐπιτρέψαντες τοῖς ἐννέα ἄρχουσι τὴν τε φυλακὴν καὶ τὸ πᾶν αὐτοκράτορσι διαθεῖναι ἢ ἂν ἄριστα διαγινώσκουσιν· τότε δὲ τὰ πολλὰ τῶν πολιτικῶν οἱ ἐννέα ἄρχοντες ἐπρασσον. οἱ δὲ μετὰ τοῦ Κύλωνος πολιορκούμενοι φλαύρως εἶχον σίτου τε καὶ ὕδατος ἀπορίαν. ὁ μὲν οὖν Κύλων καὶ ὁ ἀδελφὸς αὐτοῦ ἐκδιδράσκουσιν· οἱ δ' ἄλλοι ὥς ἐπιέζοντο καὶ τινες καὶ ἀπέθνησκον ὑπὸ τοῦ λιμοῦ, καθίζουσιν ἐπὶ τὸν βωμὸν ἰκέται τὸν ἐν τῇ ἀκροπόλει. ἀναστήσαντες δὲ αὐτοὺς οἱ τῶν Ἀθηναίων ἐπιτετραμμένοι τὴν φυλακὴν, ὥς ἐώρων ἀποθνήσκοντας ἐν τῷ ἱερῷ, ἐφ' ᾧ μὴδὲν κακὸν ποιήσουσιν, ἀπαγαγόντες ἀπέκτειναν· καθεζομένους δὲ τινες καὶ ἐπὶ τῶν σεμνῶν θεῶν τοῖς βωμοῖς ἐν τῇ παρόδῳ ἀπεχρήσαντο. καὶ ἀπὸ τούτου ἐναγεῖς καὶ ἀλιτῆριοι τῆς θεοῦ ἐκείνοι τε ἐκαλοῦντο καὶ τὸ γένος τὸ ἀπ' ἐκείνων. Thuc. 1.126.2–11. For a similar oracular tale from legend, see Thuc. 2.102.5–6.

the oracle was simple. The god told him that he would “capture” (καταλαβεῖν) the acropolis “during the greatest festival of Zeus” (ἐν τοῦ Διὸς τῇ μεγίστῃ ἑορτῇ). The Olympics were the greatest festival of Zeus that he could think of (νομίσας) at the time, and he thought that this was all the more fitting because he had gained great success at those games in the past.⁴ Although Cylon’s intent was clearly to acquire tyranny, all the oracle apparently said was that he would “capture” (καταλαβεῖν) the acropolis. Cylon did, in fact, capture the acropolis, which fulfillment Thucydides seems to be emphasizing by his repetition of the same verb found in the pronouncement (κατέλαβε), but he did not succeed in maintaining his hold on power. Such a reversal of fortune in oracular tales is very familiar from Herodotus’ *Histories*.⁵ Also, just like in some of Herodotus’ stories, Thucydides adds the suggestion by way of an alternative *conjecture* [C2] that Cylon was to blame for his reversal: he failed to think that there may be another festival of Zeus, namely the Diasia, which were called the “greatest festival of Zeus Meilichius” (Διὸς ἑορτῇ Μειλιχίου μεγίστῃ). The implication of this interjection is obviously that Cylon might have been successful if he had made his attempt when all of citizens (πανδημεῖ) were off celebrating this festival.⁶ Consequently, some have understood Thucydides as offering a defense

⁴ It appears from Herodotus that there is an interesting correlation between tyranny and Olympic victory, particularly in the chariot race. Cleisthenes of Sicyon (Hdt. 6.126.2) won his victory after he had seized power, Miltiades son of Cypselus (Hdt. 6.36) won a victory before becoming tyrant in the Chersonese, Cimon son of Stesagoras (Hdt. 6.103) seems to have fallen under suspicion of the Peisistratidae after winning his third victory with the same team of horses. Thucydides himself (Thuc. 6.16.2) has Alcibiades boast of the suspicion of δύναμις accruing to him after entering an unprecedented seven chariot teams into the Olympic Games, with which he took first, second, and fourth place.

⁵ Given Herodotus’ profound interest in oracles, it may seem odd that the historian did not give any account of this oracle in his explanation for the curse of the Alcmeonidae. Hdt. 5.70–2. In both Herodotus and Thucydides the story of the Alcmeonidae curse provides background for tension between the Spartans and Athenians. Herodotus may, therefore, have been less interested in explaining the background of the background, so to speak. There may, however, be an allusion to the oracle. Thucydides says that the oracle declared that Cylon would “capture the Athenian acropolis” (καταλαβεῖν τὴν Ἀθηναίων ἀκρόπολιν) and that “he captured the acropolis” (κατέλαβε τὴν ἀκρόπολιν); Herodotus says that Cylon “attempted to capture the acropolis” (καταλαβεῖν τὴν ἀκρόπολιν ἐπειρήθη).

⁶ H.W. Parke, *Festivals of the Athenians* (London: 1977), 120–1. Thucydides emphasizes this point by repeating the word πανδημεῖ: instead of being occupied πανδημεῖ at the festival, they came πανδημεῖ from the surrounding area and besieged him.

of Delphi against those who might have accused the oracle of misleading its consultants.⁷ In Thucydides' reasoning, Cylon might have fulfilled the oracle just as well and have actually been successful in seizing tyranny if he had made his attempt while all of the Athenians were occupied in celebrating the Diasia at Agrae "as a body" (πανδημει). Instead, they fell upon him "as a body" (πανδημει), and he was ruined. Thus, conjecture is a central feature of this tale.

Yet, some scholars have their suspicions about this story and the role it plays in Thucydides' history. Their objection is that Thucydides is at his most Herodotean here and is being guided by "literary" rather than "historical" concerns.⁸ Some have observed differences between the role of oracles in Herodotus and Thucydides as well as differences between their role in the stories of Cylon's coup (and other events that happened long ago) and what is found in the rest of Thucydides, where the historian reports on events that are proximate to his own time. It seems that oracles are less common in contemporary history. To account for this disparity, these scholars have theorized that over the course of a number of generations storytellers inserted oracular consultations and fabricated oracles that predicted the events of the days of yore in order to entertain their audiences and impart moral lessons.⁹ Where his stories about oracles do not align with the typical pattern and show no obvious sign of unclarity, they suppose that it is due to the fact that there had not yet been sufficient time for tellers of traditional tales to elaborate on and confuse the facts. Thus, they conclude that Thucydides' story of Cylon indicates a momentary indulgence in a popular traditional tale. The strongest objection to this theory is the fact that Herodotus, who was writing at approximately the same time and also told the story about the curse of the Alcmeonidae and Cylon's attempt at tyranny, does not

⁷ Nanno Marinatos, "Thucydides and Oracles," *The Journal of Hellenic Studies* 101 (1981): 139.

⁸ Bowden, *Classical Athens and the Delphic Oracle*, 76–7.

⁹ Crahay, *La Littérature oraculaire*, 14–22; Fontenrose, *The Delphic Oracle*, 88–119.

mention anything about a Delphic oracle. If the version with the oracle was traditional and well-known in the latter half of the fifth century, as seems likely, the unexpected difference between these two contemporary historians would show that they made different decisions about whether to retain the narrative pattern of the ‘oracular tale’ or to compose an account of the events in a simpler form.

The question, then, is why Thucydides (and not Herodotus) would choose to keep the pattern. Hugh Bowden accounts for it as a literary flourish designed to underscore the fact that the curse of the Alcmeonidae was “‘ancient history’” and not a “‘genuine current concern.’”¹⁰ Thucydides may have believed that the Spartans were raising a non-issue in order to buy time for their preparations, but that is not the same thing as thinking that they were using an obvious fiction to do so. Further, the Athenians return a counter-demand for the removal of similar curses resulting from the slaying of suppliants, and one of these stories also comes with an oracular tale as an attendant.¹¹ In any event, the fact that the Spartans were apparently listing offenses “in order that they might have the greatest pretext for waging war, if they should not yield at all,”¹² all but assures us that the story about the oracle and the curse was believable to contemporaries. Otherwise, it would not have been much of a pretext at all. In fact, one might more reasonably think that Thucydides’ depiction of how earlier Greeks consulted and interpreted oracles is likelier to have been influenced by knowledge of how it was done in his own time (backcasting), rather than that this depiction did not resemble either earlier or contemporary practice in such an obvious way but was, nevertheless, a matter of popular tradition that could still pass for truth. Thus, Thucydides’ presentation of this oracular tale in a more literary style than his usual need

¹⁰ Bowden, *Classical Athens and the Delphic Oracle*, 71.

¹¹ The curse of Taenarum and the curse of the goddess of the Bronze House (Thuc. 1.128–135.1).

¹² ... ὅπως σφίσιν ὅτι μεγίστη πρόφασις εἴη τοῦ πολεμεῖν, ἢν μή τι ἐσακούωσιν. Thuc. 1.126.1.

not necessarily undercut its evidentiary value for determining how Thucydides contemporaries consulted and interpreted Delphic oracles.

Although there are only a couple of oracular tales in Thucydides' history that include an episode of conjecture,¹³ a number strongly imply that oracles were interpreted in more nuanced ways than would be the case if they always gave perfectly clear advice. As I have shown in his tale about the Epidamnian consultation, some oracles may appear to offer clear advice that is then directly acted upon by the consultants. However, other times there are significant gaps between the historian's report of oracular pronouncements and the actions that the consultants later take. These gaps require some amount of interpretive leap. The first example comes from Thucydides' account of the aftermath of the Spartan siege of the Messenian rebels at Ithome (c. 457–6 BCE).

When they could no longer hold out, those in Ithome came to terms with the Spartans in the tenth year on the condition that they depart from the Peloponnesus under truce and never return there, and that if anyone should be captured, he will be the slave of the one who caught him. And the Lacedaemonians also had a Pythian oracle from before, [saying] that they should release the suppliant of Ithomaeon Zeus (τὸν ἱκέτην τοῦ Διὸς τοῦ Ἰθωμήτα ἀφιέναι). They themselves [the people at Ithome] left, and their children, and their wives, and when the Athenians had received them out of hatred for the Lacedaemonians, they settled them in Naupactus, which they happened to have taken recently from the Ozolian Locrians.¹⁴

¹³ See also Thuc. 2.102.5–6. Occasionally, specific interpretations of oracles feature in speeches to bolster a particular case. In order to push their allies to war, the Corinthians cite the Delphic oracle that was given to the Spartans in which Apollo declared that he himself would help the Spartans in their war against the Athenians (Thuc. 1.123.1). Additionally, the Athenians claim that the Delphic oracle had actually confirmed the existence of a curse following the death of Pausanias and demand that the Spartans drive it out (Thuc. 1.135.1). In this case, it appears that the Athenians may either be disputing the fulfillment of the oracle or pushing the Spartans to drive out the guilty parties as they themselves had demanded that the Athenians drive out the Alcmeonidae.

¹⁴ Οἱ δ' ἐν Ἰθώμῃ δεκάτῳ ἔτει, ὥς οὐκέτι ἐδύναντο ἀντέχειν, ξυνέβησαν πρὸς τοὺς Λακεδαιμονίους ἐφ' ᾧ ἐξίασιν ἐκ Πελοποννήσου ὑπόσπονδοι καὶ μηδέποτε ἐπιβήσονται αὐτῆς· ἦν δέ τις ἀλίσκεται, τοῦ λαβόντος εἶναι δοῦλον. ἦν δέ τι καὶ χρηστήριον τοῖς Λακεδαιμονίοις Πυθικὸν πρὸ τοῦ, τὸν ἱκέτην τοῦ Διὸς τοῦ Ἰθωμήτα ἀφιέναι. ἐξῆλθον δὲ αὐτοὶ καὶ παῖδες καὶ γυναῖκες, καὶ αὐτοὺς οἱ Ἀθηναῖοι δεξάμενοι κατ' ἔχθος ἤδη τὸ Λακεδαιμονίων ἐς Ναύπακτον κατώκισαν, ἦν ἔτυχον ἡρηνότερες νεωστὶ Λοκρῶν τῶν Ὀζολῶν ἐχόντων. Thuc. 1.103.1–3. Note the unusual Doric genitive form of Zeus' epithet Ἰθωμήτα.

Thucydides apparently adds this remark about the oracle in order to explain why the Lacedaemonians agreed to the terms they did. As Thucydides presents it, the oracle only really specified that *the* suppliant of Ithomaeon Zeus be let go. His repetition of the conjunction καὶ in his list of the people who departed from Ithome underscores, I think, a certain amount of surprise that the Lacedaemonians let *all* of them, including the rebel Helots, just walk away after forcing their capitulation. Thucydides is suggesting, I think, that the Spartans conjectured that they should send all of those at Ithome away, since everyone there might be called the suppliant of Ithomaeon Zeus. It is also possible that during the course of the siege all of the rebels supplicated Ithomaeon Zeus. Even so, the Lacedaemonians still would have needed to interpret the singular noun (ικέτης) as a part representing the whole. Their fear of violating the oracle's command by accidentally killing or detaining one who could have been or could have been called a suppliant might have compelled such a measure.

A more extreme example of an interpretive leap is found in the tale about the death of Pausanias (c. 470 BCE). As Thucydides explains, Pausanias had laid up in the temple of the goddess of the Bronze House to escape prosecution, and when he was near death from starvation, the Spartans removed him from that temple. As they were taking him out, he died in the grounds of the sanctuary, and the Spartans buried him nearby.

But the god in Delphi later declared that they transfer his tomb to where he had died—and now he lies in the precinct of the temple, which the *stelae* make clear with an inscription—and since their deed brought a curse upon them, that they should give back two bodies in exchange for one to the Bronze House (δύο σώματα ἀνθ' ἐνὸς τῇ Χαλκιοίκῳ ἀποδοῦναι). After they made two bronze statues of human form, they dedicated them in exchange for Pausanias.¹⁵

¹⁵ ὁ δὲ θεὸς ὁ ἐν Δελφοῖς τὸν τε τάφον ὕστερον ἔχρησε τοῖς Λακεδαιμονίοις μετενεγκεῖν οὗπερ ἀπέθανε (καὶ νῦν κεῖται ἐν τῷ προτεμένισματι, ὃ γραφῇ στήλαι δηλοῦσι) καὶ ὡς ἄγος αὐτοῖς ὄν τὸ πεπραγμένον δύο σώματα ἀνθ' ἐνὸς τῇ Χαλκιοίκῳ ἀποδοῦναι. οἱ δὲ ποιησάμενοι χαλκοῦς ἀνδριάντας δύο ὡς ἀντὶ Πανσανίου ἀνέθεσαν. Thuc. 1.134.4.

The command to transfer Pausanias' tomb seems clear enough, but there is quite a distance between the dactylic phrase "two bodies in exchange for one" (δύο σώματα ἀνθ' ἐνὸς, ~~/—~~/—~/) and "two bronze statues of human form in exchange for Pausanias" (χαλκοῦς ἀνδριάντας δύο ὥς ἀντὶ Πανσανίου).¹⁶ Although Thucydides does not employ a proper episode of conjecture in his version of the story, there is a strong implication here that the Spartans connected oracular words to their particular circumstances and came to their conclusion about what to do. The statues are like bodies; their removal of Pausanias from the temple was unjust in the sight of the goddess; and this act required that they give back to the temple twice as much as they took. However, it is far from clear in the oracle's language that the "bodies" needed to mean "bronze statues of human form." These stories and others that do not have a proper episode of conjecture show that Thucydides, like epigraphic narrators, often compresses his narration of oracular tales at exactly the part in the story where one would expect to find mention or debate about oracular interpretation. Thus, where Thucydides is primarily focused on the actions that people take in response to oracles, he sometimes provides enough detail about what they did that an audience, with the 'oracular tale' as a framework, can understand how the consultants in the story must have interpreted their oracles. Nevertheless, Thucydides, unlike Herodotus, is less invested in developing a full narrative episode in which his historical actors consider and dispute oracular interpretation.

¹⁶ Fontenrose rejects the authenticity of this oracle specifically on the grounds that 1) the command to give back "two bodies in exchange for one" is an obscure one that is not corroborated by Diodorus Siculus' (DS 11.45.8–9) first-century version of the oracular tale; 2) the order to transfer a body to the place where it died is unprecedented in "historical" responses and smacks of legend. He goes on to reconstruct a traditional ghost tale from much later sources that has the Spartans install the two statues as a way to appease Pausanias' restless soul. Fontenrose, *The Delphic Oracle*, 129–31. With regard to the later sources, Thucydides was probably of the second generation after that of Pausanias, so the principles of source criticism recommend that we accept Thucydides' version over the variant given by Diodorus. With regard to the issue that it is unprecedented among "historical" responses, I have argued extensively above why his methodology is seriously flawed. Finally, some Greeks believed in ghosts and curses, and they took them seriously enough to seek out the advice of oracles and ritual experts (e.g., DVC 172A, late-5th BCE).

Thucydides also implies that people did commonly perform conjectural interpretation of oracles in his discussions about the issue of oracular fulfillment. There are a number of such passages because it is the verifiability and true extent of oracular fulfillment that occupies much of his attention with regard to oracles. As I have pointed out in the last chapter and will go on to analyze in more detail in the next one, determining oracular fulfillment involves the same kind of synthetic thinking that consultants use in the episode of conjecture: they combine oracular words with particular circumstances.¹⁷ In a brief digression, Thucydides explains that “the temple of Nemean Zeus” (ἐν τοῦ Διὸς τοῦ Νεμείου τῷ ἱερῷ) in question was the one, “in which Hesiod the poet is said to have died at the hands of those who lived there—it was declared to him that he would suffer this ‘in Nemea’ (ἐν Νεμέᾳ)...”¹⁸ The notice of this oracle is brief, but it contains enough details to extrapolate the tale lying behind Thucydides’ bald comment. After receiving an oracle foretelling that he would die in Nemea, Hesiod wisely avoided the town, but he did not consider that he ought to beware of the Nemean. When he entered the temple of Nemean Zeus in Oeneon in Locris, he was set upon and killed by some men who wrongly supposed that Hesiod had raped their sister.¹⁹ The underlying claim of the story is of course that, when the oracle said “in Nemea,” it apparently meant “in the temple of Nemean Zeus.” Hesiod simply misunderstood it, just like Herodotus’ Cambyses misunderstood Ecbatana as the Median town rather than the Syrian one by the same name, and just as his Cleomenes misunderstood Argos as the town rather than the grove of the eponymous hero.²⁰

¹⁷ See “Fulfillment” in chapter two.

¹⁸ ... ἐν τοῦ Διὸς τοῦ Νεμείου τῷ ἱερῷ, ἐν ᾧ Ἡσίοδος ὁ ποιητὴς λέγεται ὑπὸ τῶν ταύτῃ ἀποθανεῖν, χρησθὲν αὐτῷ ἐν Νεμέᾳ τοῦτο παθεῖν... Thuc. 3.96.1. See Marinatos, “Thucydides and Oracles,” 139; Alessandro Giuliani, “Erodoto, Tucidie e gli Indovini degli Indovini: Considerazioni sull’Ambiguità del Linguaggio Oracolare,” *Aevum* 74, no. 1 (2000): 17–18.

¹⁹ This last detail is gleaned from Paus. 9.31.6; Plut. *Sept. sap. conviv.* 162d–f.

²⁰ Hdt. 3.64.3–5, 6.80.

Thucydides places some distance between himself and the legend of Hesiod's death with the word λέγεται ("it is said"), but he cannot be understood as questioning the fact that oracles were generally poetic and interpreted by conjecture, only that he may not have been sure of the truth of this story. Such oracles and ways of interpreting oracles were familiar from his own day. The classic example is the debate over the fulfillment of a particular complete line of hexameter verse in some oracle, saying, "There will come a Dorian war and plague along with it" (ἥξει Δωριακὸς πόλεμος καὶ λοιμὸς ἅμ' αὐτῷ, – – / – ~ ~ / – ~ ~ / – – / – ~ ~ / – ×).

A dispute, therefore, opened up with the men who claimed that "plague" (λοιμὸν) was not named by the ancients in the oracle, but "famine" (λιμόν), but fittingly in the present situation [the plague at Athens], the opinion that "plague" was named prevailed. For people were recalling the memory in relation to the things that they were experiencing. But if, I suppose, at some time another Dorian war should happen after this one, and a famine should happen to come about, they will sing it [the oracle] according to what is fitting in that way.²¹

Thucydides remarks show that conjectural interpretation was a popular thing in his time. It is important to note that the only point of debate is the exact language of the oracle and not whether it was really an oracle. Further, this verbal crux is the foundation of Thucydides' suspicions here, not whether this was an appropriate way to interpret oracles. The oracle either said one word or the other, and it could reasonably have been thought of as fulfilled by the concurrence of a Dorian war and either a plague or a famine. However, because of the disagreement about which word the oracle used, Thucydides is careful not to claim that it had been fulfilled by the Athenian plague.

²¹ ἐγένετο μὲν οὖν ἔρις τοῖς ἀνθρώποις μὴ λοιμὸν ὀνομάσθαι ἐν τῷ ἔπει ὑπὸ τῶν παλαιῶν, ἀλλὰ λιμόν, ἐνίκησε δὲ ἐπὶ τοῦ παρόντος εἰκότως λοιμὸν εἰρησθαι· οἱ γὰρ ἄνθρωποι πρὸς ἃ ἔπασχον τὴν μνήμην ἐποιοῦντο. ἦν δέ γε οἶμαί ποτε ἄλλος πόλεμος καταλάβῃ Δωρικὸς τοῦδε ὕστερος καὶ ξυμβῇ γενέσθαι λιμόν, κατὰ τὸ εἶκος οὕτως ἄσσονται. Thuc. 2.54.2–4. See "Oracular Collections and the Notions of 'Authenticity' and 'Flexibility'" in chapter four.

The plague oracle may have come from an oracular collection, which some, following Fontenrose,²² have supposed to follow a different tradition of style and interpretation that perhaps influenced or was influenced by the oracles of literature. However, Delphic oracles in Thucydides' history cannot be proven to be of a totally different sort and unamenable to conjectural interpretation. Thucydides' dispute over the fulfillment of the Delphic oracle about the Athenian Pelargicon shows how comparable these supposedly different traditions are. When he lists the places in Athens that were handed over to shelter the refugees from the Spartan invasion of Attica, Thucydides mentions a parcel of land below the acropolis called the Pelargicon.

It was also forbidden to inhabit it and a certain final hemistich (ἀκροτελεύτιον) of a Pythian oracle prevented such a thing as well, saying that it was better that the Pelargicon be unworked (τὸ Πελαργικὸν ἄργον ἄμεινον, ~~/---/---/-×). Nevertheless, it was inhabited under the present necessity. The oracle also seems to me to have been fulfilled (ξυμβῆναι) in a way different from what they were expecting. For misfortunes (ξυμφοραὶ) came about for the city not on account of the unlawful inhabitation [of the place], but the necessity of inhabitation on account of the war. And although it did not name the war, the oracle foreknew (προήδει) that it would never be inhabited in a good circumstance (ἐπ' ἀγαθῷ).²³

²² Fontenrose, *The Delphic Oracle*, 166–95.

²³ ὁ καὶ ἐπάρατόν τε ἦν μὴ οἰκεῖν καὶ τι καὶ Πυθικοῦ μαντείου ἀκροτελεύτιον τοῖόνδε διεκώλυε, λέγον ὡς ‘τὸ Πελαργικὸν ἄργον ἄμεινον,’ ὅμως ὑπὸ τῆς παραχρῆμα ἀνάγκης ἐξοικήθη. καὶ μοι δοκεῖ τὸ μαντεῖον τοῦναντίον ξυμβῆναι ἢ προσεδέχοντο· οὐ γὰρ διὰ τὴν παράνομον ἐνοίκησιν αἱ ξυμφοραὶ γενέσθαι τῇ πόλει, ἀλλὰ διὰ τὸν πόλεμον ἢ ἀνάγκη τῆς οἰκήσεως, ὃν οὐκ ὀνομάζον τὸ μαντεῖον προήδει μὴ ἐπ' ἀγαθῷ ποτὲ αὐτὸ κατοικισθῆσόμενον. Thuc. 2.17.1–2. The similarity between the pronouncement as reported by Thucydides (τὸ Πελαργικὸν ἄργον ἄμεινον) and the oracle supposedly given either to the Aegians or the Megarians (PW 1: γαίης μὲν πάσης τὸ Πελασγικὸν Ἄργος ἄμεινον) has been noted before. Riccardo Palmisciano points out in particular the slight reformulation of the line and suggests a system of formulas that plays within an oracular repertoire, but he believes that verse oracles are later elaborations and evidence of popular poetry. Palmisciano, “Varianti di riformulazione,” 284. *Non vidi* Rossi, “Gli oracoli come documenti di improvvisazione,” 216. It seems to me unlikely that the oracles could have been confused. The later one was quite famous—it appears in a number of off-the-cuff references as early as Plato's *Hippias major* (288b) a generation after Thucydides—and was better known for its appraisal of Argive land and men, Thessalian horses, and Lacedaemonian women, as well as its crushing blow to Aegean or Megarian pride. If the Athenians had taken a fragment of the first line of this oracle as predicting the troubles that would befall them in the Peloponnesian War, this would constitute an extraordinary reuse of oracle, since such an interpretation entirely ignores the greater contexts of the oracle.

Thucydides preserves only a small fragment of this verse oracle from Delphi, but although it might seem at first glance to have given clear, non-predictive advice, his discussion of the oracle shows that it was not understood that way by contemporary Athenians or even Thucydides himself.²⁴ First, I would suggest that the words ἀργός and οἰκίζόμενος do not exhaust each other in meaning, as both parties seem to take for granted. Second, although it is unclear whether there was any original relationship between the oracle and the prohibition against inhabiting the Pelargicon, if the prohibition came as a consequence of the oracle, one might suppose that the Athenians originally understood the oracle as a simple command: “Do not inhabit the Pelargicon.”²⁵ Third, the common interpretation in Athens, as the historian suggests, was that they had violated the oracle and brought the misfortunes of war upon themselves. One might say that they thought of the oracle as something like a conditional prediction: “If you inhabit the Pelargicon, misfortunes will happen.” All the same, they clearly believed that the oracle had actually predicted the war. Finally, it may seem odd, but the skeptical historian himself also concedes some amount of foreknowledge to the Delphic oracle, though not necessarily of the war in particular.²⁶ In his mind, the oracle was not to be understood as a condition, since the war compelled the occupation of the land rather than *vice versa*. Nevertheless, it was still predictive of the fact the troubles would come at the same time as the Pelargicon was occupied: “When the

²⁴ Despite the fact that this oracle would seem to follow many of the same conventions that he himself established for determining authenticity, Fontenrose flatly rejects it since Thucydides does not assign it to a particular consultation in time. Rather, he supposes that the historian, like the rest of the Athenians, were collectively duped into thinking that this “superstition in the form of a proverbial phrase” was a genuine Delphic response. Fontenrose, *The Delphic Oracle*, 327. This argument is an excellent example of special pleading.

²⁵ There is a decree from Eleusis dating to the late-fifth century that prohibits the erection of altars and the cutting or removing of sod or stone under the penalty of 500 drachmas. Although a Delphic oracle is mentioned in the inscription, that one related to an offering of first-fruits and not to the Pelargicon. *IG* I³.78a.55–9.

²⁶ A.W. Gomme, *A Historical Commentary on Thucydides*, vol. 2 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1956), 65–6; Stewart Irvin Oost, “Thucydides and the Irrational: Sundry Passages,” *Classical Philology* 70, no. 3 (1975): 188; Marinatos, “Thucydides and Oracles,” 139–40; Borimir Jordan, “Religion in Thucydides,” *Transactions of the American Philological Association* (1974–) 116 (1986): 130–1.

Pelargicon is occupied, then you will not be in a good circumstance.” Anton Powell objects that Thucydides is more circumspect in granting the Delphic oracle no more prophetic insight than reasonable “secular” conjecture could attain,²⁷ but it is still noteworthy that he offers an interpretation of oracular fulfillment that pushes the limited language of the oracle toward what worse thing lies behind the “better” (ἄμεινον). What is clear, therefore, is that contemporaries understood an apparent instance of clear oracular advice in at least two different ways, and possibly even three. It could be thought of as a direct command, a conditional prediction, or a circumstantial prediction. Thus, the stark line that some scholars have drawn between the inauthentic oracular predictions and authentic non-predictive oracular advice does not do justice to the diversity of thought surrounding oracular interpretation in the ancient Greek world.²⁸

The Pelargicon oracle is not the only one that Thucydides claims to have been fulfilled. He also mentions another oracle of uncertain provenance that apparently predicted the duration of the Peloponnesian War.

And so, with the ten-year war first and the suspect truce after it and the war after that, one will discover so many [twenty-seven] years, reckoning by the dates (λογιζόμενος κατὰ τοὺς χρόνους) both that there was not many days’ worth of a remainder and that only this, in fact, was certainly fulfilled (ἐχυρῶς ξυμβάν) for those who were gaining some confidence from oracles. For I always remembered that it was bandied about by many, both when the war was beginning and all that way until the time it ended, that it would be necessary that it last “thrice nine” (τρὶς ἐννέα, [~]~|~~~) years.²⁹

²⁷ Anton Powell, “Thucydides and Divination,” *Bulletin of the Institute of Classical Studies*, no. 26 (1979): 46. K.J. Dover, though, has pointed out that Thucydides prefers προορᾶν for human foresight. K.J. Dover, “Thucydides on Oracles,” in *The Greeks and Their Legacy: Collected Papers*, ed. K.J. Dover, vol. 2 (London: Blackwell, 1988), 68–9.

²⁸ Fontenrose’s methodology also involves such a strict discrimination of oracular pronouncements according to his own interpretation of what he calls their authentic modes (simple commands, conditioned commands, prohibitions and warnings, statements on past or present, simple future statements, and conditioned predictions). Fontenrose, *The Delphic Oracle*, 13–24.

²⁹ ὥστε ξὺν τῷ πρώτῳ πολέμῳ τῷ δεκέτει καὶ τῇ μετ’ αὐτὸν ὑπόπτῳ ἀνοκωχῇ καὶ τῷ ὕστερον ἐξ αὐτῆς πολέμῳ εὐρήσει τις τοσαῦτα ἔτη, λογιζόμενος κατὰ τοὺς χρόνους, καὶ ἡμέρας οὐ πολλὰς παρενεγκούσας, καὶ τοῖς ἀπὸ χρησμῶν τι ἰσχυρισσάμενοις μόνον δὴ τοῦτο ἐχυρῶς ξυμβάν. αἰεὶ γὰρ ἔγωγε μέμνημαι, καὶ ἀρχομένου τοῦ πολέμου καὶ μέχρι οὗ ἐτελεύτησε, προφερόμενον ὑπὸ πολλῶν ὅτι τρὶς ἐννέα ἔτη δέοι γενέσθαι αὐτόν. Thuc. 5.26.3.

Exactly what it indicates about Thucydides' perception of oracles is difficult to say. Some scholars have read this passage as an indictment of the reliability of oracular insight altogether; others attempt to limit his claim here to the oracle-mongers who peddled their interpretations of oracles taken from collections.³⁰ It is not necessary to take up this debate here. What is safe to say is that Thucydides had high standards for verifying the extent to which oracular prophecy and the claims advanced based on it were provable, as I just showed in the case of the Pelargicon oracle. In this passage, Thucydides confesses that the "thrice nine years" oracle and its interpretation was positively proven accurate (ἐχυρῶς ξυμβάν), and he does the oracular interpretation for himself. His first criterion is that the wording of the oracle has to agree with what actually happened, and so in this case, "thrice nine years" has to be the equivalent of the period from the outbreak of the war to its conclusion. He proves this by "reckoning by the dates" (λογιζόμενος κατὰ τοὺς χρόνους), by which he presumably means that he counted from the day the war began to the day it ended. The second criterion is that the oracle must have preceded the event it was supposed to have predicted without any doubt, hence, Thucydides' comment that he himself had heard the oracle mentioned as early as the beginning of the war.

However, on further inspection, it appears that Thucydides was not so much compelled by unassailable proof to concede that this oracle was accurately fulfilled as he was convinced by a reasonable account or, at least, by the desire not to appear unreasonable. First, immediately before making these remarks, Thucydides argues that the Peloponnesian War should be thought of as one, twenty-seven-year-long conflict, despite the fact that there were clearly, as he himself acknowledges, three distinct periods: a "ten-year war" (Archidamian War, 431–421 BCE), the Peace of Nicias (421–413 BCE), and the second war (Decelean War, 413–404 BCE).³¹

³⁰ See in particular Oost, "Thucydides and the Irrational"; Powell, "Thucydides and Divination."

³¹ Thuc. 5.26.1–2.

Essentially, he has to argue that what happened during the Peace of Nicias was a *de facto*, if not *de jure*, state of war. One may find his argument convincing, but this kind of reasoning is just as arbitrary, I think, as supposing WWI and WWII to be two different wars even though the Treaty of Versailles and the peace that followed was contentious and created some of the significant conditions that led again to military conflict. Second, the fact that his calculation left a remainder of some number of days could have been enough to reject the fulfillment of the oracle, since the war would have ended in the twenty-eighth year, counting inclusively, and not twenty-seven years to the day. Since he does mention this fact, one may suppose that Thucydides did not think of it as a reasonable hindrance to the claim of fulfillment. Thus, Thucydides believed that the best account of the facts was that the war between the Athenians and the Spartans lasted twenty-seven years, and as a consequence, he also needed to accept the reasonable conclusion that the “thrice nine years” oracle was close enough to be verified as an accurate prediction. Whether he thought that this was true because of actual divine foreknowledge made known to humans through the oracle or that it was just a result of blind chance is another issue entirely. In either case, Thucydides was clearly rather skeptical of the claims of oracular fulfillment and imposed an extremely high standard of proof for verifying them, but his history also shows that many of his fellow Greeks were less exacting. Additionally, it should now be clear that he and his contemporaries all used similar modes of reasoning in making their judgements and were quite familiar with oracular verse (Delphic and otherwise) just as our other ancient sources.³²

³² There are two other examples of indirectly reported Delphic pronouncements with metrical phrases and poetic expressions: (Delphi) κατὰ κράτος πολέμοισι νίκην (~/- - /~~~/~~~/-) ἔσεσθαι, καὶ αὐτὸς ἔρη ξυλλήψεσθαι καὶ παρακαλούμενος καὶ ἄκλητος (“that victory will be theirs who fight with might, and he said that he himself will be their ally both summoned and uncalled.” 1.118.3, cf. 2.54.4) Διὸς υἱοῦ ἡμιθέου τὸ σπέρμα (~~~/- - /~~~/- - /~~) ... ἀναφέρειν... ἀργυρέα εὐλάκα (/~~~/- - /- - /) εὐλαξεῖν (“to bring back the seed of the half-god son of Zeus... to plow with a silver plowshare...” 5.16.2). This last oracle was said to have been induced by bribing the Pythia, which leads us to wonder why anyone would have told the Pythia to use such a phrase or how anyone could have believed it genuine if such metrical and poetic expressions were totally outside of Delphic convention. Naerebout and Beerden make an exception of this oracle on the grounds that it might have been part of a proverb, which theory

While Herodotus often draws particular attention to the conjectures of consultants and whether or not they seem to have interpreted oracles correctly or incorrectly, Thucydides rarely emphasizes how consultants came to interpret their oracles before they acted upon them. For whatever reason, this aspect of the ‘oracular tale’ was less interesting to him. Instead, his focus is on claims of oracular fulfillment, and so, he devotes more of his critical attention and commentary to such debates with his contemporaries. Thucydides was clearly hesitant about making such claims himself, but as I have shown, the depth of his skepticism was not bottomless. Rather, if an oracle could be shown to have preceded the event it predicted, if its language was not in dispute, and if its language aligned with the facts in a convincing way, Thucydides could find it in himself to admit that it had been fulfilled. But more importantly, despite any remaining doubt he may or may not have had about what such a fulfilled oracle meant about the veracity of oracular divination, Thucydides was clearly familiar with poetic oracles from Delphi and other places, held the same cultural concept of the ‘oracular tale,’ and interpreted oracles in the same manner as Herodotus.

Fontenrose discarded long ago for lack of corroborating evidence (Fontenrose, *The Delphic Oracle*, 87n62.), or that it could be read more literally—“silver is no good for the fashioning of plowshares, i.e., all their efforts will remain fruitless”—following Simon Hornblower (Simon Hornblower, *A Commentary on Thucydides*, vol. 2 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), 465.). Naerebout and Beerden, “Gods Cannot Tell Lies,” 134n49. However, with regard to the former point, there is no great reason to think that Delphi and other producers of oracles could not employ proverbial sayings, and with regard to the latter one, interpreting the oracle as meaning that their efforts would be wasted involves that same kind of conjecture as thinking the oracle meant that they will have to buy their food. The apparent associations are as follows: 1) plowshares/toil, silver plowshare/useless and expensive tool in comparison to an iron plowshare; 2) plowshare/agricultural production, silver/used for trade. These arguments cannot so easily dismiss Thucydides’ report of this oracle, even if the Pythia was bribed to give it.

Conclusion

Herodotus' historical reliability as a witness for matters of oracular activity has too swiftly been dismissed in modern scholarship. This dismissal was due in large part to the work of Amandry and Fontenrose who insisted that the epigraphic record be used as the measure by which to judge the reliability of literary witnesses. I have argued that this evaluation has imposed a hierarchy upon the evidence that ignores the real and prominent differences that exist between epigraphic and contemporary records, on the one hand, and more literary texts, on the other, as well as the substantial similarities between their different styles of narration. The narratological approach that I propose with the help of the 'oracular tale' allows us to perform a more careful and revealing comparison of the evidence. What comes into focus in this analysis is the fact that the pattern and principles of the 'oracular tale' obtain for the epigraphic record and Thucydides as well as it does for Herodotus both in general and in a number of important specifics. Some epigraphic narrators and occasionally Thucydides himself showcase an ability to tell their oracular tales in a way that is fuller and more Herodotean. Additionally, there is broad agreement between them not only in terms of the episodes involved and their narrative order but also their typifying terminology, which suggests that the vocabulary of the 'oracular tale' was also traditional. Importantly, there is also strong evidence in the inscriptions and Thucydides for the same kinds of 'narrative compression' like colloquialism, substitution, and omission of easily inferable data that are seen in Herodotus.

However, Amandry and Fontenrose were not totally off base in their observation of important differences, but only in what those differences indicate. By this same narratological analysis, I have shown that the key points of difference between Herodotus and the contemporary sources are their style of presenting oracular pronouncements and the general

absence of the episode of conjecture from the latter. Amandry and Fontenrose observed the paucity of evidence for interpretive conjecture, and by taking the indirect reports of oracular speech to be near quotations of genuine oracular pronouncements, they concluded that the Oracle at Delphi issued advice to consultants in clear and plain prose. On the contrary, by a close examination of Herodotus' oracular tales and the evidence for oracular pronouncements in the epigraphic record, I have shown that there is no justification for interpreting indirect reports as equivalent to direct quotations. Further, there is a larger number of verse and poetically phrased oracles and fragments of oracles among the inscriptions and in Thucydides than has been typically acknowledged. Finally, although the episode of conjecture is rare in these sources, that this action was fundamental to the utility of oracles is assured by a number of allusions to the persuasive effect of oracles, by a unique inscription that spells out the interpretation of one particular oracle, and by Thucydides' frequent debates with his contemporaries over the issue of the fulfillment of oracular prophecy. In this way, I have argued more strongly that the narrative pattern of the 'oracular tale' is more than a literary phenomenon confined to Herodotus and the world of his *Histories*. It is a familiar pattern of narrative, of thought, and of practice that is proper to the culture of fifth-century Greece and beyond. All of these narrators are communicating within the same culture and using the same cultural concept of the 'oracular tale.' It is just their emphases as narrators and their media that are different.

CHAPTER FOUR: 'ORACULAR THINKING' IN AND THROUGH ORACULAR TALES

Introduction

Oracles and narratives work together. Oracles are deeply embedded in tales that show the same clear narrative pattern whether they are found in literature or in inscriptions. Some questions remain, though, about the basis of the belief that prompted the Greeks to consult oracles and the kind of thinking that allowed them to conclude that these oracles were useful for understanding their future. As I have demonstrated in the last two chapters, the 'oracular tale' would have been a familiar pattern to the ancient Greeks both from their own experience with consulting oracles and from the stories and texts that describe consultation. However, some recent scholars have specifically denied that verse and poetically phrased oracles, like those in Herodotus, would have been useful for consultants. For moderns, it is simply "common sense" that people who are uncertain about their future would not find such oracles to be useful for gaining certainty.¹ Instead, they reason that such tales were part of an invented tradition that was popular, and therefore, that such stories do not reflect the historical reality of oracular divination. In order to demonstrate my conclusions about the 'oracular tale' as a pattern of narrative, of thought, and of action and the historical reliability of Herodotus' *Histories* as a source for how oracular divination worked, I must explain what utility the Greeks derived from poetic and enigmatic oracles. Instead of imposing modern "common sense" onto the ancients, I seek to understand this utility from the stories that the Greeks told about people making use of oracles. I argue that the belief in the veracity of oracular divination prompted the Greeks to use the familiar

¹ Fontenrose, "The Oracular Response"; Morgan, *Athletes and Oracles*, 157; Bowden, *Classical Athens and the Delphic Oracle*, 51; Johnston, *Ancient Greek Divination*, 2008, 55; Naerebout and Beerden, "Gods Cannot Tell Lies," 136–7.

patterns of behavior being reflected in oracular tales to prove their oracles correct and that the act of telling such stories provided the evidentiary support necessary for sustaining belief in the prophetic power of oracles. In other words, belief reinforces utility, and utility, belief. A deeper look at the kind of thinking involved in the composition of oracular tales will explain how this is possible, and ultimately how oracular divination worked.

I begin with the claim that oracular tales are marvelous tales. They contain a conjunction between oracular words and their fulfillment. This kind of chance conjunction, though unexpected and not connected by a clear sufficient cause, is coherent and understandable because it seems to happen as if it was intended to happen that way. Thus, the composition of an oracular tale presumes a narrator (human or divine) who has already given an order to events and has already understood the oracle as being fulfilled by a certain event. Modern scholars tend to take two different and equally problematic approaches. Some are extremely critical of the reliability of such narrators and narratives and propose to discover the “true meaning” of oracles by setting them into completely different historical contexts that are usually narratives of their own construction. Others accept too readily narrators’ claims of oracular fulfillment and often talk about how consultants did or did not “get it right” when interpreting their oracles. In response to the former interpretive approach, I object that it is more methodologically hazardous to pluck oracles from literature and interpret their “true meaning” in newly fabricated historical narratives than it is to interpret them in their actual narrative contexts. The latter approach, on the other hand, suffers from an underappreciation of the narrator’s role in determining oracular meaning. In this chapter, I attempt to walk the tightrope between these two approaches by taking seriously both narrative un-falsifiability and the tendentiousness of the narrator’s interpretive claims about oracular fulfillment.

If we as historians are to understand Greek belief in and use of oracles, we must understand the kind of thinking that lies behind the composition of these narratives. As I have already shown, both Herodotus and his characters interpret oracles by attaching their words to specific circumstances. Here, I argue that this synthetic, ‘divinatory thinking’ is essentially storytelling. It is obvious that Herodotus and even some of his historical agents, like Soclees and Leotychidas, are tellers of oracular tales, but one can also observe how other historical agents tell oracular tales about their future in the process of interpreting oracles. These ‘future stories’ about their expectations and hopes for oracular fulfillment become like scripts that consultants try to act out in full. They act by looking forward to the moment of fulfillment when those hopes may materialize in reality. Some consultants are able to act out their ‘future stories’ while keeping completely to the script, and so the oracle seems to be fulfilled. Often, though, the issue is more difficult, and consultants have to revise their ‘future stories’ or begin telling different and more persuasive oracular tales about their past. In later traditions, there may also appear alternative oracular tales about the same oracle, even within the *Histories* itself. Through a close examination of a number of oracular tales about interpretive “failure” and the reuse of oracles in Herodotus’ *Histories*, I show how subjectively, arbitrarily, and opportunistically the Greeks behaved when interpreting their oracles. These clear moments of contingency in historical causation and variations in the tradition of oracular tales present themselves as discernable cracks in the façade of the ‘prophetic plan’ of the ‘oracular tale.’

In this way, although each narrator does determine what may be understood as the oracular fulfillment, there is no objective reason to think that the oracle could only have been fulfilled in exactly the way that it was. It is only the ‘oracular tale’ itself that can serve as evidence for oracular fulfillment. On the other hand, it is clear that the strangely flexible thinking

that consultants show when interpreting oracles can only be understood as the effect of an insistent belief that oracles refer directly to a single and specific set of circumstances. I argue that this tension between the ‘prophetic plan’ and contingency emplotted in the ‘oracular tale’ helps us to resolve the famous issue of oracular ambiguity in a way that also accounts for the utility that the Greeks took from their oracles. Further, I examine two metaphors of exchange (contract tokens and silver coinage) for describing the process of interpreting oracles in the *Histories* in order to demonstrate that Herodotus’ use of the metaphors is motivated by a related tension between natural and conventional value. A contract token has value because it has a verifiable, natural connection with its other half and because of the conventional agreement behind it. A silver coin has value because of the natural value of silver and because of a conventional appreciation of that value in a particular market. In the same way, oracles had meaning in the view of the Greeks because of a perceived natural connection between oracular words and circumstances and because that connection, oracular meaning, was guaranteed by the conventions of divine communication to humans. The historian’s use of these metaphors in describing oracular interpretation recommends that we understand oracular ambiguity slightly differently. The Greeks did not trust in oracles they thought were ambiguous and flexible, but in enigmatic divine signs with single, absolute meanings. Since they believed that their oracles gave a real glimpse of a future that would or did come to pass, the Greeks could use them as frames of reference to plan for the future or to understand what had happened to them in the past even as their circumstances changed. If people turn to divination in order to gain greater certainty or manage risk, the use of oracles, even metrical and enigmatic ones, can be useful tools.

Part One: The ‘Oracular Tale’ as a Marvelous Plot

As I have shown in the previous chapters, oracles are deeply embedded in stories. These stories give vital context for oracular words. Since oracular interpretation and fulfillment are both essentially conjectural in so far as they involve a mental process that relates oracular words to particular circumstances, whatever narrative context is supplied for an oracle will affect how it is ultimately understood. In other words, an oracle’s meaning is understood from its relation to the events with which it is said to correspond. Consequently, the narration of an oracular tale presumes the same process of interpretation as that involved in conjecturing a solution for an oracle and determining its fulfillment. The narrator sets the prophecy and its presumed fulfillment in a chronological sequence of events with a narrative. In this way, the order of events in the narrative imparts an implicit logic of connection between prophecy and fulfillment.

Aristotle’s Theory of Marvel and Narrative Unity

Aristotle comes to a similar conclusion about the interconnectedness of episodes of a good plot in his *Poetics*. Earlier in this treatise, he had been concerned with explaining the concept of plot unity as the necessary or fitting sequence of actions in the plot.¹ Here, Aristotle reiterates that point and moves on to the topic of what makes a plot tragic.

Of simple plots and actions, the episodic are the worst. I call episodic a plot in which it is neither likely (εἰκὸς) nor necessary (ἀνάγκη) that the episodes follow each other (μετ’ ἄλληλα). Such plots are produced by bad poets on account of themselves [i.e., because they are bad poets] or by good poets on account of the actors, for competing in contests and extending the plot beyond its potential, they are often compelled to distort the sequence (τὸ ἐφεξῆς). But since tragedy is not only an imitation of complete action but also of fearful and pitiable things,² those things happen especially whenever they happen contrary to expectation (παρὰ τὴν δόξαν) on account of each other (δι’ ἄλληλα). For thus will marvel (θαυμαστόν) be more present than if from accident (ἀπὸ τοῦ αὐτομάτου) and

¹ Arist. *Poet.* 1451a16–35.

² On the use of δέ here, see Leonardo Tarán and Dimitri Gutas, *Aristotle Poetics: Editio Maior of the Greek Text with Historical Introductions and Philological Commentaries* (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 259.

chance (τύχης), since even of the things from chance (ἀπὸ τύχης), those seem most marvelous, how many appear to happen (φαίνεται γεγονέναι) as though by a plan (ὥσπερ ἐπίτηδες), just as the statue of Mityos in Argos killed the man who was responsible for the death of Mityos when it fell on him while he was participating in a festival. For it seems (ἔοικε) that such things do not happen at random (εἰκῇ). Thus, it is necessary that such plots be superior.³

Aristotle thinks that a bad plot is the one in which episodes do not follow each other in a sequence (μετ' ἄλληλα) that is either likely (εἰκὸς) or necessary (ἀνάγκη). What makes a good tragic plot different is the element of marvel (θαυμαστὸν) that results from events happening contrary to expectation (παρὰ τὴν δόξαν). However, like any good plot, even when events happen contrary to expectation, they should still maintain a likely sequence (δι' ἄλληλα), since marvel results less from accident and common chance.⁴ That is why the plot in which events happen by chance (ἀπὸ τύχης) but seem almost planned (ἐπίτηδες) and not random (εἰκῇ) are more marvelous and better than the opposite. Here, Aristotle is indicating with regard to the sequence of episodes in a plot that there is a middle ground. Between likely and necessary, on the one hand, and accident and (irrelevant) chance, on the other, there lies what happens by a kind of chance and seems “as though by a plan” and “not random.”

What links the events of this kind of marvelous plot is not simply causal, as some seem to understand δι' ἄλληλα⁵—Martha Nussbaum's “causal intelligibility” seems closer.⁶ Such a

³ τῶν δὲ ἀπλῶν μύθων καὶ πράξεων αἱ ἐπεισοδιώδεις εἰσὶν χεῖρισται· λέγω δ' ἐπεισοδιώδη μῦθον ἐν ᾧ τὰ ἐπεισόδια μετ' ἄλληλα οὐτ' εἰκὸς οὐτ' ἀνάγκη εἶναι. τοιαῦται δὲ ποιοῦνται ὑπὸ μὲν τῶν φαύλων ποιητῶν δι' αὐτούς, ὑπὸ δὲ τῶν ἀγαθῶν διὰ τοὺς ὑποκριτάς· ἀγωνίσματα γὰρ ποιοῦντες καὶ παρὰ τὴν δύναμιν παρατείνοντες τὸν μῦθον πολλάκις διαστρέφειν ἀναγκάζονται τὸ ἐφεξῆς. ἐπεὶ δὲ οὐ μόνον τελείας ἐστὶ πράξεως ἢ μίμησις ἀλλὰ καὶ φοβερῶν καὶ ἐλεεινῶν, ταῦτα δὲ γίνεται καὶ μάλιστα [καὶ μᾶλλον] ὅταν γένηται παρὰ τὴν δόξαν δι' ἄλληλα· τὸ γὰρ θαυμαστὸν οὕτως ἔξει μᾶλλον ἢ εἰ ἀπὸ τοῦ αὐτομάτου καὶ τῆς τύχης, ἐπεὶ καὶ τῶν ἀπὸ τύχης ταῦτα θαυμασιώτατα δοκεῖ ὅσα ὥσπερ ἐπίτηδες φαίνεται γεγονέναι, οἷον ὡς ὁ ἀνδριάς ὁ τοῦ Μίτυος ἐν Ἀργεὶ ἀπέκτεινεν τὸν αἵτιον τοῦ θανάτου τῷ Μίτυι, θεωροῦντι ἐμπροσθέν· ἔοικε γὰρ τὰ τοιαῦτα οὐκ εἰκῇ γίνεσθαι... Arist. *Poet.* 1451b33–1452a9.

⁴ Aristotle's phrasing grants that accidents and chance events may bear marvel in a plot, but since such a plot breaks the likely sequence of events, it bears less marvel and is less good as a plot.

⁵ Stephen Halliwell, *The Poetics of Aristotle* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1987), 111; Kindt, *Revisiting Delphi*, 126–7; Gerald F. Else, *Aristotle's Poetics: The Argument* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1957), 322–7.

⁶ Martha C. Nussbaum, “Tragedy and Self-Sufficiency: Plato and Aristotle on Fear and Pity,” in *Essays on Aristotle's Poetics*, ed. Amélie Oksenberg Rorty (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), 278.

notion of a connection by causal necessity or likelihood would leave the marvelous plot neither marvelous nor any different from a good simple plot, since the sequence of actions could easily be anticipated by the audience.⁷ Importantly, chance is not simply a cause of anything for Aristotle; rather, it “seems (δόκει) to be of an indefinite quality (ἀορίστου) and unclear (ἄδηλος) to humans” and is a cause of an effect only “accidentally” (κατὰ συμβεβηκός).⁸ When a rational agent acts toward a specific end, chance may intervene as a seemingly accidental cause apart from the expected causal chain and effect a result different from the final cause.

The story that Aristotle uses as an example is crucial for understanding his meaning here. In a reconstructed order of events in this plot, someone kills Mityls, and then, a statue of Mityls falls on and kills his murderer in the middle of performing an unrelated activity. Aristotle does not create a clear chain of causation in this brief story: the statue of Mityls does not fall on the murderer *because* he murdered Mityls. Rather, the story is an example of the intervention of chance as an incidental cause. The murderer had the intention of continuing to participate in a festival, but he was crushed.⁹ Here, Aristotle is apparently at pains to account for the continuity of episodes in the plot of marvelous tales for which neither necessity nor likelihood suffice as explanations. The events may be said to cohere by an incidental cause, but Aristotle admits that such causes are actually quite unclear to humans. In the end, there is just a perception or feeling (φαίνεται/ἔοικε) of continuity that such things do not happen randomly. That feeling, though, is a result of or impulse toward narrative itself. The events do hold a connection *on account of each*

⁷ In his *Physics*, Aristotle separates out “things that always happen thus” (τὰ μὲν ἀεὶ ὡσαύτως γινόμενα), to which we may compare “necessary” (ἀνάγκη), and “things that happen for the most part” (τὰ δὲ ὡς ἐπὶ πολὺ), to which we may compare “likely” (εἰκός), from things being caused by chance and accident. Arist. *Phys.* 2.5 (196b10–14). Given that accidents only happen in the actions of inanimate things and animals without the capacity for developing a deliberate course of action, this category will obviously not create narrative unity in a plot. Arist. *Phys.* 2.6 (197b2–14).

⁸ Arist. *Phys.* 2.5 (197a9–15).

⁹ D.W. Lucas, ed., *Aristotle: Poetics* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968), 126. I follow Else in my translation of “participating in a festival” for θεωροῦντι. Else, *Aristotle’s Poetics*, 332–5.

other (δι' ἄλληλα), but this phrase would seem to mean that they do so because of the kind of events they are and because they are set together in a narrative in a particular way.¹⁰ The principle that such plots have continuity is maintained by the fact that the events in them *seem* to happen by design and not randomly, and therefore, in the end, the logic of the narrative is its own.¹¹ The internal logic of the narrative gives these plots their coherence.

The Internal Logic in Stories of Prophecy

The passage from Aristotle's *Poetics* above is particularly concerned with tragedy. However, his understanding of narrative coherence and unity in marvelous tales is also appropriate to stories about prophecy. A tale about a modern-day prophecy helps illustrate the usefulness of Aristotle's appreciation of an internal logic in marvelous narratives.

In 1962, a rookie pitcher for the San Francisco Giants named Gaylord Perry was taking batting practice. A reporter named Harry Jupiter was looking on and remarked to Alvin Dark, the manager of the team at the time, that Perry had a good swing. After being asked when he expected Perry to hit his first homerun, Dark shot back, "Mark my words, a man will land on the moon before Gaylord Perry hits a homerun." It was 1:17 PM Pacific on July 20, 1969 when Neil Armstrong first set foot on the moon. The news was announced at Candlestick Park in a game against the Giants' intrastate rivals, the Los Angeles Dodgers. In his very next at-bat, not even half of an hour later, Perry launched a Claude Osteen fastball out of the park for his first Major-League homerun.¹²

¹⁰ D.W. Lucas thinks differently from me that the element of chance does not leave the plot δι' ἄλληλα, but he oddly concludes similarly that a connection between the events *is* present on account of a sense of their orchestration "by a higher purpose." Lucas, *Poetics*, 127.

¹¹ John Baxter and Patrick Atherton, eds., *Aristotle's Poetics*, trans. George Whalley (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1997), 121.

¹² "Dark Was Right, But Just Barely," *Los Angeles Times*, October 8, 1987, <https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-1987-10-08-sp-12577-story.html>; Elizabeth McGarr, "Gaylord Perry," *Sports Illustrated*, July 13, 2009, <https://www.si.com/vault/2009/07/13/105837117/gaylord-perry>; Daniel Brown, "Neil Armstrong and The One Giant Swing by Gaylord Perry," *The Mercury News*, August 13, 2016, <https://www.mercurynews.com/2012/08/29/neil-armstrong-and-the-one-giant-swing-by-gaylord-perry/>; Chris Landers, "Gaylord Perry Hits Home Run Just Minutes after Neil Armstrong Moon Landing," *MLB.com*, July 20, 2017, <https://www.mlb.com/cut4/gaylord-perry-hits-home-run-just-minutes-after-neil-armstrong-moon-landing>. The narrative is my own composition.

As this story presents them, Alvin Dark's words are prophetic. The Greeks might have called it a *clendon*. For the attentive reader, the story elicits a sense of wonder at a remarkable and unexpected coincidence. When the episodes of the narrative are analyzed as distinct events, though, the tale begins to seem less remarkable, especially for those living in a world in which humans have already walked on the moon. Dark made an off-the-cuff comment that set a seemingly improbable event (landing on the moon) almost as a condition of a seemingly more improbable event (a Gaylord Perry homerun). Then, the two predicted events occurred in the predicted order and, importantly, in close chronological sequence. As in the story of the murderous statue above, there is apparently no causal connection between any of the events in the tale: neither Perry's homerun nor the moon landing, we assume, happened *because* of Dark's prophecy, and Perry did not hit a homerun *because* Armstrong and Aldrin had finally landed on the moon—in other words, these events are neither necessary nor sufficient causes of Perry's homerun. The events hold a connection *on account of each other*, because of the events they are and how they are set together in a narrative. The internal logic of the narrative gives this plot its coherence, and in the process, it frames retrospectively what may have been a joke as a prophecy. For this reason, any complete narrative about the fulfillment of prophecy predetermines certain words as prophetic and a specific event or set of events as their fulfillment. This predetermination is the result of an interpretation that has already been made.¹³ Within a narrative, oracular fulfillment is a narrator's unfalsifiable, interpretive claim.

¹³ I do not draw a distinction here between an original narrator and a subsequent one. By retelling the story, a later narrator still predetermines what words are prophetic and what their fulfillment is.

Between Analytical and Unitarian Interpretations: A Narrative-Sensitive Approach

Given that oracular fulfillment amounts to an unfalsifiable, interpretive claim on the part of the narrator, a number of tendencies in scholarship on oracles may begin to seem quite strange. These odd tendencies stem from either an immoderate, analytical skepticism (not answering to narrative un-falsifiability) or a unitarian lack of criticism (not answering to narratorial tendentiousness). Taking the analytical approach, some scholars try to pull oracular pronouncements out of their narrative contexts and provide new ones drawn from history. In other words, they rearrange the episodes of the ‘oracular tale’ in a way that seems to fit other known historical evidence and a modern sense of rationality. This approach lies behind the frequent claims that certain oracles are manifestly *post eventum* forgeries that are sometimes supposed to have been composed for some institutional or individual benefit.¹⁴ In these arguments, the conjectured benefit to an institution or person provides a new context by which the Greek belief in the prophetic nature of oracles may be understood as a fraud, perpetrated against a credulous people by power-hungry politicians and scheming clergy. Scholars reach such conclusions when they subjectively determine that the oracular pronouncements correspond more closely to their supposed fulfillment than would sit well with their sense of rationality. Absent strong corroborating evidence, many of these theories are not much more than interesting suppositions that substitute one unfalsifiable assertion for another. However, only one of these assertions has any direct evidentiary support in the end. Moreover, it is juicily ironic that the very criteria by which Herodotus, the historical agents of his *Histories*, and his audience in ancient Greece judged the truth and fulfillment of oracles have been refashioned into ammunition by modern scholars against their historicity.¹⁵

¹⁴ See “Socio-Political History and Herodotus’ Sources” in chapter 3.

¹⁵ Maurizio, “Delphic Oracles as Oral Performances,” 321.

In other arguments, it is not exactly an oracle's authenticity or a tale's historicity itself that are under debate, but the ultimate meaning of the oracle. Here, however, the analytical approach appears strangest, since it may be used to argue for alternative interpretations for particular oracles.¹⁶ About the famous "wooden wall" oracle,¹⁷ for example, Noel Robertson argues that the Pythia meant that the Athenians should defend themselves with the wall that the Peloponnesians and their allies were building across the Isthmus of Corinth at the time.¹⁸ In point of fact, however, if a literal reading is presumed to be closer to Delphi's intent, his literal interpretation of "wall" is not matched by an equally literal interpretation of "wooden": Herodotus mentions that its construction proceeded after the collection of "stones and bricks and boards of wood, and baskets full of sand," and he does so only in passing.¹⁹ Thus, Robertson uses a specific, somewhat unsatisfactory, and ultimately completely different interpretation for the "wooden wall" conjectured from alternative facts in the greater context of the *Histories*.

Lisa Maurizio, on the other hand, interprets the same oracle as reflecting a "crisis in the very definition of Athens as a city" that would have been especially appropriate to this particular time in its history as its people were staring down the barrel of the Persian invasions.²⁰ In other words, the language of the oracle corresponds to the stakes of a general crisis of identity prevailing at Athens, but they do not prophesy the sack of Athens or the victory at Salamis. Maurizio, then, broadens the notion of authenticity and conceives of oracles as oral poetic compositions whose meanings are properly interpreted only in the socio-historical contexts of

¹⁶ D.E.W. Wormell, "Croesus and the Delphic Oracle's Omniscience," *Hermathena*, no. 97 (1963): 20–22; Marcia Dobson, "Herodotus 1.47.1. and the Hymn to Hermes: A Solution to the Test Oracle," *The American Journal of Philology* 100, no. 3 (1979): 349–59.

¹⁷ Herodotus #87.

¹⁸ Robertson, "The True Meaning of the 'Wooden Wall.'"

¹⁹ ... λίθοι καὶ πλίνθοι καὶ ξύλα καὶ φορμοὶ ψάμμου πλήρεις... Hdt. 8.71.2. See also Hdt. 7.139.3–4; 8.40.2; 8.71.2; 9.7; 9.7.β.1; 9.8.β.2; 9.9.2; 9.10.2.

²⁰ Maurizio, "Delphic Oracles as Oral Performances," 329–32.

their composition generally. In the process, she has made oracles un-oracular.²¹ The Greeks in Herodotus' audience would not have understood this interpretive move; they thought that their oracles were prophetic and useful. However, they would have understood the thought process involved in the conclusions that these two scholars reach, since they both try to connect oracular language to particular circumstances. In effect, they are casting themselves in the role of the ancient oraclemongers by conjecturing possible interpretations. Ultimately, though, such modern reinterpretations of oracles are futile. In the ancient past, as I will show below, there might have been any number of fitting interpretations and possible moments of fulfillment for an oracle. However, the moment of fulfillment that Herodotus indicates is the only one that gives meaning to an oracle within the world of his narrative. Oracles, therefore, cannot be plucked from their narrative contexts and conjectured to connect with others any more convincingly than their actual contexts.²² The fact of the matter is that the "wooden wall" oracle does not *need* a better or different interpretation to give it meaning.

It is clearly unproductive and methodologically hazardous to pluck oracles from their original narrative contexts, supply them with new contexts, and interpret them within those new contexts. However, given that oracular fulfillment is an author's interpretive claim, it may also

²¹ Renaud Gagné has experimented with a close reading of an oracle in an attempt to appreciate oracles as a genre of poetry. Renaud Gagné, "Poétiques de la chrèsmodie: L'oracle de Glaucos (Hérodote, VI, 86)," *Kernos*, no. 26 (October 10, 2013): 95–109. He is certainly correct in thinking that oracles may contain nuggets of conventional wisdom applicable to different situations and could have been reperformed without narrative frames for educational purposes. However, this approach also makes oracles un-oracular in treating them as poems whose meaning are contextualized by the images and themes familiar from Greek poetry rather than by the events they are supposed to predict. It is a valid literary approach, but it will not help us to understand Herodotus' *Histories* or the way that fifth-century Greeks thought about the practicality of oracular consultation.

²² Against this critical approach to oracles, Maurizio Giangliulio and Julia Kindt argue for the inseparability of oracles from the stories in which they are transmitted. Maurizio Giangliulio, "Storie oracolari in contesto," *Seminari Romani di Cultura Greca* 3, no. 2 (2014): 211–32; Kindt, *Revisiting Delphi*, 13–14. However, I do not take this to mean that the oracles themselves originate with their narration in a tale, as Giangliulio does. Rather, it is the oracle's meaning that comes about this way. Giangliulio himself admits the existence of this kind of relationship between oracle and tale with regard to the free-floating oracle collections and recycled Delphic oracles, so it is unclear why he thinks it to be an unlikely way that oracles were used following consultation.

seem problematic to follow the narrator's interpretation uncritically. This unitarian approach to the text can yield helpful interpretations that inform our understanding of Herodotus' beliefs and those of his contemporaries. Thomas Harrison and Julia Kindt, for example, have both made cases for understanding the pairing of the oracular pronouncement or appearance of another prophetic sign with its fulfillment as an illustration of the supernatural orchestration or divine knowledge of human affairs, respectively.²³ Both gesture in the end toward an interpretation of the *Histories* as participating in an active discourse of belief and morality between author and audience. While such studies are useful, there may at times appear an uncritical attitude toward the tendentiousness of the narrative. There is, for example, a common and somewhat odd reflex toward qualifying the interpretations of the characters in these stories as either "getting it right" or "getting it wrong," following along with, but not fully appreciating the process of interpretation presupposed in the composition of the narrative in the first place.²⁴ Certainly, some of Herodotus' stories have a moral point and reflect contemporary perspectives on the involvement of the divine in human affairs. However, one should not lose sight of the fact that the foundation of these tales, the connection between pronouncement and fulfillment, is an interpretive claim and not an objectively verifiable reality. As in the story of Perry's homerun, that Dark "got it right" prophetically is a claim that can only be advanced by means of the story. However, as I have argued, it is not so much a causal connection between the events described in the story that supports such a claim as it is a narrative one.

²³ Harrison, "'Prophecy in Reverse?"; Kindt, *Revisiting Delphi*, 16–54.

²⁴ E.g., Barker, "Paging the Oracle"; Rosenberger, *Griechische Orakel*, 160–65. This tendency is even found a recent book by Julia Kindt, who pays attention to narrative in particular. Kindt, *Revisiting Delphi*, 155–64. To be totally fair, Herodotus does give his audience additional incentive to think this way, such as when he describes Croesus and Teisamenus as "erring" (ἀμαρτὸν) in their interpretation of an oracle. Hdt. 1.71.1, #5; 9.33.2, #97.

Conclusion

There is a need, then, for a different interpretive approach that can mitigate the weaknesses inherent in both the strictly analytical and unitarian approaches. The approach that I propose here reads oracles in their original narrative contexts but remains critical toward the narrator's influence on how oracles are claimed to be fulfilled. While Herodotus' oracular tales follow a clear narrative pattern, that pattern, as I have shown to some extent in chapter two, is not simply and perfectly expressed in each of them. Some of these imperfections are like fine cracks in the internal logic of the story at the joints between the pronouncements and fulfillments, and it is by analyzing these cracks in detail that we may identify more clearly the type of thinking in putting the two together. These cracks show that conjecture is synthetic in several senses: it links oracular words with particular circumstances (σύν + τίθεναι), it evaluates truth or falsehood by way of experience, and it is artificial.

Part Two: The Use of Oracles: Divinatory Thinking and the ‘Oracular Tale’

Defining Divinatory Thinking

Ralph Anderson has recently grappled with defining Greek “divinatory thinking.”¹ In his thought-provoking study, he argues that ‘divinatory thinking’ is a kind of “relational” or “synthetic reasoning.”² In other words, the Greeks thought that the meaning of divine signs and the events they are supposed to predict could only be understood when both are brought into the right relationship. Simply put, meaning is produced from the relationship between sign and event.³ Anderson usefully likens the mental process by which these relationships are formed to storytelling. As he puts it himself, “the meaning that is found in divination is *akin to the meaning that is found in a story*, in which each component of the narrative influences the meaning of other components, so that the overall meaning does not emerge until the story is complete”⁴; and later, “Dealing with the relative merits of proposed future actions, divination yields insights that are *akin to a story* whose end is imagined but not yet known.”⁵ Anderson proposes that ‘divinatory thinking’ draws a relationship between oracles and events and that the divinatory meaning gained from this kind of thinking is like what is found in stories. If it is fair to extrapolate, I may conclude from his argument that divinatory thinking is like storytelling. I

¹ Anderson, “A Story of Blood.”

² Julia Kindt has recently drawn on cognitive theory to show much the same thing; however, she denies that this part of the ‘oracular tale’ was actually performed in lived experience in ancient Greece, siding with Fontenrose’s judgement about the epigraphic sources. Kindt, “Revelation, Narrative, and Cognition: Oracle Stories as Epiphanic Tales in Ancient Greece,” 52–3.

³ As I have already argued in chapter three and Anderson also shows, Herodotus’ own terminology of conjecture clearly illustrates this point well. Anderson, “A Story of Blood,” 55–6. Further, Herodotus is not the only one to use such language, nor is the language of synthesis applied only to the interpretation of oracles (καὶ γὰρ οὐδὲν ἄλλο ἐστὶν ὀνειροκρισία ἢ ὁμοίου παράθεσις. Artem. 2.25.37–8.).

⁴ Anderson, 50. (my emphasis)

⁵ Anderson, 62. (my emphasis)

argue more ambitiously that ‘divinatory thinking’ is not merely *like* telling a story; it *is* storytelling for the consultants, the interpreters, and the historians. It *is* narrative thought.⁶

‘Divinatory thinking’ is a function of belief in the ability to predict the future and understand the past by means of divine signs, and it is this thinking that supports the production of oracular tales. One may observe the effect of the impulse of this belief in some of Herodotus’ stories that seem to come to us unmediated by a traditional tale. In some oracular tales, Herodotus appears to be doing the ‘divinatory thinking’ himself as he is telling the story.

Consider the passage from the aftermath of the Battle of Salamis.

Seizing many of the wrecks, a westerly wind was carrying them from Attica to the shore called Colias such that the oracle and every other one which was said by Bacis and Musaeus about this sea-battle was fulfilled, and especially the one about the wrecks being brought there that was said many years before these events in an oracle by Lysistratus the Athenian oraclemonger, which had escaped the notice of all the Greeks: “But Colian women will cook with oars.” And this was going to happen when the king departed.⁷

In this story, Herodotus himself, apparently independent of contemporary Greek tradition, draws a narrative relationship between the words of the oracle and the events he has just described and later implies.⁸ Lysistratus prophesied with the oracle; the wind carried the wreckage of Salamis to Colias; and Colian women baked with oars. Thus, the oracle is now meaningful because it predicted that the Colian women would cook with the oars from shipwrecks at Salamis, and this

⁶ There is an emerging theory of mind called the “theory of narrative thought.” This theory claims that “conscious experience has continuity, substance, and orderliness because it is structured by the brain and that the structure is a narrative.” In other words, it is our production of narratives, storytelling, that gives structure to conscious experience. Further, these stories are the kind that are “anchored in prior events, focusing on the present, and setting expectations for the future.” Beach, Bissell, and Wise, *A New Theory of Mind*, 34. I do not wish to commit my argument to the validity of this theory, but with the exception of differences in terminology, there are many significant similarities to the theory of divinatory thought for which I am arguing here. A closer investigation of these connections may be a profitable avenue for future research.

⁷ Τῶν δὲ ναυηγίων πολλὰ ὑπολαβὼν ἄνεμος ζέφυρος ἐξέφερε τῆς Ἀττικῆς ἐπὶ τὴν ἡϊόνα τὴν καλομένην Κωλιάδα, ὥστε ἀποπελῆσθαι τὸν χρησμόν τὸν τε ἄλλον πάντα τὸν περὶ τῆς ναυμαχίας ταύτης εἰρημένον Βάκιδι καὶ Μουσαίῳ καὶ δὴ καὶ κατὰ τὰ ναυήγια τὰ ταύτῃ ἐξενηχθέντα τὸ εἰρημένον πολλοῖσι ἔτεσι πρότερον τούτων ἐν χρησμῷ Λυσιστράτῳ Ἀθηναίῳ ἀνδρὶ χρησμολόγῳ, τὸ ἐλελήθεε πάντας τοὺς Ἕλληνας· Κωλιάδες δὲ γυναῖκες ἐρετμοῖσι φρυξοῦσι. Τοῦτο δὲ ἔμελλε ἀπελάσαντος βασιλέος ἔσεσθαι. Hdt. 8.96.2, #98.

⁸ The sentence, Τοῦτο δὲ ἔμελλε ἔσεσθαι, is understood to mean something like Κωλιάδες δὲ δὴ γυναῖκες ἀπελάσαντος βασιλέος ἐρετμοῖσι φρυξαν.

event now has special significance as a fulfillment of prophecy, rather than just a consequence of firewood being readily available at Colias in the form of beached oars. However, just like the story of Perry's homerun, Lysistratus' oracle apparently does not in any sense *cause* the ships to wreck or the Colian women to cook with oars—the oracle had escaped all contemporary notice, and so it is neither a necessary nor sufficient cause of either events. The only relationship between the oracle and these events is a narrative one, and Herodotus creates that relationship by telling the story. Here, Herodotus is thinking with narrative, and he gives meaning to the oracle and events in this synthesis. These points of synthesis, the pairings of oracles and events in narratives, offer discernible cracks in 'divinatory thinking' that allow us to see how belief in oracular divination influenced thought and action.

More often, Herodotus tells oracular tales about people who received and acted upon oracles in advance of the events that are claimed to have fulfilled them. In these stories, the narrative is illustrative of 'divinatory thinking' not just latently on the part of the narrator, which is always implied, but also overtly on the part of the historical agents. These stories are about 'divinatory thinking' in action. Generally, the place where the cracks in the 'oracular tale' are found is within the episode of conjecture. As I have argued, this episode is one of personal or public deliberation where consultants interpret the words of an oracle by linking them to specific circumstances, form an expectation about the future, and develop a plan to bring about a desirable outcome. Essentially, conjecture involves telling pleasant stories about the future by understanding one's present and anticipated circumstances in the terms provided by an oracle.⁹ The interpretation makes the story believable, and the expectation affects the story's desirability.

⁹ The Theory of Narrative Thought has a similar concept of thought about the future called "narrative projection." Beach, Bissell, and Wise, *A New Theory of Mind*, 58–60. Esther Eidinow, in particular, has taken a keen interest in how cognitive theory, specifically the cognitive ability of imagination and embodied simulation, can help us better understand Greek experience before, during, and after oracular consultation. Eidinow, "A Feeling for the Future."

I call this kind of narrative conjecture a ‘future story’ both because it is a narrative about the future and because the one who tells it expects to be able to tell it again later as a historical narrative.

A ‘future story,’ then, is like a script that consultants attempt to act out in real life. If consultants’ conjectures are valid, they will be able to follow the script closely as time goes on, and the expected outcomes will eventually result. After the result has happened, what was a ‘future story’ earlier can then be told as a historical narrative, whether through the voice of a historical narrator who was involved in the events or in the voice of a historian. One may think, for example, of the story of Psammetichus’ “bronze men from the sea” and how the Ionians and Carians helped him get revenge against the other kings of Egypt.¹⁰ Once Psammetichus conjectured that the Ionians and Carians were the bronze assistants that would bring about the revenge that the oracle promised, he simply acted out a planned story by which he would enter into alliance with them and use their military might to get his prophesied revenge against the eleven kings who had banished him. His ‘future story’ seems to move quite smoothly from conjecture to fulfillment, and so does Herodotus’ historical narrative.

In a number of Herodotus’ oracular tales, consultants act out their ‘future stories’ perfectly in this way. In such instances, Herodotus’ historical narration is sometimes inclined to omit the episode of conjecture as unnecessary, since it would only supply information that is easily inferable by the audience from the pronouncement and the action taken. For example, when Herodotus tells us that the Delphic oracle commanded the Cnidians not to dig through the isthmus and goes on only to say that they stopped digging, he does not need to explain that they interpreted the oracle as pertaining literally to their canal project then underway.¹¹ Both

¹⁰ Hdt. 2.151.3–152.5, #31.

¹¹ Hdt. 1.174.3–6, #20.

narrator and audience take the consultants' conjecture for granted, and consequently, such narratives also appear relatively seamless.

The reason for the impression of greater seamlessness in the story of the Cnidian canal than in the stories of Perry's homerun or the Colian women, is the clearer chain of causation drawn between oracle and event. The Cnidians stopped digging *because* they thought the oracle told them to do so. What is important to note here, though, is that the oracle is a necessary cause (i.e., the Cnidians' action was prompted by their understanding of the oracle's command) but not a sufficient one (i.e., they could have acted in the same way without the oracle), and the same is true for all oracular tales in which consultants know the words of an oracle in advance and act according to their interpretation of it. Thus, the existence of the oracle explains the actions of the Cnidians and gives this narrative greater causal coherency. However, this kind of analysis of causation in terms of necessary and sufficient causes suggests again that in order to understand how the Greeks used oracular divination we should give more attention to the thoughts and actions of human agents (i.e., how they interpreted the oracle, formed an expectation, and planned to achieve their goals) than to the qualities of the individual oracular pronouncement (i.e., what an oracle is and means).

One set of oracular tales that are especially helpful for analyzing 'divinatory thinking' in action are those that narrate *failure* (Dc). As I have shown in chapter two,¹² "failure" in the 'oracular tale' arises from a conjecture and subsequent action, the results of which are thought of as not fulfilling the oracle. Thus, the conjecture is empirically shown to be invalid. It is easier to understand what this means by using the concept of the 'future story.' As we all know from personal experience, plans may change when circumstances change. In time, a consultant's

¹² See "Divergences of Duplication" in chapter two.

‘future story’ may no longer appear believable when an unexpected result occurs. If the cognitive dissonance between a ‘future story’ and actual events is significant and uncomfortable enough, consultants may be compelled to revise their beliefs by changing the narratives they tell to themselves and others.

In these kinds of oracular tales, consultants in Herodotus’ *Histories* have three distinct reactions. They may interrogate the prophetic value of the oracle itself, like the story of Croesus’ oracle about destroying a kingdom. The Lydian king had expected to conquer the kingdom of Cyrus but famously blamed Delphic Apollo for misleading him when Cyrus conquered his kingdom instead.¹³ However, after another consultation at Delphi, Croesus came to understand his own failure to interpret the oracle he received. Other consultants may tell historical narratives by which they come to understand an unexpected result in the terms of the original oracle—this is oracular fulfillment. An excellent example is the story of Cambyses’ death. After suffering a mortal wound, the Persian king realized all too late that the Ecbatana in which he was to die according to an oracle was the one in Syria and not the one in Media where he had expected to end his life as an old man.¹⁴ Finally, some consultants tell another, different ‘future story.’ For instance, when the Phocaeans received an oracle from Delphi that apparently told them “to establish Cynus,” they founded a colony on the island of Corsica (Cynus) and almost certainly expected to fare well at home and in their colony. However, after twenty-five years of hardship, they were forced to leave both and settle in Oenotria. There, a Poseidonian man told them that the oracle had meant for them to establish a cult of the hero Cynus.¹⁵ What was needed in the case of the Phocaeans was a way to account for their difficulties in the past and provide a new

¹³ Hdt. 1.86–91, #5.

¹⁴ Hdt. 3.64.5, #36.

¹⁵ Hdt. 1.165–7, #18.

script, or at least a second act, to be their guide toward a more prosperous future. In these three types of stories, the results of the consultants' actions are clearly incompatible with their original 'future story.' Nevertheless, because of their belief in the prophetic power of oracles, consultants end up modifying their conjectures by telling new stories, whether relating to the past or the future, about how oracular words fit their circumstances intelligibly as governed by the rules of the 'oracular tale.' It is in oracular tales such as these, particularly within the episodes of conjecture and fulfillment, that we may most easily appreciate 'divinatory thinking' as a synthetic kind of reasoning.

Prying at the Cracks in Divinatory Thinking

To demonstrate the extent to which 'divinatory thinking' is artificial, subjective, and synthetic, it is necessary to pry open the cracks in the 'oracular tale.' Here, I analyze six oracular tales that appear in the *Histories* with particular attention to the importance of human agency in thought and in deed to the outcomes of events. I draw these six stories from the famous examples of interpretive "failure" and of oracular reuse. In analyzing the three stories about "failure" in oracular interpretation, I show not only that their "failed" interpretations and subsequent actions were reasonable in the prevailing worldview on display in the *Histories*, but also that their successes were caused by contingent circumstances. The three stories about the reuse of oracles, on the other hand, demonstrate that individuals and communities were perfectly capable of reinterpreting their oracles as predicting completely different events either with full knowledge of other oracular tales that claim different fulfillments or in ignorance of them. The evidence, therefore, indicates a template of human thinking and action that seeks and finds meaningful

patterns in contingent events, but also one that does not sit still and is constantly adjusting to changes in apparent circumstances.

“Failure” in Conjecture and the Place of Contingency in Oracular Tales

Athenians Using a “Wooden Wall”

The story of the “wooden wall” oracle is one of the most famous and extensively studied examples of an oracular tale. For my purposes here, it is a very important example of the cracks that may appear as a result of ‘divinatory thinking.’ It is the only story in Herodotus’ *Histories* to show different parties arguing extensively over the interpretation of the same oracle and actually pursuing completely different interpretations in their actions. By including the other actions relating to these alternative interpretations, Herodotus has given us additional license to tug at the seam between the pronouncement and fulfillment in his narrative. Although Herodotus clearly adopts the perspective of a ‘prophetic plan’ in his narrative, this kind of analysis helps us reappraise the circumstantial contingency of historical events and the synthetic thought involved in interpreting oracles and narrating an oracular tale.¹⁶

The story goes that at some time before Xerxes’ invasion of mainland Greece,¹⁷ the Athenians sent delegates to Delphi, ostensibly to ask about the prospect of their resistance.¹⁸

¹⁶ Emily Baragwanath argues that Herodotus draws attention to historical contingency by dwelling on important moments of decision and exploring “unrealized narratives” in the *Histories*. She uses the events surrounding the “wooden wall” oracle and Salamis as particularly worthy of investigation into these unrealized narratives. Emily Baragwanath, “Herodotus and the Avoidance of Hindsight,” in *Hindsight in Greek and Roman History*, ed. Anton Powell (Classical Press of Wales, 2013), 25–48. Importantly, though, she does not leave the ‘prophetic plan’ without a prominent place in the *Histories*. “It is a perspective [contingency] that works against the grain of the *Histories*’ strand of divine or cosmic determinism...” Baragwanath, 39.

¹⁷ The chronological difficulties are notorious. J. A. S. Evans, “The Oracle of the ‘Wooden Wall,’” *The Classical Journal* 78, no. 1 (1982): 24–29.

¹⁸ Hdt. 7.140.1–141.2, #86 and #87.

After receiving a particularly bleak oracle, the Athenians reentered the temple to ask the Pythia for a gentler response. Herodotus then records the Pythia's poetic reply.

Pallas Athena is not able to propitiate Olympian Zeus, though begging with many words and cunning craft. But I will tell you this word again, fixing it with adamant. For though the other things are conquered, how many the boundary of Cecrops contains and of the hollows of holy Cithaeron, wide-seeing Zeus gives you a wooden wall alone to be unsacked (τεῖχος... ξύλινον... μῶνον ἀπόρθητον), which will profit you and your children. Do not endure quietly the cavalry and footmen, a great army coming from the continent, but withdraw, turning your back. Still someday truly you will face them. Divine Salamis (Ἦ θεῖη Σαλαμίς), you will destroy sons of women either when Demeter is scattered or gathered.¹⁹

When the delegates bring back the written oracle to the assembly, a debate arises over the proper interpretation. The Athenians are trying to connect these words to their particular circumstances. Herodotus tells us that there were many opinions, but he only singles out a few for special attention: that of the old men, that of certain “others” and the oraclemongers, and that of Themistocles.

The first conjecture that Herodotus reports came from a number of old men in the assembly. Characteristically, they conjectured an interpretation that connected the words of the oracle to Athens' ancient past.²⁰ “Some of the old men were saying that the god seemed to them to declare that they fortify the acropolis. For long ago the acropolis of the Athenians had been

¹⁹ Οὐ δύνатаι Παλλὰς Δί' Ὀλύμπιον ἐξίλάσασθαι,
λίσσομένη πολλοῖσι λόγοις καὶ μήτιδι πυκνῇ·
σοὶ δὲ τόδ' αὖτις ἔπος ἐρέω, ἀδάμαντι πελάσσας.
Τῶν ἄλλων γὰρ ἀλίσκομένων ὅσα Κέκροπος οὔρος
ἐντὸς ἔχει κευθμόν τε Κιθαιρῶνος ζαθέοιο,
τεῖχος Τριτογενεῖ ξύλινον διδοῖ εὐρύοπα Ζεὺς
μῶνον ἀπόρθητον τελέθειν, τὸ σὲ τέκνα τ' ὀνήσει.
Μηδὲ σύ γ' ἱπποσύνην τε μένειν καὶ πεζὸν ἰόντα
πολλὸν ἀπ' ἠπειροῦ στρατὸν ἥσυχος, ἀλλ' ὑποχωρεῖν
νῶτον ἐπιστρέψας· ἐτι τοί ποτε κἀντίος ἔσση.
Ἦ θεῖη Σαλαμίς, ἀπολεῖς δὲ σὺ τέκνα γυναικῶν

ἢ που σκιδναμένης Δημήτερος ἢ συνιούσης. Hdt. 7.141.3–4, #87. For possible early allusions to this oracle in Aeschylus, see Pietro Vannicelli, “Atene, Delfi e l'invasione Persiana,” *Seminari Romani Di Cultura Greca* 3, no. 2 (2014): 379–80. There may also be an allusion to this oracle in one of the Paphlagonian's oracles in Ar. *Eq.* 1040.

²⁰ Hugh Bowden, “Oracles for Sale,” in *Herodotus and His World: Essays from a Conference in Memory of George Forrest*, ed. Peter Derow and Robert Parker (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 273–4.

hemmed in by a hedge (ρήχῳ). They were, in fact, conjecturing (συνεβάλλοντο) that this was the wooden wall (τὸ ξύλινον τεῖχος) according to the oracle.”²¹ The old men believed that the oracle’s reference to a wooden wall indicated the hedge around the acropolis. They understood this refuge, then, to be the exception to the clause of the oracle saying that “the other things are conquered, how many the boundary of Cecrops contains,” which would seem to suggest all of Attica. Their plan, therefore, was to fortify the acropolis with the expectation that its walls would be unassailable and that their citizens and the most central buildings of the city would survive, while the rest of Attica would be lost.

One can see how this ‘future story’ could be attractive to those who were hesitant or not able to abandon their city and had great faith in divine protection. Indeed, some people did find it convincing, and they stayed behind to defend the city.

And they [the Persians] capture the city, which was empty, and they discover some few of the Athenians in the temple, both servants of the temple and poor people. After they had fenced in the acropolis with both doors and stakes (θύρησί τε καὶ ξύλοισι), they were fending off the attackers, not going to Salamis on account of their lack of means and, in addition, thinking that they had correctly interpreted the oracle (ἐξευρηκέναι τὸ μαντήιον), the one that the Pythia declared to them about the wooden wall being invincible (τὸ ξύλινον τεῖχος ἀνάλωτον), and that, in fact, this very thing was the refuge according to the oracle and not the ships.²²

Herodotus emphasizes that one of the reasons why some people stayed behind to defend the city was because they understood the oracle in a manner similar to the old men in the assembly. The oracle may not have referred so much to the “hedge” (ρήχός) around the acropolis that existed a

²¹ τῶν πρεσβυτέρων ἔλεγον μετεξέτεροι δοκέειν σφι τὸν θεὸν τὴν ἀκρόπολιν χρῆσαι περιέσεσθαι· ἡ γὰρ ἀκρόπολις τὸ πάλαι τῶν Ἀθηναίων ρήχῳ ἐπέφρακτο. Οἱ μὲν δὲ κατὰ τὸν χρησμὸν συνεβάλλοντο τοῦτο τὸ ξύλινον τεῖχος εἶναι· Hdt. 7.142.1–2. I accept the reading of κατὰ τὸν χρησμὸν in Wilson’s text. See N.G. Wilson, *Herodotea* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 140.

²² Καὶ αἰρέουσι ἔρημον τὸ ἄστυ καὶ τινὰς ὀλίγους εὐρίσκουσι τῶν Ἀθηναίων ἐν τῷ ἱρῷ ἐόντας, ταμίας τε τοῦ ἱεροῦ καὶ πένητας ἀνθρώπους, οἱ φραζάμενοι τὴν ἀκρόπολιν θύρησί τε καὶ ξύλοισι ἡμύνοντο τοὺς ἐπιόντας, ἅμα μὲν ὑπ’ ἀσθενεῖς βίου οὐκ ἐκχωρήσαντες ἐς Σαλαμίνα, πρὸς δὲ καὶ αὐτοὶ δοκέοντες ἐξευρηκέναι τὸ μαντήιον τὸ ἡ Πυθίῃ σφι ἔχρησε, τὸ ξύλινον τεῖχος ἀνάλωτον ἔσεσθαι· αὐτὸ δὲ τοῦτο εἶναι τὸ κρησφύγετον κατὰ τὸ μαντήιον καὶ οὐ τὰς νέας. Hdt. 8.51.2.

long time ago, but to a literal wall that they could build for the defense of the same position once girded by the hedge. In the end, neither this hasty bulwark of “both doors and stakes” (θύρησί τε καὶ ξύλοισι) nor the divine power they supposed it to possess were sure defenses against the Persian attack.

However unlikely their expectations for this wooden wall may seem to us, the fact of the matter is that their plan was not outside of the realm of possibility in the Greek worldview, nor was it impossible that the acropolis could have survived the siege unscathed. Before this point in the narrative of the *Histories*, Herodotus had already told the miraculous story about the salvation of the sanctuary at Delphi. At that time, Apollo declared to the Delphians that he would defend his own possessions, and when the Persians attacked, autonomous arms arrayed themselves before the sanctuary, lightning sent huge boulders rolling down Mt. Parnassus, a great battle cry was heard emanating from the temple of Athena Pronaia, and two enormous ghosts chased the Persian attackers as they fled.²³ Whatever we moderns may think about such stories, clearly some Greeks did believe them and did expect that similar events could happen again.

Even absent direct divine intervention, their defense of the acropolis was still surprisingly successful. Herodotus tells us that the Athenians on the acropolis defended their position so well that there was a stalemate “for a long time” (ἐπὶ χρόνον συχνόν) and that the Peisistratidae, Xerxes’ partisans at this point, were sent to offer terms.²⁴ In fact, it was only because of some extremely talented Persian climbers, who scaled what was believed to be an insurmountable cliff face, that Xerxes’ soldiers were ultimately successful in capturing the acropolis. Of course, Herodotus says, “But in time, there appeared, in fact, an opening for the barbarians out of their

²³ Hdt. 8.36–8, #95.

²⁴ Hdt. 8.53.

difficulties. For it was necessary according to the prophecy that all of Attica on the continent fall under the Persians.”²⁵ This statement, however, is an interpretation of the oracle made with hindsight and the perspective of a ‘prophetic plan.’ The clear difference between the interpretation that Herodotus himself provides here and that of the old men and those barricaded on the acropolis is whether the “unsacked wooden wall” is the notable exception to “how many the boundary of Cecrops contains” or a different thing altogether. With knowledge of the ultimate failure of this plan and of the eventual victory at Salamis, Herodotus excludes the possibility that the plan could have worked. Absent this knowledge and thinking from the perspective of contingency, though, there is no objective reason, apart from the numerical superiority of the Persians, to believe that the plan could not have been successful in its aims. Nevertheless, some of the Athenians acted out this ‘future story’ to its real and bitter end, and it is the pairing of their interpretation with the story of their defeat in this narrative that invalidates their conjecture.

Following the old men, the next opinion expressed in the assembly over the interpretation of the oracle was that of certain “others” and the oraclemongers. These “others” thought that the words “wooden wall” referred to ships and were calling for the fleet to be prepared, once again linking words to circumstances: the Athenians had just set foot on stage as a naval power.²⁶ However, there was some confusion over the last two lines of the oracle: “Divine Salamis, you will destroy sons of women either when Demeter is scattered or gathered.” The oracle-mongers accepted that the oracle meant ships but thought that the foreboding last two lines indicated that

²⁵ Χρόνω δ’ ἐκ τῶν ἀπόρων ἐφάνη δὴ τις ἔσοδος τοῖσι βαρβάροισι· ἔδεε γὰρ κατὰ τὸ θεοπρόπιον πᾶσαν τὴν Ἀττικὴν τὴν ἐν τῇ ἡπείρῳ γενέσθαι ὑπὸ Πέρσῃσι. Hdt. 8.53.1.

²⁶ Hdt. 7.142.2–3, 144.

they would lose a naval battle at Salamis. Rather than suffer this, they suggested that the Athenians abandon Athens altogether, take to their ships, and settle in some other land.²⁷

Although Herodotus says that this ‘future story’ was not preferable to the Athenians at the time,²⁸ it did have some appeal later when their circumstances and prospects were in danger of changing dramatically. After news of the Persian sack of Athens reached the Greek allied navy at Salamis, the coalition seriously debated whether they should abandon Salamis and sail to the Isthmus of Corinth in order to provide seaborne support for the land-based defenses already assembled there. Themistocles the Athenian tried to explain that the oracle promised the Greeks victory at Salamis,²⁹ but when he was shouted down by Adeimantus the Corinthian, he then demanded that the whole fleet stay where they were, saying to Eurybiades:

If you remain here, you will be a noble man for remaining, but if not, you will topple Greece. For the ships carry the entirety of the war for us. Just trust me. But if you should not do these things, gathering up our households as we are, we will take them to Siris in Italy, which is still very much ours from long ago, and the prophecies say that it is necessary that it be founded by us.³⁰

What is interesting about Themistocles’ threat is that he gives up his own preferred interpretation of the oracle, which he had originally pushed in the assembly and just earlier in the meeting of the commanders, and he adopts that of the oraclemongers. If the commanders choose to defend the isthmus, the Athenians will take their two-hundred ships and make a new home in Italy in accordance with other oracles that they have.

This threat should not be understood as an empty one. It was not raised only to make Eurybiades and the Peloponnesians cave. Themistocles’ ideal outcome, of course, was to use the

²⁷ Hdt. 7.143.3.

²⁸ Hdt. 7.143.3.

²⁹ Hdt. 8.60.γ.

³⁰ Σὺ εἰ μενέεις αὐτοῦ, καὶ μένων ἔσσαι ἀνὴρ ἀγαθός· εἰ δὲ μή, ἀνατρέψεις τὴν Ἑλλάδα· τὸ πᾶν γὰρ ἡμῖν τοῦ πολέμου φέρουσι αἱ νέες. Ἄλλ’ ἐμοὶ πείθεο. Εἰ δὲ ταῦτα μὴ ποιήσης, ἡμεῖς μὲν ὥς ἔχομεν ἀναλαβόντες τοὺς οἰκέτας κομιεύμεθα ἐς Σῆριν τὴν ἐν Ἰταλίῃ, ἥ περ ἡμετέρη τέ ἐστι ἐκ παλαιοῦ ἔτι, καὶ τὰ λόγια λέγει ὑπ’ ἡμέων αὐτὴν δεῖν κτισθῆναι· ὑμεῖς δὲ συμμάχων τοιῶνδε μουνωθέντες μεμνήσεσθε τῶν ἐμῶν λόγων. Hdt. 8.62.1–2.

threat to keep the Greeks united at Salamis in order to fulfill the oracle and eventually to return to Athens, whatever might be left of it. However, it does not follow that he and the Athenians would not have made good on that threat if much of the Greek coalition left Salamis and they were not convinced of their chances of defeating the Persian army and navy at the isthmus. In fact, Herodotus himself believes that the Greeks could not have opposed the Persians at sea without the Athenians, and he has Themistocles point out that the decision of fighting the more numerous Persians on the open sea at the isthmus is a poor one strategically.³¹ Defending the isthmus, then, might have seemed like an unacceptable gamble which risked the safety of their ships and, therefore, the prospects of their future as a self-determining people. It may have appeared less risky just to head out west and start over. Further, as strange as it may seem to think of a world in which the Athenian people did not live in Attica, Herodotus' *Histories* shows that this was not an unprecedented occurrence in the face of the expanding Persian Empire. The Phocaeans and the Teians abandoned their homes and settled elsewhere in the middle of the previous century, and the Ionians as a whole at least considered the option.³² Thus, the potential future of the Athenians as Italians was not ludicrous and could even have been preferable in the face of greater risks and unacceptable alternatives. Both the oraclemongers and Themistocles, at least for a time, thought so. As it turned out though, the Athenians would never have to make good on that threat. Again, it is the pairing of their interpretation and the story of the actual events at Salamis in this narrative that invalidates the oraclemongers' future story about an Athenian defeat there.

³¹ Hdt. 7.139.1–2, 8.60.α.

³² Hdt. 1.164.3, 168, 170.2.

The final opinion expressed in the assembly was that of Themistocles. In his conjecture, he agreed that “wooden wall” meant ships but disagreed with the negative prognosis of the oraclemongers. He thought that they would win the battle at Salamis.

This man said that the oraclemongers did not conjecture (συμβάλλεσθαι) everything well, saying such things: if the oracle that was said really pertained to the Athenians, it does not seem that it would have prophesied so mildly, but “Wretched Salamis” (ὦ σχετλίη Σαλαμίς, --~/--~/--) instead of “Divine Salamis” (ὦ θεΐη Σαλαμίς, --/--~/--), if their people, at least, were going to die there. Rather, if one understood (συλλαμβάνοντι) the oracle correctly, it was spoken by the god with regard to the enemy, but not the Athenians. He was, therefore, counselling that they prepare for making war at sea, because that really was the wooden wall.³³

Themistocles’ interpretative point was to draw attention to a concept in narratology now called focalization. The central question that he raised was who were the “sons of women” to be destroyed according to the final line of the oracle. The oraclemongers thought that these men would be Athenians, but Themistocles argued that the epithet “divine” allows for an important distinction to be drawn. To whom would Salamis be “divine” if it destroyed many men? If the oracle was given in relation to the Athenians and focalized through their perspective, as seems to be indicated by the direct address of Athena in the opening lines, the “sons of women” must be the Persians. Otherwise, a word like “wretched,” which could fit metrically in the same position of the line, would be expected rather than “divine.” Thus, Themistocles proposed that the Athenians prepare to defend themselves at sea near Salamis.

Just like Herodotus and his audience, we know what ended up happening. The Greeks won a decisive victory at Salamis that left them in control of the sea. Since antiquity, Themistocles has been given credit for “getting it right,” as if the oracle had a clear and definite

³³ Οὗτος ὦν ἡρ οὐκ ἔφη πᾶν ὀρθῶς τοὺς χρησμολόγους συμβάλλεσθαι, λέγων τοιάδε, εἰ ἐς Ἀθηναίους εἶχε τὸ ἔπος εἰρημένον ἐόντως, οὐκ ἂν οὕτω μιν δοκέειν ἡπίως χρησθῆναι, ἀλλὰ ὅδε ὦ σχετλίη Σαλαμίς ἀντὶ τοῦ ὦ θεΐη Σαλαμίς, εἴ περ γε ἔμελλον οἱ οἰκήτορες ἀμφ’ αὐτῇ τελευτήσῃν· ἀλλὰ γὰρ ἐς τοὺς πολεμίους τῷ θεῷ εἰρῆσθαι τὸ χρηστήριον συλλαμβάνοντι κατὰ τὸ ὀρθόν, ἀλλ’ οὐκ ἐς Ἀθηναίους. Παρασκευάζεσθαι ὦν αὐτοὺς ὡς ναυμαχήσοντας συνεβούλευε, ὡς τούτου ἐόντος τοῦ ξυλίνου τείχεος. Hdt. 7.143.1–2.

solution. Even the circumspect Thucydides marveled at the man whom he called “the best conjecturer (εἰκαστής) of the things that are going to happen in the fullness of the future.”³⁴ This impression is clearly one that Herodotus wants his audience to get, too. However, if one views the events of Xerxes’ invasion from a perspective of contingency rather than with an eye toward a ‘prophetic plan,’ a number of critical moments that brought the Persian fleet against the Greeks at Salamis come into focus. I have already mentioned how the Peloponnesians were keen on leaving Salamis to defend the Isthmus of Corinth. Themistocles’ threat was enough to keep the allies where they were for a while, but the very same debate reopened when the Persian fleet arrived and caused the Peloponnesians to fear for their own land again.³⁵ When it became clear that he was going to lose the debate this time, Themistocles sent his household slave to the Persians in a boat to report that there was dissension among the Greeks and that they were going to flee.³⁶ His gamble paid off when Xerxes took the bait and surrounded the island. When Aristides and a ship of Tenians reported that the Persians had done just that, the Greeks were forced to fight where they were.³⁷ Even earlier, Xerxes tragically ignored Artemisia’s wise words when she advised him not to attack the Greeks at Salamis at all but to wait for the Greek coalition to squabble and disperse.³⁸ Although Herodotus seems to expect his audience to come away with a sense that the Battle of Salamis was predetermined by fate and predicted by the words of this oracle and others,³⁹ his account of the events leading up to the battle clearly shows at several different times that the fight might not have happened when and where it did. Themistocles forced the Greeks to test the validity of his ‘future story’ about the Athenian

³⁴ ... τῶν μελλόντων ἐπὶ πλεῖστον τοῦ γενησομένου ἄριστος εἰκαστής. Thuc. 1.138.3.

³⁵ Hdt. 8.70, 74.

³⁶ Hdt. 8.75. See also Aesch. *Pers.* 355–73.

³⁷ Hdt. 8.79–83.

³⁸ Hdt. 8.68.α–γ.

³⁹ See Herodotus #97 and #98.

victory at Salamis by debating fiercely against the recalcitrant allies and tricking Xerxes into attacking the Greeks before they could sail away.

There is also no objective reason to think that the Greeks could not have suffered a devastating defeat in that dire strait. Numbering 380 triremes in all, the Greek fleet was still steeply outnumbered by the Persian navy, which had numbered 1,207 at the beginning of the expedition.⁴⁰ Even after the extremely heavy losses in the great storm off the coast of Magnesia and both the battles and another storm around Euboea,⁴¹ Xerxes still had the superior force by the time of the engagement at Salamis after many of the Greeks in the north and the islanders medized.⁴² Artemisia's warnings about the unnecessary risk of a high-stakes naval attack, the superiority of Greek seamanship, and lack of faith among their allies were all valid and might have been heeded by a more cautious leader. However, neither Xerxes nor his commanders were totally insane to think that such impressively superior numbers would have been capable of handling the Greeks.⁴³ It was by no means a foregone conclusion that the Greeks would win at Salamis even with the strategy that they adopted. But they did win, and the connection in the narrative between Themistocles' opinion in the assembly and the Greek victory at Salamis validates his conjecture.

⁴⁰ Hdt. 7.89.1, 7.184.1.

⁴¹ Of the 1,207 triremes, Herodotus tells us that about four hundred of them were destroyed in a storm near Magnesia (7.190.1). A scouting party of fifteen triremes was captured by the Greeks off the coast of Euboea (7.194.3). Another two hundred were captured in battle (thirty triremes, 8.11.2) or stove in a storm (170 triremes, 8.13). An unspecified, but large, number of triremes was also destroyed in the Battle of Artemision (8.16.3).

⁴² Those who medized were the Malians, Dorians, Locrians, Boeotians (except the Thespians and Plataeans), Carystians, and all of the islanders except the Ceans, Naxians, Cythnians, Seriphians, Siphnians, and Melians (Hdt. 8.66.2). Further, if the Athenians managed to have exactly 180 triremes at both Artemision (8.1.1, 8.14.1) and Salamis (8.44.1) after seeing half of them disabled in the former battle (8.18), we are probably supposed to think that both sides had the time to mend damaged vessels that were repairable.

⁴³ Hdt. 8.67–9. The Cercyraeans, who had agreed to send ships to defend Greece, failed to arrive to the battle on time, and the story was that they avoided battle since they were expecting the Persians to win. Hdt. 7.168.

In this tale about the “wooden wall” oracle, Herodotus provides his audience with three different interpretations and ‘future stories’ at the center of the Athenian debate. None of the plans was totally outside of the realm of reasonable expectation in the Greek worldview, and it was a consideration of risk and reward that factored towards the preferability of each. Even after deciding on Themistocles’ plan, however, some Athenians attempted to act out an alternative ‘future story’ in the face of the official one of the polis, and even Themistocles himself dabbled with an alternative ‘future story’ when the Peloponnesians pushed to abandon Salamis. Each of these alternative ‘future stories’ was invalidated by historical circumstances: the sack of the acropolis and the victory at Salamis. However, additional information that sneaks into Herodotus’ narrative may seem to undercut his view of the ‘prophetic plan.’ The Athenians defended their city well enough that Xerxes offered terms. They did not attempt the plan to colonize another land *en masse*, and there is no telling whether or not this plan could have been successful. Finally, the Battle of Salamis came about as a result of several contingent and fortuitous events, and the Greeks could just as easily have lost to the more numerous Persian armada. The structure of the ‘oracular tale’ ensures that the “failures” in interpretation and chance circumstances feel like necessary steps in a steady movement toward an objective oracular fulfillment that reveals divine foreknowledge. However, they also point to contingency in the causation of historical events and to the synthetic nature of conjecture. ‘Divinatory thinking’ is apparently provisional, and a conjecture is only valid as long as it is not supplanted by a more believable story of fulfillment.

Thebans Asking Their “Nearest”

There is more evidence for this kind of thinking with narrative when interpreting and finding fulfillment for oracles. I have already discussed in chapter two the debate in the Theban assembly over the interpretation of the “ask your nearest” oracle, but it is particularly useful as an example of the synthetic nature of ‘divinatory thinking.’ In the story about the “wooden wall” oracle, different groups of Athenians adopt and act upon different ‘future stories’ and meet with different results. In this oracular story, the Thebans conjecture and act in concert, but after meeting an unexpected result, they revise their ‘future story.’

A Delphic oracle once told them that their revenge against the Athenians would not be their own and that they should ask their “nearest.”⁴⁴ An earlier opinion that related their “nearest” to the other members of the Boeotian League was summarily dismissed, since they always called upon these allies for help. Then, an old man suggested that the god was telling them to ask the Aeginetans for help, since Thebe and Aegina were both daughters of Asopus and, therefore, very near to each other. The Thebans accepted his interpretation and resolved to ask for Aeginetan assistance in getting their vengeance against the Athenians. When the Aeginetans handed over cult images of the Aeacidae, the ‘future story’ that the Thebans were conjecturing becomes clearer. By taking these images into battle with them, the Thebans seem to have expected the power of the statues to win the victory and thereby to have fulfilled both relevant aspects of the prophecy: that they ask their “nearest” and that revenge would not be their own.

Modern minds may find it difficult to understand how anyone, and especially the Greeks who are often praised for rational thought, could trust in statues to win a battle for them.

However, this ‘future story’ makes perfect sense in the prevailing worldview of ancient Greece

⁴⁴ Hdt. 5.79–80, #58.

as represented in Herodotus' *Histories*. In fact, the very same cult images of the Aeacidae reappear at the Battle of Salamis after the coalition sent a ship specifically to fetch them from Aegina, and according to the Aeginetans, it was this very ship that led the charge against the enemy on that day.⁴⁵ According to their belief in divine intervention and the power of cult images, the Thebans had every expectation that they would win a great victory. Moreover, even without divine aid, it was, of course, possible that the Thebans could have won the battle, though Herodotus is silent about the numbers and strategy involved in the engagement. As it happened, though, they lost again, and their 'future story' did not become a true historical narrative.

Curiously, the Thebans did not question their original interpretation that "nearest" meant the Aeginetans after their apparent failure. Rather, Herodotus tells us that the Thebans returned the statues after their defeat and asked for men instead.⁴⁶ Thus, they reconsidered not whether the Aeginetans would help them get revenge, but how it was that they would do so. Convinced that they were asking for the help of the right people, the Thebans now told a new 'future story' about how the Aeginetans would attack Attica while the Athenians were already engaged in a battle elsewhere against themselves. Herodotus concludes the tale, "For when they were fighting against the Boeotians, after they sailed to Attica with their long ships, the Aeginetans sacked Phalerum and many *demoi* along the coast, and when they did these things, they were causing the

⁴⁵ Hdt. 8.64, 83.2, 84.2.

⁴⁶ Hdt. 5.81.1–3. In his commentary, Hornblower raises the possibility of a secular spirit in the return of the Aeacidae and request for men, but the issue at stake for the Thebans is over proper interpretation of an oracle, another pointedly divine thing, not over the military uses of cult images versus that of actual soldiers. Simon Hornblower, ed., *Herodotus: Book V* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 231. How and Wells suggest that the Aeacidae may not have done the job because they were already inclined at this time toward the Athenians, who would later dedicate a sanctuary to Aeacus before their war against Aegina. W.W. How and J. Wells, *A Commentary on Herodotus*, vol. 2 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1912), 45. This suggestion, as keen as it is in drawing connections with the greater context of the *Histories*, is not necessary for a similar reason. In light of the oracular tale, the Aeacidae did not help because it was fated for the Aeginetans to get vengeance for the Thebans.

Athenians great damage.”⁴⁷ When linked in the narrative to the great damage done to the Athenians, the words of the oracle that their revenge would not be their own and their interpretation of the oracle as directing them to ask the Aeginetans finally make a neat story of oracular fulfillment and successful conjecture.

In the greater context of Herodotus’ *Histories*, however, the decision to think of these events as ushering in the fulfillment of the oracle may seem somewhat arbitrary. The Thebans, of course, medized later, joined the Persian land invasion, and pointed out to Xerxes other poleis that had refused to offer earth and water.⁴⁸ After the arrival of the Persian army in Boeotia and the conclusion of their alliance, the Thebans could, perhaps, have imagined the destruction of Athens as a more impressive fulfillment of the oracle without the interpretive gymnastics of the old man: the Persians would be their “nearest” in both spatial and political terms. Herodotus does not frame the oracular tale in this way; the oracle was not traditionally connected with this event. However, the fact that one could use other events within the *Histories* to frame a reasonable narrative as a convincing, alternative oracular tale demonstrates that the traditional fulfillment cannot be confirmed objectively. This issue will reappear when I treat the reuse of oracles.

Just as in the story of the “wooden wall” oracle, the “failure” of the Thebans’ original conjecture gives the impression that events point naturally to an objective moment of oracular fulfillment. There is, however, an important difference between the two stories. Whereas Themistocles only ever threatened to pursue a completely different ‘future story,’ the Thebans and their Aeginetan allies actually acted upon an alternative ‘future story’ after abandoning one

⁴⁷ Ἐπικειμένων γὰρ αὐτῶν Βοιωτοῖσι ἐπιπλώσαντες μακρῇσι νηυσὶ ἐς τὴν Ἀττικὴν κατὰ μὲν ἔσυραν Φάληρον, κατὰ δὲ τῆς ἄλλης παραλίης πολλοὺς δῆμους, ποιεῦντες δὲ ταῦτα μεγάλως Ἀθηναίους ἐσίνοντο. Hdt. 5.81.3.

⁴⁸ Hdt. 8.50. According to Herodotus, the Thebans medized early (7.132), but this fact does not appear to have been general knowledge until after Thermopylae (7.205.3, 7.222). Their inveterate hatred of the Athenians is confirmed not only by this story of revenge, but by the fact that they suffered three hundred of their most prominent men (not to mention those who were not so prominent) to die fighting the Athenians at Platea before finally retreating (9.67).

that, to all appearances, did not result in success. This moment of re-conjecture on the part of the actors perfectly illustrates the synthetic character of ‘divinatory thinking’ in action. The Thebans’ unexpected loss did not invalidate the prophetic power of the oracle, but it did challenge the how they thought that its fulfillment would come about. With their new-found knowledge about what the oracle did not mean, the Thebans then conjectured a new ‘future story’ and their expectations were ultimately satisfied.

Cleomenes Taking “Argos”

Sometimes consultants encounter an unexpected result that runs counter to their ‘future story’ and then, as a reaction, tell themselves a historical narrative that accounts for oracular fulfillment in a different way. It is more often the case that consultants do so when their ‘future story’ is totally invalidated by their experience of events and yet their experiences are, nevertheless, reminiscent of the oracle. The story of Cleomenes and his invasion of Argos provides another significant facet of this kind of *post eventum* ‘divinatory thinking’ in action. Before the Spartan king went mad, he received an oracle from Delphi that said, according to the indirect report, Ἄργος αἰρήσειν.⁴⁹ Acting upon his implied expectation that he would be able “to destroy Argos,” he led an attack against the Argives. Cleomenes defeated the Argive army at the Battle of Sapeia and pursued them until they took refuge in a sanctuary. When he was no longer having success killing off the individual Argives that he tricked into coming out, Cleomenes ordered that the sacred grove be burned. Herodotus goes on:

While it was burning, he was asking one of the deserters to what god the grove belonged. And the man said that it belonged to Argus. When he heard it, he groaned greatly and said, “Oracular Apollo, you have misled me greatly indeed, saying Ἄργος αἰρήσειν. But

⁴⁹ Hdt. 6.76–82, #75.

now I conjecture (Συμβάλλομαι) for my part that the oracle has come to an end (ἐξήκειν).”⁵⁰

Clearly, Cleomenes’ ‘future story’ scripted his invasion of Argive land and capture of Argos, the city of the Argives. His expectation, however, encountered what he felt to be a significant impediment when he learned that the burning grove belonged to the eponymous hero Argus. He then thought through an alternative story, a historical narrative, in which he conjectured (Συμβάλλομαι) the burning of the grove to be the fulfillment of the oracle which told him that he would destroy Argos. To him, the oracular tale fit. His original ‘future story’ appeared invalid, and so he considered his oracle to be fulfilled (ἐξήκειν) in a different way. Cleomenes ended his expedition and sent most of his army back to Sparta, while he himself sought another divine sign, this time from sacrificial omens. Then, after accepting his apparent failure, he returned back to Sparta.

There is something different about Cleomenes’ thinking here. Unlike the earlier “failed” conjectures of the Athenians and Thebans which were completely invalidated by later events, Cleomenes did not pursue his original plan far enough to invalidate his ‘future story’ entirely. He still might have captured the city of Argos, considering the clear military advantage that he had, but he gave up before he could have known for sure. Herodotus tells us that his personal enemies in Sparta thought as much, too. “After he returned, his enemies brought him before the ephors, saying that he was bribed not to capture Argos, although he easily could have taken it.”⁵¹ Forced to defend himself against the charge of bribery, Cleomenes told the ephors the historical narrative, an oracular tale, he had conjectured earlier and something else besides.

⁵⁰ Καιομένου δὲ ἤδη ἐπείρετο τῶν τινα αὐτομόλων τίνος εἶη θεῶν τὸ ἄλσος· ὁ δὲ ἔφη Ἄργου εἶναι. Ὁ δὲ ὡς ἤκουσε, ἀναστενάξας μέγα εἶπε· ὦ Ἀπολλὼν χρηστήριε, ἧ μεγάλως με ἠπάτηκας φάμενος Ἄργος αἰρήσειν. Συμβάλλομαι δ’ ἐξήκειν μοι τὸ χρηστήριον. Hdt. 6.80.

⁵¹ Νοστήσαντα δέ μιν ὑπῆγον οἱ ἐχθροὶ ὑπὸ τοὺς ἐφόρους, φάμενοί μιν δωροδοκήσαντα οὐκ ἐλεῖν τὸ Ἄργος, παρεὼν εὐπετέως μιν ἐλεῖν. Hdt. 6.82.1.

And he said to them—I am not able to say clearly whether he was lying or speaking the truth, but he did speak, saying—when, in fact, he took the sanctuary of Argos, it seemed to him that the oracle of the god had been fulfilled (ἐξεληλυθέναι). In consequence of these things, therefore, it was not right to make an attempt on the city, until, at least, he might consult sacrifices and learn whether the god would grant it to him or stand opposed. But when he was sacrificing in the temple of Hera, a flame of fire shone out from the chest of her statue, and he knew for certain that he was not going to capture Argos. For if it had shone out from the head (ἐκ τῆς κεφαλῆς) of the statue, he would have destroyed the city from top to bottom (κατ’ ἄκρης), but since it shone out from her chest, everything the god wished happened for him.⁵²

Cleomenes’ defense is an oracular tale and a story about a bad omen, which notably involves ‘divinatory thinking’ as well.⁵³ What is particularly interesting is that Cleomenes, along with his enemies, seems to have acknowledged that his earlier ‘future story’ about the oracle’s fulfillment had not been completely invalidated. If the oracle was still open to fulfillment, Cleomenes would have needed to account for his actions by providing a story that was more believable than that of bribery offered by his enemies. Whether he had anticipated this objection or made up the story on the spot,⁵⁴ his explanation accounts entirely for that gap. He designed a divinatory test for the validity of his second conjecture and determined from the appearance of fire coming from Hera’s chest during his sacrifice that he should not push his luck by attacking the city of Argos.⁵⁵ The

⁵² Ὁ δὲ σφι ἔλεξε, – οὔτε εἰ ψευδόμενος οὔτε εἰ ἀληθέα λέγων, ἔχω σαφηνέως εἶπαι, ἔλεξε δ’ ὃν φάμενος, – ἐπεῖτε δὴ τὸ τοῦ Ἀργου ἱερὸν εἴλε, δοκέειν οἱ ἐξεληλυθέναι τὸν τοῦ θεοῦ χρησμόν· πρὸς ὧν ταῦτα οὐ δικαιοῦν πειρᾶν τῆς πόλιος, πρὶν γε δὴ ἱροῖσι χρήσῃται καὶ μάθῃ εἴτε οἱ ὁ θεὸς παραδιδῶι εἴτε [οἱ] ἐμποδὼν ἔστηκε· καλλιερεομένῳ δὲ ἐν τῷ Ἡραίῳ ἐκ τοῦ ἀγάλματος τῶν στηθέων φλόγα πυρὸς ἐκλάμψαι, μαθεῖν δὲ αὐτὸς οὕτω τὴν ἀτρεκεΐην, ὅτι οὐκ αἰρέει τὸ Ἀργος· εἰ μὲν γὰρ ἐκ τῆς κεφαλῆς τοῦ ἀγάλματος ἐξέλαμψε, αἰρέειν ἂν κατ’ ἄκρης τὴν πόλιν, ἐκ τῶν στηθέων δὲ ἐκλάμψαντος πᾶν οἱ πεποιῆσθαι ὅσον ὁ θεὸς ἐβούλετο γενέσθαι. Hdt. 6.82.1–2.

⁵³ It would be another interesting area of future research to demonstrate the clear similarity in story-pattern between stories about oracles and other divine signs like omens and dreams.

⁵⁴ Herodotus is very careful to distance himself from the truth of the content of this speech. However, since the only new aspect of the story here in contrast with the main narrative is the events that happened during his sacrifice, it would seem that Herodotus is wary of Cleomenes’ story about the omen.

⁵⁵ The use of divination to confirm divinatory insights is well-known in extant sources, and recent studies have shown that such actions should not be understood as being impious. Pierre Bonnechere, “Oracles and Greek Mentalities: The Mantic Confirmation of Mantic Revelation,” in *Myths, Martyrs, and Modernity: Studies in the History of Religion in Honour of Jan N. Bremmer*, ed. Jitse Dijkstra, Justin Kroesen, and Yme Kuiper (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 115–34; Eidinow, “Testing the Oracle?”

divine sign confirmed his conjecture. His story was so “believable and fitting” (πιστά τε καὶ οἰκότα) that the ephors acquitted him by a large margin.

Cleomenes and the ephors may have been convinced that the destruction of the sacred grove of Argus formed a convincing oracular tale. However, there may be a slight hint of another alternative oracular tale that lies latent in the greater context of the narrative. Herodotus tells us this story because it is an Argive tale about how Cleomenes went mad and cut himself until he bled to death.⁵⁶ The historian introduces and closes this story in the following way:

... he died in such a way, ... as the Argives say, because he cut down the Argives who fled from the battle, luring them out from their sanctuary of Argus, and he burned the grove itself, disregarding it. For when Cleomenes was consulting at Delphi, it was declared to him that Ἄργος αἰρήσειν...

Now the Argives say that Cleomenes died terribly, going mad on account of these things.⁵⁷

What is clear is that this story is about retribution, but what is less certain is how involved the oracle is in that retribution. Is it merely related to the death of Cleomenes or is it actually predictive of it? Roland Crahay pointed out long ago that the name of Argos, the city, is a neuter, third-declension noun, and the name of Argus, the hero, is a masculine, second-declension noun.⁵⁸ In light of this fact, Cleomenes’ second conjecture seems less reasonable since the accusative form of the name Argus is Ἄργον, not Ἄργος, and so the noun in Herodotus’ rendering of the pronouncement could only properly mean the city. To explain this issue, Lionel Scott proposes that a Greek speaker might “easily assimilate” the two accusatives.⁵⁹ However, even if that were not the case, Argus, the eponymous king of Argos, may be understood as a

⁵⁶ Hdt. 6.75.

⁵⁷ ... ἀπέθανε τρόπῳ τοιούτῳ ... ὥς δὲ Ἀργεῖοι, ὅτι ἐξ ἱεροῦ αὐτῶν τοῦ Ἄργου Ἀργείων τοὺς καταφυγόντας ἐκ τῆς μάχης καταγινέων κατέκοπτε καὶ αὐτὸ τὸ ἄλσος ἐν ἀλογίῃ ἔχων ἐνέπρησε. Ἀργεῖοι μὲν νυν διὰ ταῦτα Κλεομένεά φασι μανέντα ἀπολέσθαι κακῶς. Hdt. 6.75.3, 84.1.

⁵⁸ Crahay, *La Littérature oraculaire*, 170.

⁵⁹ Scott, *Historical Commentary*, 302–3.

metonym for the city and vice versa, just like “Pallas” may be a metonym for Athens in the “wooden wall” oracle.⁶⁰ In light of the whole story, then, the indirect report of the oracle Ἄργος αἰρήσειν may also reasonably be understood as “Argos/Argus will destroy [him]” with the direct object of the infinitive implied from the context—it is a rare, but not unprecedented, use of αἰρέειν with implied direct object in Herodotus’ *Histories*, and an example even occurs as the pronouncement in another oracular tale that also happens to involve the unexpected death of the consultant.⁶¹ Such an apparently ambiguous oracle recalls a similar response supposedly given to Pyrrhus as recorded by Cicero: ‘aio te, Aeacida, Romanos vincere posse,’ which could either mean “I affirm that you are able to conquer the Romans” or “... that the Romans are able to conquer you.”⁶² If this interpretation was the one that the Argive tale was ultimately anticipating, it would mean that the whole interlude is part of the oracular tale meant to explain Cleomenes’ madness and death. These events were fated and predicted by the oracle told at the beginning of the story. Further, it may also alleviate concerns about the story’s representation of Spartan interests and honor at the expense of the Argives since in this interpretation Cleomenes suffers a greater misfortune stemming from another “failed” conjecture.⁶³

Whatever the case may be, it is a belief in a ‘prophetic plan’ that allows Cleomenes, the Argives, and even Herodotus to think that the oracle was fulfilled in any of the ways that I have

⁶⁰ Hdt. 7.141.3, #87. “Ares” is sometimes a metonym for war (7.140.2, #86; 8.77.2, #97), and Demeter, for grain (7.141.4, #87).

⁶¹ **Οὗτος ὁ Φάνης** μεμφόμενός κού τι Ἀμάσι ἐκδιδρῆσκει πλοῖω ἐξ Αἰγύπτου, βουλόμενος Καμβύσῃ ἐλθεῖν ἐς λόγους. Οἷα δὲ ἔοντα αὐτὸν ἐν τοῖσι ἐπικούροισι λόγου οὐ σμικροῦ ἐπιστάμενόν τε τὰ περὶ Αἰγύπτου ἀτρεκέστατα, μεταδιώκει ὁ Ἄμασις σπουδὴν ποιούμενος **ἐλεῖν**, μεταδιώκει δὲ τῶν εὐνούχων τὸν πιστότατον ἀποστείλας τριήρεϊ κατ’ αὐτόν, ὃς **αἰρέει μιν** ἐν Λυκίῃ, **ἐλὼν** δὲ οὐκ ἀνήγαγε ἐς Αἰγύπτου. Hdt. 3.4.2. Ὁ δὲ ἀκούσας ταῦτα ἐς Δελφοὺς οἶχeto χρησόμενος τῷ χρηστηρίῳ, εἰ αἰρέει ἐπ’ ἣν στέλλεται **χώρην**· ἡ δὲ Πυθίη οἱ χρᾶ **αἰρήσειν**. Hdt. 5.43, #55. Ἀνὰ δὲ χρόνον Κρήτας θεοῦ σφέας ἐποτρύναντος, πάντας πλὴν Πολιχνιτέων τε καὶ Πραισίων, ἀπικομένους στόλῳ μεγάλῳ ἐς Σικανίην πολιορκέειν ἐπ’ ἔτα πέντε **πόλιν Καμικόν**, τὴν κατ’ ἐμὲ Ἀκραγαντινοὶ ἐνέμοντο· τέλος δὲ οὐ δυναμένους οὔτε **ἐλεῖν** οὔτε παραμένειν λιμῷ συνεστεῶτας, ἀπολιπόντας οἶχεσθαι. Hdt. 7.170.1–2.

⁶² Cic. *De div.* 2.56.116.

⁶³ Reginald Walter Macan, *Herodotus: The Fourth, Fifth, and Sixth Books*, vol. 1 (London: MacMillan and Co., 1895), 338.

argued. On the other hand, with an eye for contingency in events, Cleomenes' decision to abandon his campaign after such a great victory may seem like foolishness as it has to some modern commentators.⁶⁴ However, it is a decision that can be understood as reasonable in the context of 'divinatory thinking.' After he thought of a convincing story for the oracle's fulfillment, to attack the city of Argos anyway might have seemed like flying blind, and hence the need for additional divination. Scholars may suspect that these events did not happen historically, but what this and other tales show us is that Herodotus and his anticipated audience understood 'divinatory thinking' and considered it to be reasonable and believable.

Prophecy and the Notions of Oracular "Disconfirmation" and "Falsification"

What I have argued from my analysis of these stories is that a person who believes in the prophetic power of oracles thinks through oracular words to find oracular fulfillment. This kind of thought, which I am calling 'divinatory thinking,' is essentially oracular tale-telling. Whether the story is a 'future story' or a historical narrative, the logic is synthetic and involves the pairing of oracular words and specific circumstances. Further, by taking the perspective of contingency, I have shown how arbitrary and subjective 'divinatory thinking' can be in practice. This conclusion points toward the fundamental importance of human factors when considering the question of oracular fulfillment.

The impulse of belief behind the process of oracular interpretation has been recognized and studied before. However, the debate is sometimes framed in terms that directly challenge Greek belief in the prophetic power of oracles. In a relatively recent book chapter, Lisa Maurizio,

⁶⁴ E.g., How and Wells, *A Commentary on Herodotus*, 2:96; Macan, *Herodotus: The Fourth, Fifth, and Sixth Books*, 1:338.

for example, speaks of the “disconfirmation” and “falsification” of oracles.⁶⁵ She draws on *When Prophecy Fails*, by Leon Festinger, Henry W. Riechen, and Stanley Schachter,⁶⁶ and carries over the term “disconfirmation” directly into her discussion about Herodotean oracular tales.

Festinger’s study attempts to explain why belief in prophecy persists despite “objective disconfirmation,” and so their work might seem to be a fitting way to analyze oracular tales in Herodotus’ *Histories* as well. However, this is not really true; Festinger et al. are close to collapsing a fundamentally meaningful distinction between prophecy (primary) and interpretive prediction (secondary), and Maurizio actually follows through with it.

A significant example, in Festinger et al.’s study is the case of William Miller. After some years of studying the Bible, this man predicted in 1818 that the prophesied Second Coming of Christ would occur in the year 1843.⁶⁷ As I have been claiming for divinatory thinking generally, his reasoning was synthetic. It involved a belief in Christ’s prophesied return (Acts 1:11, *inter alia*), a prophetic reading of a passage of scripture that mentions 2,300 days of cleansing in the sanctuary (Daniel 8:14), the interpretation of “days” as meaning “years,” the relation of the time of cleansing to the time between when the prophecy was issued and the Second Coming, and the calculation of an additional 2,300 years from the time of the prophecy (supposedly 457 BCE), hence the year 1843. The team of scholars says a lot about disconfirmation in their discussion of the history of the Millerites. However, it is important to note that, while they may fairly claim that Miller’s interpretive prediction (a ‘future story’) had been disconfirmed by the fact that Christ apparently did not return in 1843 or any time since, the events of those years cannot be said to disconfirm the prophecy of the Christ’s Second Coming

⁶⁵ Maurizio, “Interpretive Strategies.”

⁶⁶ Leon Festinger, Henry W. Riechen, and Stanley Schachter, *When Prophecy Fails* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1956).

⁶⁷ Festinger, Riechen, and Schachter, 12–23.

or the prophetic value of Daniel 8:14. The reason is that these prophecies fail the third criterion of Festinger et al.'s theory that would allow for objective disconfirmation: "The belief must be sufficiently specific and sufficiently concerned with the real world so that events may unequivocally refute belief."⁶⁸ The temporal limits involved in the prophesied Second Coming, though, are famously open-ended, and as is apparent both here and elsewhere, once an utterance is understood prophetically, "days" may become "years." Thus, there is an important distinction to be made between prophecy (that which is taken to be a divine sign) and a prediction (an interpretation) based on a prophecy.

Maurizio's adoption of Festinger et al.'s theory of disconfirmation for the study of oracles in Herodotus, therefore, does not come without problems. She collapses this meaningful distinction between prophetic oracles and a consultant's interpretation. As Maurizio herself acknowledges, the oracle that Doreius receives, for instance, is not so specific as to qualify for disconfirmation under Festinger et al.'s third criterion. When Doreius asked "whether he will take the land to which he sets out," Herodotus reports that the Pythia said, "he will take it."⁶⁹ Maurizio argues, "Because the oracle is not specific, it may be considered ambiguous. But this ambiguity is only recognized after the oracle has been disconfirmed."⁷⁰ Her claim here only confuses the issue. In the Herodotean tale, Doreius' oracle can only be thought of as disconfirmed if, like Maurizio and Harrison,⁷¹ one thinks that the original oracle intended to

⁶⁸ Festinger, Riechen, and Schachter, 4.

⁶⁹ εἰ αἰρέει ἐπ' ἣν στέλλεται χώραν· ἡ δὲ Πυθίη οἱ χρᾶ αἰρήσειν. Hdt. 5.43. Hans Klees argues that the phrase ἐπ' ἣν στέλλεται χώραν may just be a consequence of a desire not to repeat the implied referent of Eryx, which was already named in the oracle of Laius a little earlier. However, the Sybarite tale depends precisely on ambiguity of "the land to which he sets out." Klees, *Die Eigenart des griechischen Glaubens*, 77–8. Further, the phrasing of this type of question—"what I have in mind"—is also found in among the oracular lamellae at Dodona. Eidinow, *Oracles, Curses, and Risk*, 121, 137.

⁷⁰ Maurizio, "Interpretive Strategies," 68.

⁷¹ I think it is significant that the readings of both these scholars flow naturally from their own paraphrases of the story, which are plainly misrepresentations. "When Doreius, the younger brother of Kleomenes, leaves Sparta, he receives advice from Antichares of Eleon to take Eryx, the region in western Sicily that belonged to Heracles, and

indicate exactly what Doreius thought it did indicate, namely that he would take the land of Eryx in Sicily. As I have shown above, though, there is an important distinction between prophecy and prediction based on an interpretation of prophecy. Thus, one cannot assume that Doreius' interpretation aligns with the oracle's intent. If there is intent to be assigned to the oracle, it can only reasonably be said to lie in what the narrator says about its fulfillment.

It does not stand to reason that this Delphic oracle is like Miller's prediction of the Second Coming and Daniel 8:14. Rather, it should be clear that the oracle is to Doreius' interpretation as the prophesied Second Coming is to Miller's prediction. Doreius' interpretation may be disconfirmed objectively, but the prophetic oracle cannot, given the alternative claim about its fulfillment. Maurizio concludes: "Thus, imputing ambiguity to Delphi is a form of falsification on the part of individuals and groups invested in the outcome of an oracle."⁷² But again, her use of the term "falsification" implies that some oracles have original and specific enough meanings at the moment of their pronouncement that they could be objectively proven false. This claim can only be made by an appeal to the supposed intentions of Delphi (its priestesses and priests) and even of Pythian Apollo himself.⁷³ However, it should be emphasized that, while there are a few accusations of bribing the Pythia and a prevailing suspicion of tampering in the process of consultation,⁷⁴ divine intention in oracular speech remains a constant

thus to Doreius, his descendant. Doreius consults with Delphi *and is told "to take it"* [my emphasis]. Maurizio, 67. "He [Doreius] sought *and obtained the approval of Delphi* [my emphasis] to reclaim the territory of Eryx that had once belonged to his ancestor Heracles (5.43)... Doreius, for example, on consulting Delphi as to *whether he should undertake a colony to Eryx* [my emphasis] (a plan inspired by some prophecies of Laius), *is simple told that he should* [my emphasis] (5.43)." Harrison, *Divinity and History*, 154, 156. Harrison's term "non-fulfilment" is closely related to Maurizio's "disconfirmation," but his chapter provides helpful nuance on the kinds of explanations available to those whose expectations about the future are not met.

⁷² Maurizio, "Interpretive Strategies," 68.

⁷³ It is also quite similar to the reasoning of skeptical scholars who argue that an enlightened clergy preyed on the credulity of believers in prophecy by embedding ambiguities into their oracles (at the moment of pronouncement) and oracular tales (after the fact) in order to shore up a ready defense against disconfirmation.

⁷⁴ E.g., Hdt. 5.63.1, 5.90.1, 6.123.2, #56; Thuc. 5.16.2.

that is revealed through the reading of the *Histories*. Whenever Apollo is accused of having misled a consultant, it is always the case in the *Histories* that a consultant's newly realized understanding of the oracle proves the truth of divine intention. In the worldview of the *Histories*, then, one should not understand the reinterpretation of oracles as a "falsification" of original oracular meaning, but as a *verification* that aligns human understanding of an oracle with the divine intention of its meaning.

Despite my objections about the usefulness of the concepts of "disconfirmation" and "falsification," Maurizio is right to draw attention to another solution for the question of oracular ambiguity that is so famous in scholarship. If interpreters of prophecy can think that "wooden wall" can mean "ships"; the Thebans' "nearest," "Aeginetans"; and even "Argos," "Argus"; the evidence seems to indicate that we are not dealing with *oracular* ambiguity per se but with a very *human* ambiguity.⁷⁵ There are clearly two sides to this coin. Only in the view of a 'prophetic plan,' which attributes intentionality both to the divine agents of the oracle and divine ordering of the cosmos generally, can an oracle mean "ships" when it says "wooden wall"—this is part of the worldview of the *Histories*. From the perspective of contingency, on the other hand, one can only see human creativity in making meaning through thinking ambiguously about signs that are believed to be divine and prophetic.⁷⁶

Reuse of Oracles in the *Histories* and Greek Historiography

Another kind of crack that may appear in oracular tales stems from multiple claims of fulfillment or potential fulfillment. In these cases, the central oracles appear to float more freely

⁷⁵ "Delphi's noted ambiguity is a consequence of clients and groups finding and creating ambiguity through their interpretation of oracles and in their story-telling," Maurizio, "Interpretive Strategies," 75.

⁷⁶ See "Part Three: Oracular Ambiguity and the Utility of 'Divinatory Thinking'" below.

in the minds of the ancients, rather than being closely tied to the consultant and the event brought about by their actions. The result is that the same oracle, after being considered fulfilled in one event, may later be considered to be fulfilled in other events.

Sacking Delphi

The most prominent example in the *Histories* is the story of Mardonius' oracular inquiry before the Battle of Platea. At that time, he asked his commanders, including his Greek allies, whether they knew of any oracle that predicted Persian defeat.⁷⁷ When no one spoke up, Mardonius said:

Well then, since you either do not know of one or do not dare to say, but I will tell you one, since I know it well. There is an oracle that it is necessary that the Persians sack the sanctuary at Delphi when they have arrived in Greece, and after the sack, to be destroyed one and all. Therefore, since we know this very oracle, we shall neither go to that sanctuary, nor attempt sack it, and on account of this reason, we shall not be destroyed. And so, however many of you happen to be well-disposed to the Persians, be pleased on account of this, that we are superior to the Greeks.⁷⁸

In conjecturing his future story, Mardonius draws a relation between the oracle and certain actions (the potential Persian sack of Delphi), but since he knows the oracle, he plans not even to go to Delphi. Therefore, since the Persians are more numerous and the precondition of the oracle will not be fulfilled, his 'future story' is that the Persians will win their war against the Greeks.

Herodotus himself criticizes Mardonius' thinking. Immediately following his speech, the narrator interjects: "But I, at least, know that this oracle, which Mardonius said pertained to the Persians, was issued (πεποιημένον) pertaining to the Illyrians and the army of the Encheleis, and

⁷⁷ Hdt. 9.42–43.1, #104.

⁷⁸ Ἐπεὶ τοίνυν ὑμεῖς ἢ ἴστε οὐδὲν ἢ οὐ τολμᾶτε λέγειν, ἀλλ' ἐγὼ ἐρέω ὡς εὖ ἐπιστάμενος. Ἔστι λόγιον ὡς χρεόν ἐστι Πέρσας ἀπικομένους ἐς τὴν Ἑλλάδα διαρπάσαι τὸ ἱερὸν τὸ ἐν Δελφοῖσι, μετὰ δὲ τὴν διαρπαγὴν ἀπολέσθαι πάντας. Ἡμεῖς τοίνυν αὐτὸ τοῦτο ἐπιστάμενοι οὔτε ἵμεν ἐπὶ τὸ ἱερὸν τοῦτο οὔτε ἐπιχειρήσομεν διαρπάζειν, ταύτης τε εἵνεκα τῆς αἰτίας οὐκ ἀπολεόμεθα. Ὡστε ὑμέων ὅσοι τυγχάνουσι εὐνοοὶ ἐόντες Πέρσῃσι, ἥδεσθε τοῦδε εἵνεκα, ὡς περιεσομένους ἡμέας Ἑλλήνων. Hdt. 9.42.2–4.

not to the Persians.”⁷⁹ The situation that Herodotus is referring to here is elucidated partly by Euripides’ *Bacchae*. At the end of this tragedy, Dionysus reveals an oracle to Cadmus, which says: “You shall drive a chariot of barbarian heifers, as the oracle of Zeus says, while leading along with your wife, and you will destroy many cities with a numberless horde. But whenever they plunder the oracle of Loxias, they will have a miserable return back.”⁸⁰ The oracular tale implied here is one of the shadowy corners of Greek myth, and there are different versions. Cadmus and the Cadmeans ended up as rulers among the Illyrians, whether after escaping from the attacking Encheleis, or escaping from the Argives to the Encheleis, or joining forces with Encheleis against the Illyrians.⁸¹ This much can be affirmed from what survives among later mythology, but there is no extant source for the Cadmean sack of Delphi or the destruction of the army to which Herodotus alludes as the fulfillment of the oracle. Although the oracular tale behind Herodotus’ interpretive claim is difficult to reconstruct, his argument about Mardonius’ conjecture is quite clear. He thinks that this oracle was intended at the moment of its first pronouncement to pertain to a completely different set of circumstances that had already been fulfilled. Therefore, Mardonius’ use of the oracle in ‘divinatory thinking’ is an improper reuse in Herodotus’ understanding and is, therefore, objectively wrong. What this passage shows is that the Persian commander received the oracle independent of the story with which Herodotus was familiar, since he claimed that the oracle predicted a bad return after a Persian sack of Delphi.

⁷⁹ Τοῦτον δ’ ἔγωγε τὸν χρησμόν, τὸν Μαρδόνιος εἶπε ἐς Πέρσας ἔχειν, ἐς Ἰλλυριοὺς τε καὶ τὸν Ἐγγελέων στρατὸν οἶδα πεποιημένον, ἀλλ’ οὐκ ἐς Πέρσας. Hdt. 9.43.1.

⁸⁰ ὅχον δὲ μόσχων, χρησμὸς ὡς λέγει Διὸς,
ἐλαῖς μετ’ ἀλόχου βαρβάρων ἡγούμενος,
πολλὰς δὲ πέρσεις ἀναρίθμωι στρατεύματι
πόλεις· ὅταν δὲ Λοξίου χρηστήριον
διαρπάσωσι, νόστον ἄθλιον πάλιν

σχήσουσι. Eur. *Bacc.* 1333–8. See E.R. Dodds, *Euripides: Bacchae* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1960), 234–6.

⁸¹ Hdt. 5.57.2, 5.61.2; Ps.-Apollod. 3.5.4; Paus. 9.5.3; Str. 7.7.8; Diod. Sic. 19.53; Ps-Scymnus *Ad Nicomedem regem* 437–8.

Herodotus may poke fun at Mardonius for relying on a previously fulfilled oracle, but his allusion to the mythical sack of Delphi by the Illyrians under Cadmus may not have been the only story about this oracle's fulfillment. For Pherecydes of Athens, the offenders of Delphi's holy ground were the Phlegyans.

While they [Amphion and Zethus] were living, the Phlegyans were unable to bring any evil upon the Thebans, but when they [Amphion and Zethus] died, after they [Phlegyans] attacked with their king Eurymachus, they destroyed Thebes. Daring even more injustice, they were destroyed by Apollo according the plan of Zeus (κατὰ Διὸς προαίρεσιν). These men even burned the temple of Apollo in Delphi.⁸²

It would appear from the mention of the “plan of Zeus,” the burning of the temple of Pythian Apollo, and the destruction of the Phlegyans in this fragment that the story is an oracular tale reported secondarily as a fulfillment of the same oracle of Zeus that Euripides wrote into his *Bacchae* and Herodotus, into his *Histories*. The fact that all three of these writers are working in Athens during the fifth century BCE means that there may not have been the kind of consensus about the oracle's fulfillment that Herodotus' certainty makes it seem. In the fifth century, the oracle about the destruction of the army that would attack Delphi was circulating in the myth-history and even present consciousness of the Greeks. Sometimes, it was communicated in oracular tales to which it stuck convincingly as a prophecy. Other times, it was received independently and could be cited in deliberation as an oracle that was still looking for fulfillment.

⁸² τούτων μὲν οὖν ζώντων οὐδὲν οἱ Φλεγῦαι τοὺς Θηβαίους κακὸν ἡδύναντο διαθεῖναι· θανόντων δὲ αὐτῶν ἐπελθόντες σὺν Εὐρυμάχῳ τῷ βασιλεῖ τὰς Θήβας εἶλον. πλείονα δὲ τολμῶντες ἀδικήματα κατὰ Διὸς προαίρεσιν ὑπὸ Ἀπόλλωνος διεφθάρησαν. οὗτοι δὲ ἐνέπρησαν καὶ τὸν ἐν Δελφοῖς ναὸν τοῦ Ἀπόλλωνος. Pherecydes (*FGrHist* 3 f41e) via Schol. *Il.* 13.302. In Pherecydes' reckoning of time, this event would have happened even before the arrival of Cadmus into Boeotia, his second foundation of the city of Thebes, and his subsequent removal to Illyria. Pherecydes (*FGrHist* 3 f41d) via Schol. *Il.* 13.302. The two traditional accounts of the foundation of Thebes recommended two solutions: one that placed made Amphion and Zethus as the earliest founders of a city that would be destroyed and later refounded by Cadmus, as Pherecydes does here, and another that made Amphion and Zethus themselves into refoundation figures following a Cadmean collapse. Timothy Ganz, *Early Greek Myth: A Guide to Literary and Artistic Sources* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993), 467.

Cleansing Delos

Another example of reuse may be found in the stories about the Athenian efforts to cleanse Delos. Herodotus gives us the first oracular tale about Peisistratus' third tyranny at Athens (545–528 BCE). “And in addition still to these things, he purified the island of Delos in accordance with the oracles (ἐκ τῶν λογίων), and he cleansed it in this way: how much land had a direct view of the temple (ἐπ’ ὅσον ἔποψις τοῦ ἱεροῦ εἶχε), after digging up the corpses from this whole land, he was transferring them to another part of Delos.”⁸³ In Herodotus' text, Peisistratus' action are presented as a fulfillment of the oracles.

Thucydides, however, complicates our understanding of this oracular tale. As this historian tells us, the Athenians re-cleansed Delos in the year 426 BCE.

And during the same winter, the Athenians even purified Delos according to one oracle or another (κατὰ χρησμόν δὴ τινα). For Peisistratus the tyrant purified it earlier, not entirely, but how much of the island was visible from the temple (ἀλλ’ ὅσον ἀπὸ τοῦ ἱεροῦ ἐφεωρᾶτο τῆς νήσου). At this time the whole island was purified in such a way: How many tombs of the dead were in Delos, they removed them all, and finally they forbade people to die or to give birth on the island but ordered them to remove to Rheneia.⁸⁴

Diodorus Siculus recalls this same event along with a vital piece of information not given by Thucydides.

On account of the virulence of the disease, the Athenians were attributing the causes of their misfortune to the divine. Because of this, they even purified the island of Delos in accordance with a certain oracle, since it was holy to Apollo and because it seemed to be made impure on account of the dead being buried in it. Therefore, after they dug up all of

⁸³ ... πρὸς τε ἔτι τούτοις τὴν νῆσον Δῆλον καθήρας ἐκ τῶν λογίων, καθήρας δὲ ὧδε· ἐπ’ ὅσον ἔποψις τοῦ ἱεροῦ εἶχε, ἐκ τούτου τοῦ χώρου παντὸς ἐξορύξας τοὺς νεκροὺς μετεφόρεε ἐς ἄλλον χώρον τῆς Δήλου. Hdt. 1.64.2, #8 (Wilson, ed., 2016).

⁸⁴ Τοῦ δ’ αὐτοῦ χειμῶνος καὶ Δῆλον ἐκάθηραν Ἀθηναῖοι κατὰ χρησμόν δὴ τινα. ἐκάθηρε μὲν γὰρ καὶ Πεισίστρατος ὁ τύραννος πρότερον αὐτήν, οὐχ ἅπασαν, ἀλλ’ ὅσον ἀπὸ τοῦ ἱεροῦ ἐφεωρᾶτο τῆς νήσου· τότε δὲ πᾶσα ἐκαθάρθη τοιῷδε τρόπῳ. θῆκαι ὅσαι ἦσαν τῶν τεθνεώτων ἐν Δήλῳ, πάσας ἀνεῖλον, καὶ τὸ λοιπὸν προεῖπον μήτε ἐναποθνήσκειν ἐν τῇ νήσῳ μήτε ἐντίκτειν, ἀλλ’ ἐς τὴν Ῥήνειαν διακομίζεσθαι. Thuc. 3.104.1–2.

the tombs in Delos, they transferred them to the island called Rheneia, which is near to Delos. And they also made it law neither to give birth nor to bury the dead on Delos.⁸⁵

Thucydides had mentioned the fresh outbreak of plague at Athens the previous year and that it lasted the entire year of 427 BCE,⁸⁶ but Diodorus adds that the purification of Delos was actually prompted by that epidemic. If this connection is correct, the Athenians have a reason for consulting known oracle collections,⁸⁷ and one may understand their ‘divinatory thinking’ more clearly. It was always a potentially meaningful fact that Peisistratus had only cleansed the parts of Delos within sight of the temple as both Herodotus and Thucydides emphasize. At the beginning of the Peloponnesian War, though, the Athenians were already troubled by other oracles, the first of which claimed, according to some, that the Peloponnesian War would bring plague, and the second, that Apollo himself would help the Spartans.⁸⁸ According to Thucydides, both oracles were popularly related to the Athenian plague. So, all of the signs pointed toward Apollo as the cause of the plague.⁸⁹ Although the Athenians were at one time convinced that Peisistratus had fulfilled the oracle, in the context of the ongoing plague in 426 BCE, this no longer seemed to be the case. Peisistratus had ordered the purification of the sanctuary to an extent, but he had not totally removed impurity from the whole island, which was now understood as the real meaning of the command to purify Delos. Moreover, they were not merely content to remove all of the bones from the island but took a step further to ban both death and

⁸⁵ οἱ δ’ Ἀθηναῖοι διὰ τὴν ὑπερβολὴν τῆς νόσου τὰς αἰτίας τῆς συμφορᾶς ἐπὶ τὸ θεῖον ἀνέπεμπον. διὸ καὶ κατὰ τινα χρησμὸν ἐκάθηραν τὴν νῆσον Δῆλον, Ἀπόλλωνος μὲν οὔσαν ἱεράν, δοκοῦσαν δὲ μεμιάσθαι διὰ τὸ τοὺς τετελευτηκότας ἐν αὐτῇ τεθάρθαι. ἀνασκάψαντες οὖν ἀπάσας τὰς ἐν τῇ Δῆλῳ θήκας μετήνεγκαν εἰς τὴν Ῥήνειαν καλουμένην νῆσον, πλησίον ὑπάρχουσαν τῆς Δῆλου. ἔταξαν δὲ καὶ νόμον μήτε τίκτειν ἐν τῇ Δῆλῳ μήτε θάπτειν. Diod. Sic. 12.58.6–7.

⁸⁶ Thuc. 3.87.1–2.

⁸⁷ There is some debate in scholarship about the origin of the oracle or oracles in question, but I agree with those who suspect that the origin to be some kind of oracle collection. Simon Hornblower, *A Commentary on Thucydides*, vol. 1 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), 525–6; Roger Brock, “Thucydides and the Athenian Purification of Delos,” *Mnemosyne* 49, no. 3 (1996): 321–5.

⁸⁸ Thuc. 2.54.

⁸⁹ It is a matter of Homeric tradition (*Il.* 1.33–67, 92–100, 428–74) that the arrows of Apollo are understood as the cause of plague.

birth from Delos because they might be other sources of impurity. Essentially, the Athenians unfulfilled the oracle in their thinking and reused it to conjecture a fresh ‘future story’ in order to fulfill the oracle in a more convincing way and appease Apollo.⁹⁰

Oracular Collections and the Notions of “Authenticity” and “Flexibility”

The fact that the agents in these oracular tales reuse traditional oracles in ‘divinatory thinking’ demonstrates that certain oracles could and did circulate apart from narrative contexts before being connected with particular events. For this reason, I conclude that oracles also circulated independently in a tradition that ran parallel to a tradition of oracular tale-telling in ancient Greece.⁹¹ As I have argued, the former provided the raw materials (oracles to be fulfilled) for the latter. Scholarship has recognized the wealth of evidence for a tradition of oracle collecting, but it is curious that recent work has emphasized orality and flexibility at the expense of textuality and fixity. The consequence of this change in emphasis is the development of a new notion of oracular authenticity. This kind of authenticity is determined subjectively by the audience of a performance of an oracle rather than objectively by its precision in replicating the actual words of an oracular pronouncement. Further, oracles are now understood as extremely flexible in the sense that they may admit any kind and number of alterations as long as the community still considers it authentic. Against this interpretation, however, the evidence shows

⁹⁰ Later Apollo was worshipped in Athens under the epithet “Averter of Evils” because he brought an end to this plague. Paus. 1.3.4; 8.41.8.

⁹¹ Maurizio Giangliulo pushes back against earlier approaches that have thought of oracles either as *post eventum* fabrications or, like Lisa Maurizio, preexisting utterances that were falsified. Rather, he argues that some traditional verse oracles seem to have been birthed together with oracular tales because of the prominent connections between oracular words and events and because of the moralizing character of these tales. However, with regard to the clear instances of reuse, he does think that oracles were plucked from other tales (and so become free-floating) and then set within new narrative contexts, which argues against his main point. Given that this interpretive process of connecting a preexisting, free-floating oracle to new circumstances is exactly what he dismisses with regard to traditional verse oracles, his conclusions, I think, do not hold. Giangliulo, “Storie oracolari in contesto.”

that the Greeks were quite familiar with oracles as texts, did not hold such a notion of relative authenticity, and insisted on precision in dealing with oracular language in contexts where fulfillment was still being debated.

Again, it is Lisa Maurizio's work that has taken center stage. In her study of Delphic oracles, she takes aim at the supposedly objective criteria for determining whether or not the wording of a reported oracle was actually spoken by the Pythia under the historical circumstances described.⁹² This notion of authenticity underlies much earlier scholarship implicitly, including the major oracular collection of H.W. Parke and D.E.W. Wormell as well as that of Joseph Fontenrose.⁹³ Instead, Maurizio proposes to understand Delphic oracular authenticity in the same terms of oral performance by which scholars have appreciated Homeric authenticity. She argues that the narrative pattern in oracular tales, the effect of Jan Vansina's theory of narrative "structuring,"⁹⁴ is evidence of oral transmission. Since they have come down to us contained in such narratives, Delphic oracles, as the theory goes, must have ossified at the end of an extended process of oral performance. One of the principles of oral performance, as the oralists have taught, is that the performer may alter the poem as far as the audience continues to validate the reperformance. Using this theory, Maurizio claims that the author of an oracle can only really be understood as the community that authorized an oracular reperformance and circulated the oracle (and story). If this were true, the effect would be a tendency for oracles to become quite flexible in their wording and application. In her new notion of authenticity, then, all of the oracles that are reported in extant literature as coming from the Pythia at Delphi are

⁹² Maurizio, "Delphic Oracles as Oral Performances."

⁹³ Parke and Wormell, *The Delphic Oracle*, 1956, 1:94; Joseph Fontenrose, *Python: A Study of Delphic Myth and Its Origins* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1959), 1–10. It is worth noting that Parke and Wormell, at least, understood that they could never establish general principles for determining authenticity nor achieve any certainty about their claims of authenticity. Parke and Wormell, *The Delphic Oracle*, 1956, 2:xxi–xxii.

⁹⁴ Vansina, *Oral Tradition as History*, 71–9, 165–73.

authentic because they were all authenticated as Delphic by the communities that have transmitted them to us. Maurizio's arguments present a useful challenge to traditional approaches to oracular authenticity and are helpful in drawing special attention to the peculiarities of human thinking about oracles and oracular fulfillment. However, there are a couple of objections that should be raised. First, I do not think her redefinition of authenticity is very serviceable because this kind of authenticity does not actually limit what may be considered Delphic. To say that all Delphic oracles are authentically Delphic is tautological, and to think that all Delphic oracles are authentic is as useful as thinking that none of them are. There is simply nowhere else to go with this idea of authenticity. Second, her efforts to emphasize human agency, though instructive, have at times strayed too far from the support of the text and are in danger of ignoring it in favor of modern theory.

Accepting that oracles are governed by the principles of oral reperformance has important consequences for how we understand the use of oracles in ancient Greece. If oracles were often never fixed in writing, or oral recitations of oracles were never checked against a written record, the only limit on how much they (and the narratives told about them) could change over time in the collective memory would be whatever the audience found reasonable. In this way, one can fully appreciate how Maurizio's interpretation of the meaning of the "wooden wall" oracle comes about. For her, this oracle was likely one whose wording and meaning had been altered through a process of oral performance until the point it became an expression of a general crisis in Athenian identity that corresponded to contemporary anxiety about the Persian invasions.⁹⁵ She concludes, "Whether they [the two Delphic oracles given to the Athenians] reflect particular

⁹⁵ Maurizio, "Delphic Oracles as Oral Performances," 329–32.

historical details and can be mined for them, as many scholars have tried to do, is unlikely.”⁹⁶ Thus, since she is disinclined to make claims about *particular* historical details, her interpretive recourse is to appreciate oracles as literary productions that are merely reflective of their *general* socio-historical situatedness.

The idea that many of the extant oracular tales circulated orally as traditional tales in ancient Greece is one that is familiar from earlier scholarship and still has relevant explanatory force for the composition of Herodotus’ *Histories*. Indeed, the distance between Maurizio and these earlier scholars is not as far as it may seem at first. To them, the narrative pattern of prophetic fulfillment should be read as evidence of an oral tradition that is unreliable for those interested in historical facts. What Maurizio helpfully adds is a theoretical limit to alterations made in re-composition and reperformance of oracles and oracular tales: whatever was believable to the audience. However, without a more practical limit, there is little reason beyond the assumption of cultural familiarity with oracles and oracular consultation to think that she is correct elsewhere in her claims about the importance of the Pythia or the pronouncement of verse oracles at Delphi.⁹⁷ Some scholars have preferred to sidestep the issue of making a judgment on the validity of the assumption of cultural familiarity.⁹⁸ Consequently, they leave open the possibility that the Greeks may have been largely ignorant about what oracles were, how they

⁹⁶ Maurizio, 331. However, she does seem to want to maintain the general historical details about the episode of consultation, but it is unclear to me where the line between particular and general is or how it is drawn in an inductive argument like the following: “Ambassadors may return from Delphi with an oracle whose wording appears not to change during performance, as is the case in the ‘wooden wall’ oracle—though, as Nagy argues, we should be suspicious of such claims. In this instance, the audience vies to interpret the oracle, twisting the meaning of the words so that they simultaneously sanction their own political goals and the oracle itself.” Maurizio, 322. One historical detail that she explicitly casts aside is Herodotus’ claim that the ambassadors wrote down the response, which directly challenges her theoretical approach.

⁹⁷ Maurizio, “Anthropology and Spirit Possession”; Lisa Maurizio, “The Voice at the Centre of the World: The Pythia’s Ambiguity and Authority,” in *Making Silence Speak: Women’s Voices in Greek Literature and Society*, ed. Andre Lardinois and Laura McClure (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001); Maurizio, “Shared Meters and Meanings.”

⁹⁸ Rosenberger, *Griechische Orakel*, 12–13; Struck, “The Ordeal of the Divine Sign,” 172.

were obtained, and how they worked. Others appear to challenge Maurizio's criterion of believability as determinative of audience authorization and install in its place one of entertainment. The arguments typically involved here are that the Greeks were simply fascinated with riddles and the intellectual competitions that they instigated, or in a more Freudian vein, that their narratives about the misinterpretation of oracles express cultural anxieties about misunderstanding divine signs.⁹⁹ Without the assumption of general cultural familiarity, then, the literary evidence is only good for understanding a socially constructed, storybook world and perhaps some generic observations about the historical context of its construction. Thus, in these ways of thinking, traditional oracles are understood either as utter fictions designed for entertainment or as *post eventum* fabrications for promoting values.¹⁰⁰ The issue is apparently that the principle of cultural familiarity is difficult to ground in the criterion of believability when the criterion of entertainment is as persuasive for explaining how an audience might validate oral reperformances of oracles and oracular tales.

There are, however, a number of objections to raise against Maurizio's case for a redefinition of "authenticity," notion of audience-based authority, and theory of oracular "flexibility." Hugh Bowden has already pointed out, "While it is quite possible to see oral tradition at work in stories involving oracles, her [Maurizio's] account plays down or ignores the

⁹⁹ Johnston, *Ancient Greek Divination*, 2008, 55–6; Naerebout and Beerden, "Gods Cannot Tell Lies"; Kindt, "Revelation, Narrative, and Cognition: Oracle Stories as Epiphanic Tales in Ancient Greece." Hugh Bowden argues for the entertainment value of Herodotus' stories. However, he thinks that Herodotus received written oracles, which were for the most part fabricated *post eventum* at Delphi, and then told his tales in a way that reflected the language of the oracles and dramatized the events. The exception to this theory is the debate about the "wooden wall," which Bowden thinks met with no objection among the Athenians despite its apparent falsity because Herodotus' version presented them exceedingly favorably. Bowden, *Classical Athens and the Delphic Oracle*, 69–73, 100–8. Nino Luraghi, on the other hand, just like Fontenrose as we have seen, thinks that the Greeks of the fifth century analogized the character of Delphic oracles from those that circulated in the chresmologic tradition. Luraghi, "Oracoli esametrici nelle Storie."

¹⁰⁰ Interestingly, Herodotus (1.78.3, 9.16.5) seems to be sensitive to the fact that certain prophecies may have been forged *post eventum*, as Thomas Harrison has argued. Harrison, *Divinity and History*, 144.

evidence for the preservation of oracles in writing from the sixth century.”¹⁰¹ As I myself have argued in chapter four, there is plenty of evidence from both literary and epigraphic texts to show that writing sometimes appears as part of oracular consultation at Delphi, Dodona, and other sanctuaries.¹⁰² Oracles were not infrequently collected as written texts. As Fontenrose says, “There were many oracle collections in the ancient world, both private and public, and there were many oracles that circulated orally.”¹⁰³ We need to consider a textual tradition of oracles running parallel to an oral one, and for this reason, many of the rules of orality do not necessarily or always apply to oracles.

The story of Onomacritus’ interpolation is sometimes offered as an example of the oral tradition of oracular performance in action, but it is actually a great example for where that tradition intersects with the textual one. The story is that Onomacritus of Athens was “caught by Lasus of Hermione in the act of inserting an oracle into the collection of Musaeus” (ἐπ’ αὐτοφώρῳ ἀλοῦς ὑπὸ Λάσου τοῦ Ἑρμιονέος ἐμποιέων ἐς τὰ Μουσαίου χρησμὸν).¹⁰⁴ John Dillery has rightly emphasized that the phrase “in the act” (ἐπ’ αὐτοφώρῳ), if taken literally, should mean that Lasus caught him reciting this oracle in public, rather than that Lasus was with him when he wrote the oracle into his collection.¹⁰⁵ Other scholars have also drawn attention to the context of oral performance in this story and have pointed out that the two were poets in competing genres: Onomacritus in rhapsodic, oral poetry and Lasus in melic, textual poetry.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰¹ Bowden, *Classical Athens and the Delphic Oracle*, 37n26. See also Michael Flower on this point, and Maurizio’s own acknowledgement of the validity of this critique. Flower, *The Seer in Ancient Greece*, 218–19; Maurizio, “Shared Meters and Meanings,” 101.

¹⁰² See “*The Mantic session: questions and pronouncements*” in chapter three.

¹⁰³ Fontenrose, *The Delphic Oracle*, 165.

¹⁰⁴ Hdt. 7.6.3.

¹⁰⁵ Dillery, “Chresmologues and Manteis,” 189–90. As he also points out, we should be prepared to think that Onomacritus, as “an arranger of the oracles of Musaeus,” wrote this oracle into his collection as well as asserted its provenance in public.

¹⁰⁶ Gregory Nagy, *Pindar’s Homer: The Lyric Possession of an Epic Past* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990), 172–4; Richard Martin, “Onomakritus, Rhapsode: Composition-in-Performance and the Competition

However, it should be clear that the phrase “in the act” or “red-handed” depends on the fact that, to those who were knowledgeable, this act was manifestly an insertion of a novel oracle into the collection. In some way, this accusation should be as obviously true as that of Leotychidas’ graft when he was caught “red-handed” (ἐπ’ αὐτοφώρῳ) sitting on a glove full of gold.¹⁰⁷ Herodotus’ certainty, and probably that of Lasus, implies the objectivity of an authoritative collection fixed in a text, like the one that qualified Onomacritus as an “arranger of the oracles of Musaeus” (διαθέτην χρησμῶν τῶν Μουσαίου). Lasus caught Onomacritus’ manifest insertion because he knew very well that an oracle about the islands around Lemnos slipping into the sea was not in Musaeus’ catalogue of oracles, whether he had memorized the collection or had it at hand to read in public. This story shows us that the textual tradition of oracles was available in some cases to act as a kind of check on the oral tradition and the malefactors who made up oracles for advantage. This is not to say that people could never make up oracles and persuasively assert a grander provenance for them. It certainly happened just as was attempted in this case,¹⁰⁸ and it is precisely this self-interested manipulation of oracles by the oracle-mongers that Aristophanes derided.¹⁰⁹

This story also raises an objection to Maurizio’s notion of “authenticity” and audience-based authority. As a consequence of his actions, Onomacritus was expelled from Athens by Hipparchus.¹¹⁰ The reason for Onomacritus’ expulsion from Athens was not the result of a misunderstanding about the differing notions of authenticity between rhapsodic versus melic poetry, as Richard Martin argues, nor of an oracular challenge to the designs of the Peisistratidae,

of Genres in 6th-Century Athens,” in *Animo Decipiendi? Rethinking Fakes and Authorship in Classical, Late Antique, & Early Christian Works*, ed. Antonio Guzmán and Javier Martínez (Groningen: Barkhuis, 2018), 89–106.

¹⁰⁷ Hdt. 6.72.2. See also Hdt. 6.137.3.

¹⁰⁸ Fontenrose, *The Delphic Oracle*, 145–65.

¹⁰⁹ Smith, “Diviners and Divination.”

¹¹⁰ Hdt. 7.6.4.

as H. Alan Shapiro thinks.¹¹¹ The crime was that Onomacritus had perpetrated a fraud against the Athenians. He tried to give his oracle the authority of a genuine oracle of Musaeus and to exploit Athenian trust in that oracle collection to get them to act on it.¹¹² Although he failed to convince the Athenians, Onomacritus would try his luck again in Persia. The failures that Xerxes encountered after he was encouraged to invade Greece by Onomacritus' selective citation of oracles illustrates the high stakes involved in oracular manipulation and why the Athenians took this case so seriously.¹¹³ What Onomacritus' offenses make clear is that the Greeks conceived of oracular authenticity in a way similar to that of Parke, Wormell, and Fontenrose: a reported oracle is authentic only if its words actually come from a text that is considered to be oracular. As Herodotus tells the story, the oracle about the islands around Lemnos was inauthentic not because the Athenian audience rejected its authenticity, but because it did not originate from the collection of Musaeus.

Instead of the tale of Onomacritus, Maurizio's attention is on the first oracle that the Athenians received on the eve of Xerxes' invasion of Greece. As the story goes, the Pythia told them:

Miserable men, why do you sit? Leaving the homes and lofty peaks of the wheel-formed city, flee to the ends of earth. For the head does not remain in place, nor the body, nor feet below, nor even hands, nor is anything in between left, but they are unenviable. For both fire and sharp Ares are crashing down upon it, following a Syrian-born chariot.¹¹⁴ Many and other walled cities will it destroy, and not yours alone, and many temples of the immortals will it give to raging fire, who perhaps now stand pouring with sweat,

¹¹¹ Martin, "Onomakritus, Rhapsode"; H. Alan Shapiro, "Oracle-Mongers in Peisistratid Athens," *Kernos*, no. 3 (January 1, 1990): 336–7.

¹¹² Hugh Bowden gestures toward this conclusion. Bowden, "Oracles for Sale," 264–6.

¹¹³ Hdt. 7.6.4–5.

¹¹⁴ It is interesting to note the phrase "following a Syrian-born chariot" (συρηγενὲς ἄρμα διώκων) has a parallel in Aeschylus' *Persians* (Σύριον θ' ἄρμα διώκων, 84). Both H.D. Broadhead and Pietro Vannicelli suggest the possibility that this line of Aeschylus would have reminded the Athenians of this oracle. H.D. Broadhead, *The Persae of Aeschylus* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1960), 52; Vannicelli, "Atene, Delfi e l'invasione Persiana," 376–7. However, we should be more circumspect and agree with J.A.S. Evans that the line from Aeschylus could have influenced the oracle if it only circulated in an oral tradition. Evans, "The Oracle of the 'Wooden Wall,'" 29.

shaking with fear. And black blood flows down from the tallest thatched houses,
foretelling the necessity of evil. But go from the *adyton* and embrace evils.¹¹⁵

The Athenians were understandably dismayed by this response, and with the encouragement of a local man, they returned to the temple to ask the Pythia for a milder oracle. Maurizio comments: “This suggests that even in a ritual context such as Delphi, the audience of any oracle could exert considerable influence on a performer, and as in this instance reject her performance and thereby refuse to confer authority on her.”¹¹⁶ Maurizio’s assertion here is odd for a few reasons. First, it misunderstands the power dynamics between the Pythia, the prophet of Apollo, and the consultants as shown by the humility of their supplication in the temple. Second, she seems to ignore her own redefinition of authenticity. The issue is that this oracle *did* actually make the grade for the community to pass it along as an utterance they called Delphic, which is her sole criterion of authenticity—someone presumably had to give the oracle to Herodotus. More damningly, though, her interpretation cannot be maintained in the greater context of the *Histories*. Despite the fact that Herodotus does not give as much emphasis to this oracle, the Athenians do, indeed, seem to act on it when they flee to the edges of their land.¹¹⁷ More importantly, the prophetic images of war and destruction are nicely fulfilled in the devastation

¹¹⁵ ὦ μέλαιοι, τί κάθησθε; Λιπὼν φύγ' ἐς ἔσχατα γαίης
δῶματα καὶ πόλιος τροχοειδέος ἄκρα κάρηνα.
Οὔτε γὰρ ἡ κεφαλὴ μένει ἔμπεδον οὔτε τὸ σῶμα,
οὔτε πόδες νέατοι οὔτ' ὦν χέρρες, οὔτε τι μέσσης
λείπεται, ἀλλ' ἄζηλα πέλει· κατὰ γάρ μιν ἐρείπει
πῦρ τε καὶ ὄξυς Ἄρης, συριγενὲς ἄρμα διώκων.
Πολλὰ δὲ κἄλλ' ἀπολεῖ πυργώματα, κοῦ τὸ σὸν οἶον·
πολλοὺς δ' ἀθανάτων νηοὺς μαλερῶ πυρὶ δώσει,
οἳ πού νῦν ἰδρῶτι ῥεοῦμενοι ἐστήκασι,
δείματι παλλόμενοι, κατὰ δ' ἀκροτάτοις ὀρόφοισιν
αἷμα μέλαν κέχυται, προῖδὼν κακότητος ἀνάγκας.
Ἀλλ' ἴτον ἐξ ἀδύτοιο, κακοῖς δ' ἐπικίδνατε θυμόν. Hdt. 7.140, #86.

¹¹⁶ Maurizio, “Delphic Oracles as Oral Performances,” 316. John Dillery also thinks that this oracle was less definitive than the “wooden wall” oracle, citing the fact that Herodotus only mentions the use of writing in the case of the second oracle. Dillery, “Chresmologues and Manteis,” 215–17. However, as I have shown, writing was more commonly used in the preservation of oracular speech than has previously been thought.

¹¹⁷ Hdt. 8.41.2. See Harrison, *Divinity and History*, 150–2.

wrought by the Persians on Athens and its countryside.¹¹⁸ Just because the Athenian delegates did not like the oracle does not mean that they could, or even did, deny its authority. Moreover, even if they had actually thought that they could, the story proves that they were wrong to have thought so. Here, Maurizio's interpretation is guided more by her theory than by the text. The fact that the oracle was fulfilled seals its authoritative status as an authentic sign of divine foreknowledge, and hence its survival in the tradition. Maurizio's work is helpful in drawing attention to the human factors at play in the reception and transmission of a tradition of oracles and oracular tales that are so often not the focus of our extant sources. However, one ought not lose sight of the way the Greeks thought about their oracles when interpreting oracular tales. For the Greeks, it is the gods that give authority to oracles, and it is their fulfillment in time that validates them.

A final objection may also be registered against Maurizio's theory that oracles were always and necessarily subject to alteration in reperformance. She calls this principle "oracular flexibility," and there are two types: one typified by minor differences of language in ostensibly the same oracle and another typified by substantial similarity of motif between different oracles.¹¹⁹ The evidence upon which she bases this theory, though, is not as pertinent as it might seem at first glance. With regard to the latter type, the evidence of a similar motif is not enough to demonstrate any real relationship between two different oracles that are attributed to different consultations. If the motif of the appearance of a "white crow" was a familiar enough image for improbability, as Maurizio in fact thinks,¹²⁰ there really is no telling whether the motif came to

¹¹⁸ Hdt. 8.51–3.

¹¹⁹ Maurizio, "Delphic Oracles as Oral Performances," 323.

¹²⁰ Maurizio, 325. The appearance of white crows is the condition of a pair of oracles, one to the Boeotians and the other to the Magnesians. Demon (*FGrHist* 327 f7); *IM* 17. Photius' story about the Boeotians is a variant of the story that Demon tells. Phot. *Lex.* s.v., "ἐς κόρακας."

be expressed in two unrelated oracular pronouncements independently or a prophet actually drew the motif from an older oracle. In either case, it is doubtful whether it is fair in this context to speak of recycled oracles as opposed to recycled motifs.

Her example of the former type of flexibility is similar in at least one respect. Again, the fragmentary historians with which we are dealing here attribute the oracle to different consultations. According to Photius and the Suda, both Ion of Chios (fifth century BCE) and Mnaseas of Patrae (third century BCE) knew of an oracle given to the Aegians:

[Pelasgicon Argos is better than every land], a Thessalian horse and a Lacedaemonian woman, and men who drink the water of beautiful Arethusa. But still better than these are those who dwell between Tiryns and Arcadia rich in flocks. The Argives are best to fight with spears. But you, Aegians, are neither the third, nor the fourth, nor the twelfth either in account or in number.¹²¹

However, they both add that some unnamed others thought that it was given to the Megarians, with the line about the Aegians replaced with “But you, Megarians, are neither third, nor fourth... (Ὑμεῖς δ', ὃ Μεγαρεῖς, οὔτε τρίτοι, οὔτε τέταρτοι...).”¹²² Clearly, there is some kind of relationship between these two oracles, but whether that relationship is genetic is difficult to establish.

Maurizio is certainly right to draw attention to the flexibility of the language of this oracle even beyond the half-line substitution already mentioned. However, she has dramatically

¹²¹ [Γαίης μὲν πάσης τὸ Πελασγικὸν Ἄργος ἄμεινον,]

Ἴππον Θετταλικὴν, Λακεδαιμονίαν τε γυναῖκα·

Ἄνδρας δ' οἱ πίνουσιν ὕδωρ καλῆς Ἀρεθούσης·

Ἄλλ' ἔτι καὶ τῶν εἰσιν ἄμεινονες, οἳ τε μεσηγὺ

Τίρυνθος ναίουσι καὶ Ἀρκαδίας πολυμήλου·

Ἀργεῖοι λινοθώρηκες, κέντρα πτολέμοιο·

Ὑμεῖς δ', Αἰγίεες, οὔτε τρίτοι, οὔτε τέταρτοι,

Οὔτε δυωδέκατοι, οὔτ' ἐν λόγῳ, οὔτ' ἐν ἀριθμῷ· Phot. Lex. s.v. “Ὑμεῖς, ὃ Μεγαρεῖς”; Suda Y.108. Carl Müller

questions whether the citation of Ion of Chios may be a scribal error (KAI IQNΔE for KAI MNAS). Most of the other references to this oracle in the bibliographers of Late Antiquity and the Byzantine Period, who like to parrot earlier bibliographers, do not mention him and instead summarize the preceding information. *FHG* 2.51, fr.17. This supposed fragment of Ion of Chios does not appear in Jacoby's *FGrHist*.

¹²² Callimachus apparently thought the same way. Callim. *Epi.* 25.

overstated the case, and although she seems to walk back from the furthest extent of these claims in her later work, her earlier work continues to have great influence on the study of Delphic oracles.¹²³ She says, “In its roughly twenty-five appearances, this oracle has different addressees, verses and authors, creating a dizzying array of possible occasions and events for its utterance and reflecting a vital and flexible oral tradition.”¹²⁴ There are a number of issues with this claim. First, although the oracles and their attendant oracular tales are reported or alluded to in a number of different contexts, like telling a story at a dinner party, there are only ever two consultations—the Aegians and the Megarians—mentioned in any of the evidence, and the circumstances reported for those consultations change only in the extent to which the oracle is contextualized historically.¹²⁵ Second, only Clement of Alexandria assigns the verses to an author other than the Delphic priestess,¹²⁶ and the fact that the author of the oracle is sometimes just referred generally to Apollo or left anonymous cannot be interpreted as positive evidence for authorial flexibility.¹²⁷ Third, there are only few changes in language that could be called substantive. Most involve variations that cannot be attributed so specifically to oral transmission rather than faulty memory of something once read like ἄνδρας θ’ for ἄνδρας δ’ and οἱ τὰ

¹²³ “The consistency in oracles over time may confirm Michael Flower’s claim that Delphic oracles were written down sooner and preserved with greater care than other forms of oral poetry (Flower 2009, 218).” Maurizio, “Shared Meters and Meanings,” 101.

¹²⁴ Maurizio, “Delphic Oracles as Oral Performances,” 324. See also Palmisciano, “Varianti di riformulazione.”

¹²⁵ Aegians: Str. 10.1.13; Mnaseas (*FHG* 3.157); and Ion? (*FHG* 2.51); Steph. Byz. *Ethn.* 1.1080; Phot. *Lex.* s.v. “Υμεῖς, ὃ Μεγαρεῖς”; Suda Y.108; Paus. Att. *Syn.* Y.5; Eust. *comm. ad* Dion. *Peri.* 473.16–17; Schol. *Il.* 23.6; Eust. *comm. ad* *Il.* 2.574; Michael Apostolius *Collectio paroemiarum* 1.59; Diogenianus Gramm. *Paroemiae* 1.47; Zenobius 1.48; Aelius Herodianus *Paroemiae* 3.2.890.16–17; Johann. Tzet. *Chil.* 9.273.481–9, 291. Megarians: Deinias via Schol. Theocr. 14.48; Phot. *Lex.* s.v. “Υμεῖς, ὃ Μεγαρεῖς”; Suda Y.108; Paus. Att. *Syn.* Y.5; *Anth. Pal.* 14.73; Julian *Or.* 249c; Theocritus 14.49. Clement of Alexandria reports the line addressing the Megarians directly, and allusions in Plutarch show that the issue was ambiguous even in his time. Clem. Alex. *Str.* 7.18.110; Plut. *Quaest. conviv.* 682f, 730d. Other references and allusions to the oracle include: Ath. 7.278e; Oenomaus the Cynic via Eus. *PE* 5.29; Theodor. *Gr. Aff. Cur.* 141.14; Choricus *Opera* 29.1.3.6–8; Nicetas Magister *Epistulae ex Hellesponto* 23.11–13.

¹²⁶ Clem. Alex. *Str.* 7.18.110.

¹²⁷ Anonymous: Str. 10.1.13; *Anth. Pal.* 14.73; Eust. *comm. ad* Dion. *Peri.* 473.16–17; Schol. *Il.* 2.763, 23.6; Michael Apostolius *Collectio paroemiarum* 1.59; Diogenianus Gramm. *Paroemiae* 1.47; Aelius Herodianus *Paroemiae* 3.2.890.16–17; Steph. Byz. *Ethn.* 1.1080; Ath. 7.278e. Apolline: Theodor. *Gr. Aff. Cur.* 141.14; Choricus *Opera* 29.1.3.6–8.

μεσσηγνὺ or οἱ τὸ μεταξὺ for οἱ τε μεσσηγνὺ,¹²⁸ and since most of our evidence for the wording of the oracles comes from fragments recorded in the lexica of Late Antiquity and the Byzantine Period, faults in textual transmission are much more likely. Also, the change from nominative to accusative case in some nouns is easily explained by a shift into indirect discourse, and that from singular to plural, though more difficult to explain, has no obvious impact on its meaning. There are only four substantive variants: the “Thessalian horses” become “Thracian,”¹²⁹ “Pelagicon Argos” becomes “Pelagicon earth,”¹³⁰ and the “beautiful water of Arethusa” becomes “holy” or even a “holy spring.”¹³¹ Consequently, even if one were to think that these variations could only arise in a living oral tradition (and this is patently false),¹³² the consistency of the oracles through the long millennium between our textual sources would actually be quite remarkable and prompts us to wonder whether it is really such a problem to hold a more traditional view of oracular authenticity. Be that as it may, the array of differences in narrative frame and transmission, whether textual or oral, are far from “dizzying” and only point toward the conclusion that I have already drawn. The Greeks were only anxious about preserving the accuracy of oracular language when they thought that their oracles could still help them determine how to act.¹³³ When that was no longer the case, the precise words only mattered in so far as they still connected to a particular, traditional oracular tale. Hence, our sources pay close

¹²⁸ ἄνδρας θ’ (Str. 10.1.13; Oenomaus the Cynic via Eus. *PE* 5.29); οἱ τὰ μεσσηγνὺ (Deinias via Schol. Theocr. 14.48); οἱ τὸ μεταξὺ (Johann. Tzetz. *Chil.* 9.291). Albio Cesare Cassio has recently suggested that the process of textual transmission may be to blame for some dialectical alterations to oracles. Albio Cesare Cassio, “Innovazioni linguistiche e tratti locali nei più antichi oracoli,” *Seminari Romani di Cultura Greca* 3, no. 2 (2014): 257–270.

¹²⁹ Deinias via Schol. Theocr. 14.48; Oenomaus the Cynic via Eus. *PE* 5.29; Theod. *Gr. Aff. Cur.* 141.14.

¹³⁰ Oenomaus the Cynic via Eus. *PE* 5.29.

¹³¹ Str. 10.1.13; Schol. *Il.* 2.763.

¹³² The overwhelming majority of our sources for these oracles come from lexicographers and other antiquarians who are clearly citing literary fragments and borrowing from each other. Thus, we need to allow that an author might have misremembered what was once read and that copyists might have misread the words or intentionally altered (atticize) the words for euphony. Given apparent allusions to the oracles in Plato (*Hp. Ma.* 288b), Theocritus (14.49), Callimachus (*Epi.* 25), Plutarch (*Mor.* 682f), Julian the Apostate (*Or.* 249c), and popular proverbs (Suda AI.45; Zenobius 1.48) it is fair to say that there may have been some kind of an oral tradition, too.

¹³³ See “*The Mantic session: questions and pronouncements*” in chapter four.

attention to the historical crux of Aegian versus Megarian consultants, and not at all to the issue of Thessalian versus Thracian horses.

Maurizio is not wrong to think that oracles may have been somewhat flexible in the practice of interpretation. The best evidence for this phenomenon comes from Thucydides' story about the "Dorian war" oracle that I mentioned in chapter three.

In the present evil, as was fitting, they also remembered this oracle, since the old men were going around saying that long ago it was sung, "There will come a Dorian war and plague along with it." A dispute, therefore, opened up with the men who claimed that "plague" (λοιμὸν) was not named by the ancients in the oracle, but "famine" (λιμὸν), but fittingly in the present situation, the opinion that "plague" was named prevailed. For people were recalling the memory in relation to the things that they were experiencing. But if, I suppose, at some time another Dorian war should happen after this one, and a famine should happen to come about, they will sing it according to what is fitting in that way.¹³⁴

Clearly, Thucydides is describing a living oral tradition at work in the process of interpreting a traditional oracle. Maurizio comments: "His shrewd observation about how people remember oracles also implies that the Athenian community accepts and thereby authorizes this anonymous oracle so that it becomes part of its collective understanding of their present plight. Thus, they are its authors, and in their understanding, if not Thucydides', it is authentic."¹³⁵ She is right to point out that the Athenians are promoting the oracular story that they made from their memory of the oracle and their present circumstances. However, they certainly did not think of themselves as the authors of the oracle. In fact, the debate over the variants, "famine" and "plague," implies that the one or the other was the original and authentic word used in the oracle. The circumspect Thucydides does not actually disagree with this since his only point is that the

¹³⁴ ἐν δὲ τῷ κακῷ οἷα εἰκὸς ἀνεμνήσθησαν καὶ τοῦδε τοῦ ἔπους, φάσκοντες οἱ πρεσβύτεροι πάλαι ἄδεσθαι ἥξει Δωριακὸς πόλεμος καὶ λοιμὸς ἅμ' αὐτῷ. ἐγένετο μὲν οὖν ἕρις τοῖς ἀνθρώποις μὴ λοιμὸν ὠνομάσθαι ἐν τῷ ἔπει ὑπὸ τῶν παλαιῶν, ἀλλὰ λιμὸν, ἐνίκησε δὲ ἐπὶ τοῦ παρόντος εἰκότως λοιμὸν εἰρησθαι· οἱ γὰρ ἄνθρωποι πρὸς ἃ ἔπασχον τὴν μνήμην ἐποιοῦντο. ἦν δέ γε οἷμαί ποτε ἄλλος πόλεμος καταλάβῃ Δωρικὸς τοῦδε ὕστερος καὶ ξυμβῇ γενέσθαι λιμὸν, κατὰ τὸ εἰκὸς οὕτως ἔσσονται. Thuc. 2.54.2–4.

¹³⁵ Maurizio, "Delphic Oracles as Oral Performances," 318.

Athenians might change their minds about which was the authentic word if another Dorian war should come with famine. This is to substitute one oracular story for another potential one. On this point, it is also worth observing that Thucydides does not say that the nature of memory in oral tradition could have made the “Dorian war” Boeotian, as Maurizio seems to suggest in her argument. The extent of the flexibility of this oracle comes down to a single vowel sound in a single word, though with admittedly major consequences for interpretation.

Even though oracles in oral transmission may have been flexible in practice, the degree of their flexibility has been overstated in current scholarship. In theory, the Greeks did not even concede that they were flexible at all. Because they thought that the divine origin of oracles was confirmed by specific and divinely known moments of fulfillment, exact wording was fundamentally important. A change in the language of an oracle, if recognized as not the original language, might constitute a change of its status as a divine sign and point away from its proper referent. In this view, the altered oracle might no longer be prophetic of the event that it was intended to predict. For this reason, the Greeks closely scrutinized the process of transmission from god, to priest or priestess, to delegates, to community, to fulfillment. What the tradition did with it after that is another matter.

Conclusion

‘Divinatory thinking’ is storytelling that links a divine sign to a fulfillment. As I have shown, this kind of synthetic thinking is subjective. There is no objective reason why any oracle must be fulfilled only in the way that is claimed in the narrative other than that it is claimed in the narrative. The examples of interpretive “failure” and reuse of oracles above show how tenuous the connection between pronouncement and fulfillment can be.

Interpretive “failure” is particularly helpful for observing the subjectivity of ‘divinatory thinking’ involved in determining oracular fulfillment. The plan to defend the acropolis of Athens with a literal, and perhaps supernaturally powerful, “wooden wall” was not an insane idea in the worldview of the *Histories*, that interpretation simply did not tally with the fact of the Persian seizure of the acropolis. On the other hand, the Athenians never tested whether they might have been successful resettling their people in Italy, like the oraclemongers proposed, and so there is no way of knowing whether that interpretation might have been accurate in a different world. Although the Greek victory at Salamis invalidated their conjecture of a significant defeat there, with a view for contingency, it can be said that this victory was neither likely, since the Greeks were heavily outnumbered, nor necessary, since it is clear from the leadup that a battle might not have happened there at all. In the second example, the Thebans trusted that their oracle meant that the Aeginetans would help them. However, unlike in the case of the Athenians, they did not believe that their interpretation was totally invalidated when the statues they carried into battle failed to yield success. Instead, they asked the Aeginetans to send their soldiers to help, and when the Aeginetans devastated the land of their enemy, their conjecture about the meaning of the oracle was apparently fulfilled. However, if one makes careful note of contingency in these circumstances, it is clear that their revenge was, as far as we can tell, just as likely to result from the first engagement as the later one—or indeed any other time that an ally of theirs might have beaten up on the Athenians. In the third story, Cleomenes set out to attack Argos according to the encouragement he took from an oracle. However, after his burning of the grove of Argus, he came to believe that his oracle had been fulfilled, and so he did not take his army against the city even though he himself and his fellow Spartans thought he was likely to succeed. Nevertheless, he was able to defend himself against the charge of bribery by convincing the

ephors of the correctness of his later interpretation of the oracle. To put it briefly, some consultants held alternative interpretations but never fully tested these ‘future stories’ by committing to act upon them. Others undertook a particular ‘future story,’ but the results did not meet their expectations. Whether these results resonated at all with the oracle was an important factor that consultants then considered before pressing their luck by conjecturing a different ‘future story’ to pursue.

The instances in which people reused familiar oracles for conjecturing new ‘future stories’ shows that the issue of oracular fulfillment could be negotiable. In such cases, people recall old oracles and apply them to new contexts either because they are ignorant of their original and established contexts, like Mardonius, or they are not convinced by earlier conjectured moments of fulfillment, like the Athenians and their second cleansing of Delos. In determining the validity of these moments of re-fulfillment, what mattered most to Herodotus was whether the oracle had already been convincingly fulfilled. What the two Athenian stories show, though, is that previously credible fulfillments did not always stand in the way of attempting to gain some advantage from old oracles by pursuing better or more convincing ‘future stories.’ These stories point to contingency and opportunism in the events of oracular tales, that is to say, how subjectively and arbitrarily ancient Greeks thought and behaved when interpreting and acting upon oracles.¹³⁶

¹³⁶ Harrison, *Divinity and History*, 150; Lisa Maurizio, “Technopaegnia in Heraclitus and the Delphic Oracles: Shared Compositional Techniques,” in *The Muse at Play: Riddles and Wordplay in Greek and Latin Poetry*, ed. J. Kwapisz, D. Petrain, and M. Szymansk (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2012), 114.

Part Three: Oracular Ambiguity and the Utility of ‘Divinatory Thinking’

This picture of how people interpreted and used oracles is usually expressed as the problem of oracular ambiguity and is the subject of extensive debate in scholarship. A number of scholars have outright denied that ambiguity was a feature of historical oracles. One of their key arguments against it is the supposition that ambiguous pronouncements would not have been fair, satisfactory, or useful to consultants.¹ Their reasoning is that true ambiguity is impossible to resolve and, therefore, would have been unsatisfying for people seeking advice about what to do. If the goal of divination was in part to achieve greater certainty or manage risk, as some have rightly theorized,² then it seems that only crystal-clear advice (yes/no, “It is better to do x.”) will do. Since these scholars, and others as well, consider (Delphic) oracular ambiguity to be ahistorical or at least suspicious, they attempt to account for its appearance in oracular tales with appeals to the manipulations of a priestly intelligentsia or other self-interested parties before or after the fact,³ to a tradition of moralizing or dramatic folktales,⁴ or to the popularity of riddles in Greek culture.⁵ All of these reasons may explain the evidence as it has come down to us. However, these theories still create too neat a schism between the world of literature and the world of reality to be entirely credible. The first issue is that the enigmatic mode of expression is strongly associated in ancient Greece not just with divinatory signs in general, but with oracles in

¹ Fontenrose, “The Oracular Response”; Morgan, *Athletes and Oracles: The Transformation of Olympia and Delphi in the Eighth Century BC*, 156–7; Bowden, *Classical Athens and the Delphic Oracle*, 51; Johnston, *Ancient Greek Divination*, 2008, 55; Naerebout and Beerden, “Gods Cannot Tell Lies,” 136–7.

² Parker, “Greek Oracles and Greek States,” 300; Eidinow, *Oracles, Curses, and Risk*, 10–25; Beerden, *Worlds Full of Signs*, 195–222; Bowden, “Seeking Certainty.”

³ Arist. *Rhet.* 3.5.4 (1407a32–b5); Cic. *De div.* 2.56. (Priests): Oeri, “De Herodoti fonte Delphico”; Whittaker, “The Delphic Oracle,” 28–9; Morgan, *Athletes and Oracles: The Transformation of Olympia and Delphi in the Eighth Century BC*, 156–7. (Others): Crahay, *La Littérature oraculaire*, esp. 58–60; Giangiulio, “Storie oracolari in contesto.”

⁴ Crahay, *La Littérature oraculaire*, esp. 46–51; Fontenrose, “The Oracular Response”; Murray, “Herodotus and Oral History,” 1987; Bowden, *Classical Athens and the Delphic Oracle*, 51.

⁵ Crahay, *La Littérature oraculaire*, esp. 54–6; Johnston, *Ancient Greek Divination*, 2008, 55; Naerebout and Beerden, “Gods Cannot Tell Lies.”

particular, as Peter Struck has convincingly demonstrated.⁶ The second is that in order for these stories about human agents to have their intended moral or propagandistic effect, it would have to be believable that the actions of the agents depicted are possible.⁷ Thus, these stories depend on the cultural knowledge that oracles like those from Delphi were sometimes enigmatic, and one need not suppose that the popularity of riddles and word games occasioned the depiction of the oracles found in literature. Rather, it seems more likely that the interpretation of oracles and that of riddles, as well as the allegorical interpretation of poetry generally, existed as parallel interpretive discourses that passed theories and tools back and forth.⁸

The question about utility is a good one, however, and this “common sense” bit of thinking has compelled scholars to explain it. Some have suggested that ambiguous oracles may have been helpful for consultants since it would give them the opportunity to reconsider their crises in semantic mode rather than a strategic one.⁹ Others believe that ambiguity is a necessary and appropriate mode for divine communication with humans since it expresses the difficulty (understood as impossibility) of bridging the gaps between human ignorance of the future and divine knowledge of it.¹⁰ Another group thinks of oracular ambiguity as a consequence of the

⁶ Peter T. Struck, *Birth of the Symbol: Ancient Readers at the Limits of Their Texts* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2004), 170–9.

⁷ See Rebecca Langlands’ recent study of exemplary ethics. Rebecca Langlands, *Exemplary Ethics in Ancient Rome* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 92.

⁸ Struck, *Birth of the Symbol*, 165.

⁹ Parker, “Greek States and Greek Oracles,” 301–2. See also Simon Price, “Delphi and Divination,” in *Greek Religion and Society*, ed. P. E. Easterling and J. V. Muir (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 148–9; Morgan, *Athletes and Oracles*, 156–7; Anderson, “A Story of Blood.”

¹⁰ Vernant, “Parole et signes muets”; Dobson, “Oracular Language,” 88–9; Kindt, “Delphic Ambiguity”; Giovanni Manetti, *Theories of the Sign in Classical Antiquity* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1993), 14–35; Maurizio, “Anthropology and Spirit Possession,” 82–3. Similarly, Carol Dougherty has argued that oracular ambiguity in colonial foundation narratives replicates on a linguistic level the process of colonization. The riddling oracle presents a puzzle, a foreignness, that requires interpretation according to Greek custom, just as the site of the foundation begins in disorder and it becomes the job of the colonists to unravel and order that site according to Greek custom. Carol Dougherty, “When Rain Falls from the Clear Blue Sky: Riddles and Colonization Oracles,” *Classical Antiquity* 11, no. 1 (1992): 28–44.

flexible interpretative thinking adopted for sustaining belief in oracular prophecy.¹¹ Lastly, a few think of oracular ambiguity as a “randomizing device,” that is to say, speech that is especially marked by its style as a signal that the medium is beyond human manipulation and under divine influence.¹²

I suggest that all of these theories help explain oracular ambiguity best when understood together. The observable behaviors in accounts of how the Greeks used their oracles presuppose a cultural insistence on the value of oracular divination. The oracles had to be prophetic definitionally, and this belief compelled consultants to find “empirical” fulfillment and to confirm their belief by telling convincing stories about it. Importantly, the search for prophetic fulfillment is neither entirely active nor entirely passive. Consultants may try to force fulfillment in a way that aligns with a more pleasant ‘future story,’ but the course that events ultimately take is not entirely up to how they themselves act: some events seem to happen by chance, which is to say that the effect was unintended. This observation allows us to expand further on the theory that oracular language is a divinatory ‘randomizing device’ in a way that points toward the practical utility of enigmatic language for diminishing uncertainty. As Maurizio and Flower have argued, the language of oracles by its meter and apparently allegorical expressions marks them as being issued by the gods, as opposed to being completely controlled by the diviner, in the moment of consultation. However, that language also serves as a sign of divine providence in the moment of fulfillment, when divine influence or the effect of the supernatural order of causation is felt as and understood to be a real force. In the strictest sense of the word, then, oracles were

¹¹ Harrison, *Divinity and History*, 149–55; Pierre Bonnechere, “Divination,” in *A Companion to Greek Religion*, ed. Daniel Ogden (Hoboken: Wiley-Blackwell, 2007), 147; Maurizio, “Delphic Oracles as Oral Performances,” 326–9.

¹² Maurizio, “Anthropology and Spirit Possession,” 82–6; Flower, *The Seer in Ancient Greece*, 221. Maurizio helpfully expands the theory of the ‘randomizing device’ as set out by Emily Ahern to include interpersonal divination. Emily Martin Ahern, “Divination,” in *Chinese Ritual and Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 53.

not really ambiguous in the worldview that prevails in Herodotus' *Histories*. They are only ever presented as being fulfilled in one or another way, which is to say that they mean exactly one thing. Since oracles were understood as meaning exactly one thing, consultants could use them to create frames of reference for planning and acting toward advantageous results, for interpreting what ended up happening to them, and for reinterpreting what might still happen to them in the future. Thus, although the Greeks insisted that each oracle had a single meaning that was objectively fulfilled in a specific moment, their 'divinatory thinking' often appears to us as ambiguous and subjective.

The Metaphor of a Deal

A latent metaphor in one of the most common words for conjecture in Herodotus' *Histories* provides an analogy for understanding the objectivity of oracular fulfillment that is claimed and the subjectivity of 'divinatory thinking' as two sides of the same coin. Paavo Hohti has shown that Herodotus often uses the verb *συνβάλλεσθαι* to express the mental activity of putting together two known facts, whether explicit or implicit, and drawing a greater conclusion. In this way, oracular interpretation is in his words, "to find out the correspondence between the oracle and the real situation, to recognize similarities so that both parts may be combined."¹³ Thus, the mental activity of interpreting oracles corresponds to the literal meaning of *συνβάλλειν* (*συν*+*βάλλειν*), "to throw together," which is roughly the same notion contained in the etymology of the English term 'conjecture' (lat. *coniectura*, from *conicere*, "to strike together").¹⁴

¹³ Hohti, "ΣΥΜΒΑΛΛΕΣΘΑΙ," 12.

¹⁴ Paavo Hohti traces the early use of the term *conicere* as meaning "to conjecture" to Latin comedy, and it is commonly used in reference to the interpretation of dreams and oracles. Hohti, 6n2, 12n15.

However, in Herodotus, as Hohti recognizes, the result of this mental operation is greater than the sum of its factors. In this way, oracles are very much like σύμβολα in that they are “thrown together” with other things to lead to conclusions that are greater than the mere fact of their connection.¹⁵ In ancient Greece, σύμβολα were authenticating devices made from a single object, like a potsherd, that was broken in half. In one of the earliest uses of the word, Herodotus has Leotychidas explain the salient aspects of their use incidentally as part of his story of Glaucón and the Milesian stranger. This Milesian stranger wishes to protect his assets, and so he liquidates half of his estate and proposes to deposit it abroad with the Spartan Glaucón, famed for his honesty. The Milesian stranger tells Glaucón: “So then, accept my money and, taking these σύμβολα, keep them safe. But whoever in possession of these should ask, return it to this one.”¹⁶ Glaucón agrees, and Leotychidas goes on in his story: “After much time passed, the children of the man depositing the money came to Sparta, and coming into conversation with Glaucón and showing him the σύμβολα, they were asking him to return the money.”¹⁷ Each party to an agreement would receive half of the broken token and retain it until the time one party would make a claim on the value of the token according to the agreement. At that time, the two tokens could be placed together to prove their fit, and therefore, the authority of the claimant to make the claim.¹⁸ The action of “throwing together” σύμβολα, then, is indicative of something beyond the fact that they fit together, just as the mental combination of facts expressed by the

¹⁵ See also Hollmann, *The Master of Signs*, 1.3.1.

¹⁶ Σὺ δὴ μοι καὶ τὰ χρήματα δέξαι καὶ τὰδε τὰ σύμβολα σῶζε λαβών· ὅς δ' ἂν ἔχων ταῦτα ἀπαιτή, τοῦτ' ἀποδοῦναι. Hdt. 6.86.α.5.

¹⁷ Χρόνου δὲ πολλοῦ διελθόντος ἦλθον ἐς Σπάρτην τούτου τοῦ παραθεμένου τὰ χρήματα οἱ παῖδες, ἐλθόντες δὲ ἐς λόγους τῷ Γλαύκῳ καὶ ἀποδεικνύντες τὰ σύμβολα ἀπαιτεῖν τὰ χρήματα. Hdt. 6.86.β.1.

¹⁸ Given the procedure involved in combining the two σύμβολα, I cannot agree with Walter Müri and Peter Struck that the word σύμβολον stems from the metaphorical meaning of συμβάλλειν, “to agree,” rather than from the literal sense “to throw together.” Struck, *Birth of the Symbol*, 73. *Non vidi* Walter Müri, *Symbolon, Wort- und sachgeschichtliche Studie* (Bern: Rektorat des Gymnasiums, 1931). It seems far more likely, given the nature of its function, that the name of this object stems from the literal sense of the verb and that the metaphorical sense of the verb, “to agree,” stems from its association with this way of authenticating agreements.

term συμβάλλεσθαι shows that those facts are meaningful beyond their mere combination.

However, it is not just Herodotus' use of this verb in the context of oracular interpretation and his familiarity with σύμβολα that warrant us to think about the use of oracles like that of σύμβολα. Other signs used in divination, like portents, omens, and chance encounters, are actually called σύμβολα by the ancients.¹⁹

In the same way that contract markers are joined in order to validate claimed debt and the authority of the claimant, an oracle is an indication of a determined obligation that needs to be connected with particular circumstances in order for that obligation to be “filled up” or “completed.”²⁰ Here, as is expected, there are clearly two orders of meaning. The primary order is the meaning that comes from the actual connection of one token with another, say, “a wooden wall” and “Salamis divine” for a fleet of ships and a goddess benevolent to the Athenians. The secondary order is the signification of the pair of tokens for the agreement or the apparent truth of Themistocles' interpretation of the oracle that the Athenians would win a naval victory at Salamis in 480 BCE. Although signification may seem clearer cut in the case of contract markers than that of divine signs, Peter Struck argues for greater similarity and thus complicates that notion in conversation with the debate over natural versus conventional signification.

The symbol considered in itself, as either a contract marker or a divine sign, indicates its referent by its very nature. However, the grounds of possibility for a symbol lie in a set of normative relationships between humans themselves or between humans and gods. In the case of the contract marker, natural signification requires and is predicated on consensual agreement of the parties. In the case of the divine sign, the natural divine sign is lost on those who have not learned the gods' conventional ways of speaking. But the conventional aspect of these symbols is equally dependent on the natural. It is only because the potsherds have the physical property of forming a unique and verifiable seam that they are able to encode social relations within a language. Without such a means of surety, no one in their right mind would redeem the entitlement that the token demands, and the language it speaks would fall apart; all bets would be off, so to speak. And

¹⁹ Struck, *Birth of the Symbol*, 90–4.

²⁰ See “Fulfillment” in chapter two.

without the first premise, that the gods themselves use natural signs, the conventions of their language—diligently pursued by students of divination—would be empty.²¹

The significance of both kinds of σύμβολα depends both on “natural” linkages to their counterparts (naturalism) and on a relationship, agreement, or common language between humans and other humans, on the one hand, and humans and gods, on the other (conventionalism). It may seem strange to think that there is a natural relationship between “a wooden wall” and a fleet of ships, but as Struck suggests, such a relationship is guaranteed by the gods as part of the conventions of their divine language when they speak to humans. Thus, a σύμβολον or an oracle always has value and a second order of meaning as long as it is, in fact, what it is according to the agreement in their respective conventions. Further, knowledge of these agreements is not precise in either case since it is limited by temporal (memory of the past agreement) or by ontological distance (relationship between humans and gods). These limitations require a certain amount of trust or belief in order to be bridged.

It is fair to wonder, though, how the Greeks came to believe that oracles were divine signs that signified what needed to happen in the future. In the case of the contract marker, one would actually meet with the other party with whom the agreement was made both when the potsherd was broken into tokens and when they were put back together again. Where is the presence of the divine that guarantees oracles as indications of divine will? The first encounter between humans and gods is in the consultation, where the divinely inspired medium (the Pythia, Bacis, Musaeus, etc.) bridges the gap between the two parties by handing a consultant an

²¹ Struck, *Birth of the Symbol*, 96. Struck is, in fact, speaking of the σύμβολα in nature used in divination, like portents and omens, but the relationship that he draws between these signs and divine language also justifies the application of this analogy to oracles. In the famous words of Heraclitus, “The lord, whose oracle is in Delphi, neither tells, nor conceals, but gives a sign” (ὁ ἄναξ, οὗ τὸ μαντεῖόν ἐστι τὸ ἐν Δελφοῖς, οὔτε λέγει οὔτε κρύπτει ἀλλὰ σημαίνει. DK fr. 93). Oracular words should be considered divine signs.

oracle,²² a divine σύμβολον broken from the events that must come to pass. The divine presence is marked by the “randomizing device” contained in the riddling words of the oracle.

The second moment where the influence of the divine is felt comes along with oracular fulfillment. The conjunction of oracular language and a specific set of circumstances gave a profound sense of significance to the Greeks just as other coincidences were at times laden with deeper meaning that suggested divine intention and intervention.²³ Struck calls this paradoxical phenomenon of finding meaning in chance conjunctions the “semantics of coincidence.” As he puts it, “The ancient habit of seeing just these crystallizations of randomness as the ultrasignificant language of the divine dramatically points to a certain willful resistance to nonsense, an assertion of sense where none is by any logical definition possible.”²⁴ Struck’s issue with the “sense” taken from coincidences here is the same as the one in Aristotle’s treatment of narrative continuity and causation in the marvelous plot and our own discussion of causality in the ‘oracular tale.’²⁵ Although the links in the chain of causation are unclear, some coincidences are simply too coincidental for one to think that there was no intention behind them. They “appear” or “seem” (φαίνεται/ἔοικε), as Aristotle says, “not random” (εἰκῇ) and “as though by a plan” (ὥσπερ ἐπίτηδες). Because divine powers were real to many of them, the Greeks could always suppose a divine cause to link the chain of causation and make intelligible the “uncanny sense of meaningfulness” they felt.²⁶ Therefore, the plot of the ‘oracular tale’ and the ‘divinatory thinking’ involved in its creation give expression to the influence of divine intention on human affairs, which only appears to be fully contingent in this view. However, to say that the Greeks

²² See Hdt. 1.63.1.

²³ For a study of this phenomenon in Herodotus’ *Histories*, see Harrison, “‘Prophecy in Reverse?’”

²⁴ Struck, *Birth of the Symbol*, 95.

²⁵ Arist. *Poet.* 1451a16–35.

²⁶ Struck, *Birth of the Symbol*, 95.

read some amount of determinism into what are essentially contingent events, though perhaps true, is a critical claim that does not do justice to how they seem to have looked at their history and future. Rather, in their presentation of themselves in works like Herodotus' *Histories*, they saw the results of certain contingent events as fulfilling a 'prophetic plan.'

There is another noteworthy difference between these two kinds of σύμβολα. In the case of a contract marker, the parties to the agreement would presumably have been clear about its provisions when it was first struck and would have remembered them at the time of its resolution more or less accurately. However, the consultants of oracles do not know with what circumstances oracular language actually fits or what precisely is due to them as recipients of an oracle. In other words, they do not know the value of their oracles because that value relates to uncertain future events known only to the gods. It would be like randomly discovering a contract token without knowledge of the agreement to which it related. Consultants hold one piece of a greater whole. It is up to them to examine the edges of their oracle, to seek out corresponding edges in their circumstances, and to test the conjectured connections in order to complete the transaction of what is due to them as the bearers of this σύμβολον.

The Metaphor of an Alloyed Coin

Herodotus also expresses the objectivity of oracular meaning and subjectivity of oracular interpretation with numismatic metaphor. A great number of modern scholars have drawn attention to the historian's use of κίβδηλος when describing certain oracles. The exact meaning of the term has been debated in scholarship. While everyone recognizes that it is a term proper to coinage and can mean something like "adulterated," "alloyed," or "counterfeit," translators and commentators, both long ago and more recent, have often used words like "false," "deceptive,"

“quibbling,” or even “ambiguous”—so strong is the traditional idea of oracular ambiguity—as an essential quality of the oracles in question.²⁷ When analyzed in context, κίβδηλος and other terms relating to coinage speak as much to the human problems in oracular transmission and interpretation as they do to the nature of the oracles themselves.²⁸

There are three passages in which Herodotus gives the label κίβδηλος to oracles. Two are found in the Croesus *logos*.

When the Lacedaemonians heard the things that were brought back, they were keeping away from the other Arcadians, but taking shackles with them, they were making a campaign against the Tegeans, trusting (πίσυνοι) in a κίβδηλος oracle, that they were, in fact, going to enslave the Tegeans.²⁹

... when there arrived a κίβδηλος oracle, expecting (ἐλπίσας) that the oracle pertained to himself, he [Croesus] was making a campaign into the portion of the Persians.³⁰

²⁷ Space only permits a small sampling. Commentators: Heinrich Stein, ed., *Herodotos*, 5th ed., vol. 1 (Berlin: Weidmannsche Buchhandlung, 1883), 79; George A. Sheets, *Herodotus Book I* (Bryn Mawr: Bryn Mawr Commentaries, 1993), 32; David Asheri, Allen B. Lloyd, and Aldo Corcella, *A Commentary on Herodotus Books I–IV* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 128. Translators: Robin Waterfield, trans., *Herodotus: The Histories* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 29, 34, 337; Aubrey De Sélincourt and John Marincola, trans., *Herodotus: The Histories*, rev. ed. (London: Penguin Books, 2003), 29, 75, 345; Pamela Mensch, trans., *Herodotus: Histories* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 2014), 28, 32, 298; Strassler, *The Landmark Herodotus: The Histories*, 38, 44, 406. Herodotus uses another term to describe an oracle, ἀμφιδέξιον, that David Asheri has understood as meaning ambiguous and as presenting a challenge to Herodotus’ general belief in the power of oracles. Asheri, “Erodoto e Bacide,” 72–3. The passage in question (Hdt. 5.92.ε.1), refers to the Delphic oracle given to Cypselus saying that both he and his sons would be kings of Corinth, but not the sons of his sons. The oracle, therefore, is not “ambiguous” in the sense that is usually associated with oracles, but “double-edged” in the sense that it offers both gain and loss at the same time for the Cypselidae.

²⁸ See Klees, *Die Eigenart des griechischen Glaubens*, 85–6. My argument to take Herodotus’ numismatic metaphors more seriously is related and indebted to Leslie Kurke’s fantastic study, though I may disagree on some points. Leslie Kurke, “‘Counterfeit Oracles’ and ‘Legal Tender’: The Politics of Oracular Consultation in Herodotus,” *Classical World* 102, no. 4 (2009): 417–438.

²⁹ Ταῦτα ὡς ἀπενειχθέντα ἤκουσαν οἱ Λακεδαιμόνιοι, Ἀρκάδων μὲν τῶν ἄλλων ἀπείχοντο, οἱ δὲ πέδας φερόμενοι ἐπὶ Τεγεήτας ἐστρατεύοντο, χρησμῷ κίβδηλῳ πίσυνοι, ὥς δὴ ἐξανδραποδιεῦμενοι τοὺς Τεγεήτας. Hdt. 1.66.3, #10.

³⁰ ... ἀπικομένου χρησμοῦ κίβδηλου, ἐλπίσας πρὸς ἑαυτοῦ τὸν χρησμὸν εἶναι, ἐστρατεύετο ἐς τὴν Περσέων μοῖραν. Hdt. 1.75.2, #5. For this sense of ἐλπίζειν, see John L. Myres, “Ἐλπίς, Ἐλπῶ, Ἐλπομαι, Ἐλπίζειν,” *The Classical Review* 63, no. 2 (1949): 46. This passage may seem to show that the oracle was κίβδηλος before it arrived, but Herodotus is recapitulating the episode of consultation (1.53.3–54.1) for the second time and the episode of conjecture for the third time in this passage (1.54.1, 1.71.1). Since Croesus has already determined the meaning he gets from the oracle and Herodotus’ has already given indication that his conjecture was not ultimately valid (1.71.1), the use of κίβδηλος here makes sense in the way I go on to describe below.

Thomas Harrison has said that the use of the term in these instances need not be pejorative, and I think he is right in a certain sense.³¹ Both oracles are fulfilled, albeit in ways that were unexpected to their recipients, and Croesus, at least, ends up acknowledging that his frustration over the oracle was his own fault.³² Indeed, the fact that the Spartans go back to Delphi to get another oracle suggests that they felt similarly to Croesus.³³ If the term were supposed to reflect poorly on Delphi or the oracles more specifically, both the fact of their fulfillment and Croesus' confession would seem to be at odds with that interpretation. Thus, neither "false," as in "untrue" or "inauthentic," nor "deceptive" can be Herodotus' meaning here.

Herodotus puts the third instance of κίβδηλος in the mouths of the Spartans. He tells a traditional Athenian tale about how the Alcmeonidae bribed the Pythia with money to tell any Spartan who consulted at Delphi to liberate Athens.³⁴ The Spartans were eventually persuaded by these oracles, and after an initial, unsuccessful attempt, they captured Athens and ended the tyranny of the Peisistratidae (510 BCE). Later, the Spartans began to worry about the growing power of Athens and gathered their allies for the purpose of reinstalling Hippias as tyrant there. They had heard about the deception of the Alcmeonidae.³⁵

³¹ Harrison, *Divinity and History*, 152n109. It is clearly a negative thing that these oracles are *kibdeloi*, but it should not be taken as general skepticism toward the value of oracular prophecy as some do. Legrand, "Hérodote croyait-il aux oracles?," 276; Heinz Panitz, *Mythos und Orakel bei Herodot* (Greifswald: Hans Dallmeyer, 1935), 51. I go on to argue that their reason for being *kibdeloi* has to do with problems that the humans dealing with them bring to the table. I should highlight in particular Giovanni Ingarao's argument that there is something about the oracles themselves and the Pythia's or the god's way of putting them that makes them *kibdeloi*. In addition to the three usual passages, he points to the oracle that the Cumaeans received from Branchidae as an example of an oracle specifically designed to induce a mistake. Giovanni Ingarao, "Ingannevoli come monete false: I κίβδηλοι χρησμοί in Erodoto," *Klio* 98, no. 2 (2016): 439–56. It should be added, however, that the text is very clear in expressing that the fault for receiving such an oracle lies with the Cumaeans who asked an irreverent question, and in any event, it should make us wonder why Herodotus does not call this oracle *kibdelos*.

³² Hdt. 1.91.6.

³³ Hdt. 1.67.2–5, #10 and #11.

³⁴ Hdt. 5.63–5, #56. The Alcmeonid Cleisthenes is named as the man responsible for the bribery. Hdt. 5.66.1. Cleomenes was also said to have bribed the Pythia, Periallus, to remove Demaratus as King of Sparta. In the end, Cobon, the Delphian who assisted in the plot, fled, presumably out of fear of punishment, and Periallus was removed from the priesthood. Hdt. 6.66.

³⁵ Hdt. 5.90.1.

Allies, we confess that we have not acted rightly. For being urged on by κιβδήλοι oracles, we drove out of their country these men, who were very much our guest-friends and undertook to bring Athens under control, ... Since we made a mistake (ἡμάρτομεν) when we did those things, we shall now attempt to mend (ἀκεόμενοι) them with your help. For we have summoned both Hippias and you all from your cities for this very reason, in order that, after we have led him to Athens with a common accord and common expedition, we may give back (ἀποδῶμεν) the things we stole (ἀπειλόμεθα).³⁶

Scholars have argued that the word κιβδήλοι in this passage has a different sense from the other two. The case for a difference in meaning leans on the different contexts of these oracles. The first two are fulfilled in unexpected ways, and so they are thought of as tricky; these last ones are the result of bribery, and so, they are thought of as spurious or false.³⁷ However, Herodotus only ever uses the word κιβδηλος to describe oracles, so there should be a way to understand the term as fitting both contexts without supposing dramatically different, but equally metaphorical, meanings for it. The term κιβδηλος seems to point more specifically to a blended or alloyed state of metal, especially when dealing with coinage, and it is toward this more precise meaning of the term that we should look for an answer to what Herodotus means when applying the term to oracles.

Leslie Kurke has suggested that the close association that Herodotus makes between oracles and coins warrants thinking about an “economy of oracles” that is much like a civic economy.³⁸ These associations are enough, I think, to hypothesize a more extensive analogy in

³⁶ Ἄνδρες σύμμαχοι, συγγινώσκομεν αὐτοῖσι ἡμῖν οὐ ποιήσασι ὀρθῶς· ἐπαρθέντες γὰρ κιβδήλοισι μαντηίοισι ἄνδρας ξείνους ἐόντας ἡμῖν τὰ μάλιστα καὶ ἀναδεκομένους ὑποχειρίας παρέξειν τὰς Ἀθήνας, τούτους ἐκ τῆς πατρίδος ἐξηλάσαμεν, ... Ἐπεῖτε δὲ ἐκεῖνα ποιήσαντες ἡμάρτομεν, νῦν πειρησόμεθα σφεα ἅμα ὑμῖν ἀκεόμενοι. Αὐτοῦ γὰρ τούτου εἵνεκεν τόνδε τε Ἰππὶν μετεπεμψάμεθα καὶ ὑμέας ἀπὸ τῶν πολιῶν, ἵνα κοινῶ τε λόγῳ καὶ κοινῶ στόλῳ ἐσαγαγόντες αὐτὸν ἐς τὰς Ἀθήνας ἀποδῶμεν τὰ καὶ ἀπειλόμεθα. Hdt. 5.91.2–3.

³⁷ Crahay, *La Littérature oraculaire*, 153; Klees, *Die Eigenart des griechischen Glaubens*, 85–6; Immerwahr, *Form and Thought in Herodotus*, 159n26; J. Enoch Powell, *A Lexicon to Herodotus*, 2nd ed. (Hildesheim: Georg Olms, 2004), s.v., “κίβδηλος”; Hollmann, *The Master of Signs*, 2.3.2; Hornblower, *Herodotus: Book V*, 245. Herodotus is aware of the possibility of false oracles.

³⁸ Kurke, “‘Counterfeit Oracles’ and ‘Legal Tender,’” 152–65.

popular thinking between these two economies than Kurke has observed. In book five, Soclees tells the tale of two oracles related to the tyranny of Cypselus.

Earlier they [the Bacchiadae] had an oracle pertaining to Corinth that was unmarked (ἄσημον), referring (φέρον) to the same thing as that of Eetion and saying, “An eagle sires among rocks, and he shall produce a mighty, flesh-eating lion, and he shall loosen the knees of many. Now mark these things well, Corinthians, who dwell around beautiful Peirene and steep Corinth.” This earlier oracle belonging to the Bacchiadae was, in fact, without mark (ἀτέκμαρτον). But then (τότε δὲ), when they learned that of Eetion, immediately, they also understood (συνῆκαν) the earlier one as being harmonious (ἐὸν συνῳδὸν) with that of Eetion. Although they understood (Συνέντες) even that one, they were keeping quiet, wishing (ἐθέλοντες) to destroy the child that Eetion was going to have.³⁹

The term ἄσημος, though generally translated as “unclear,” “obscure,” or “unintelligible,” literally means “without distinguishing mark,” and is often used to describe metal bullion before it is fashioned into currency by being struck with a mark.⁴⁰ Herodotus himself even uses the word ἄσημος in opposition to ἐπίσημος (“marked”) when referring to gold in book nine.⁴¹ Twice, he uses it metaphorically to describe the cries of Croesus that are cryptic to Cyrus’ translators and the babbling of infants who cannot be understood by the shepherd until they speak a clear word in some recognizable language.⁴² Importantly, the verbal expression of Croesus and the

³⁹ Τοῖσι τὸ μὲν πρότερον γενόμενον χρηστήριον ἐς Κόρινθον ἦν ἄσημον, φέρον τε ἐς τὸ αὐτὸ καὶ τὸ τοῦ Ἡετίωνος καὶ λέγον ὥδε·

Αἰετὸς ἐν πέτρῃσι κύει, τέξει δὲ λέοντα
καρτερὸν ὠμηστήν· πολλῶν δ’ ὑπὸ γούνατα λύσει.
Ταῦτά νυν εἰ φράζεσθε, Κορίνθιοι, οἱ περὶ καλὴν
Πειρήνην οἰκεῖτε καὶ ὀφρυόεντα Κόρινθον.

Τοῦτο μὲν δὴ τοῖσι Βακχιάδῃσι γενόμενον πρότερον ἦν ἀτέκμαρτον· τότε δὲ τὸ Ἡετίωνι γενόμενον ὡς ἐπίθοντο, αὐτίκα καὶ τὸ πρότερον συνῆκαν ἐὸν συνῳδὸν τῷ Ἡετίωνος. Συνέντες δὲ καὶ τοῦτο εἶχον ἐν ἡσυχίᾳ, ἐθέλοντες τὸν μέλλοντα Ἡετίωνι γίνεσθαι γόνον διαφθεῖραι. Hdt. 5.92.β.3–γ.1.

⁴⁰ Esther Eidinow has noticed this connection. Esther Eidinow, “Testing the Oracle? On the Experience of (Multiple) Oracular Consultations,” in *Ancient Divination and Experience*, ed. Lindsay G. Driediger-Murphy and Esther Eidinow (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 61.

⁴¹ *LSJ*, s.v., “ἄσημος.” ἔχειν γὰρ χρυσὸν πολλὸν μὲν ἐπίσημον, πολλὸν δὲ καὶ ἄσημον... Hdt. 9.41.3. Oddly, in her discussions of Herodotus’ *Histories*, Kurke does not reflect on the potential of this numismatic metaphor although she notes the appearance of the term here. Leslie Kurke, *Coins, Bodies, Games, and Gold: The Politics of Meaning in Archaic Greece* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999), 160; Kurke, “‘Counterfeit Oracles’ and ‘Legal Tender,’” 433.

⁴² Hdt. 1.86.4; 2.2.3. The situation involving the two infants is Psammetichus’ test for determining what people were first to come into being. The idea was that if a shepherd raised the two children in isolation, when they would learn to speak, they would use the language that was most natural to humans and, therefore, the earliest.

crying of infants are not without meaning entirely. That meaning is simply not understood by those who are listening either because of their lack of context, as in the case of Croesus' cries about Solon, or because of unfamiliarity with its mode of expression, as in the inability of the infants to speak in words. With regard to oracles, it is not the mode that causes them to be unclear—they are expressed in words that are comprehensible to those who know the appropriate language—but the issues related to contextualizing them. The Bacchiadae knew that their oracle pertained to Corinth, but that was not enough context to make sense of the first two lines and to form a conjecture about the oracle's meaning. It is in this sense that their oracle was like unmarked silver bullion. The oracle's value was unmarked (ἄσημος/ἀτέκμαρτον) to the Bacchiadae until the time (τότε δὲ) they learned of Eetion's oracle and conjectured (συνιέναι) a meaning for it. Developing the analogy, the process of conjecture, therefore, is like minting coins. When the value of the bullion is established as being of a certain fineness, moneyers carve it up into pieces of a standard weight and strike each piece with a mark that warrants its value and authorizes it for trade as legal currency in specific markets.⁴³

In order to understand the analogy between oracles and coins that underlies some of Herodotus' oracular tales, it will be helpful to consider briefly the circulation of coinage in ancient Greece. The Athenian Currency Law of 375/4 BCE provides a helpful model.

Nicophon proposed that the Attic silver coin be accepted whenever [it is proven to be] silver (ἀργυροῦ) and bears the public mark (δημόσιοι χα[ρακτῆρα]). Let the public *dokimastes*, sitting among the tables, approve (currency) according to these provisions every day, except when there is a deposit of monies, and at that time, (sitting) in the *bouleutērion*. But if someone should present a strange silver coin, bearing the same mark as the Attic, [if it is good (silver)], let him (the *dokimastes*) give it back to the person presenting it. But if it is bronze-core, or lead-core, or *kibdelon* (silver), let him cut through it immediately... And if someone should not accept the silver coin that the

⁴³ On striking coinage in Herodotus, see 1.94.1, 3.56.2, 4.166.2.

dokimastes may approve, let him be deprived of what he may have earned in sales on that day...⁴⁴

First, it is clear that not all silver coins are acceptable in exchange for goods and services within this economy. Rather, this law imagines a situation with currency in which sellers may choose not to accept certain silver coins on the suspicion that they may not be of the standard value, despite the fact that they bear an Attic *character*. The choice to accept any coin in exchange for goods and services, then, was primarily with the seller, and at some point, a *dokimastes* was introduced secondarily as a legal remedy in the instance where a seller refused to accept the coin proffered by an insistent buyer. This official either approved the coin as valid, after which time the law compelled its acceptance, or did not approve the coin, in which case he either gave it back or permanently removed it from circulation.

Second, the *dokimastes* deals with three main kinds of coins. These coins are: 1) Attic-standard fineness of silver marked with Attic *character*, 2) Attic-standard fineness of silver marked with Attic *character* of strange origin,⁴⁵ 3) composed of base-metal cores (bronze-core or lead-core) or non-Attic-standard fineness of silver (*kibdelon*) marked with Attic *character* of strange origin.⁴⁶ Leslie Kurke, following Ronald Stroud's work on this inscription, has tried to

⁴⁴ Νικοφῶν εἶπεν· τὸ ἀργύριον δέχεσθαι τὸ Ἀττικὸν ὅτ[αν δεικνύητ]αι ἀργυροῦ καὶ ἔχη τὸν δημόσιον χαρακτῆρα. ὁ δὲ|| δοκιμαστής ὁ δημόσιος καθήμενος με[ταξὺ τῶν τρ]ῶν ἀπεζῶν δοκιμαζέτω κατὰ ταῦτα ὅσαι ἡ[μέραι πλήν] ὅταν ἡ[ι] χρημάτων καταβολή, τότε δὲ ἐ[ν τῷ βουλευτ]ῇ ἡρώϊ. ἐὰν δὲ τις προσενέγκῃ ξ[ε]ν[ικὸν ἀργύριον] ἔχον τὸν αὐτὸν χαρακτῆρα τῷ Ἀττικῷ, ἐ[ὰν καλόν], ἀποδιδότω τῷ προσεγγόντι, ἐὰν δὲ ὑπ[ὸ χαλκόν] ἢ ὑπομόλυβδον ἢ κίβδηλον, διακοπτέτω πα[ραυτίκ]α... ἐὰν δὲ τις μὴ δέχῃται τὸ ἀ[ρ]γ[ύριον] ὃ τ[ι] ἂν ὁ δοκι[μ]αστής δοκιμάσῃ, στερέσθω ὧν ἂμ [π]ωλῇτ[αι ἐκεῖν]ῃ τῇ ἡμέρῃ. SEG 26.72.2–12, 16–18. The inscription was first published by R.S. Stroud. Ronald S. Stroud, “An Athenian Law on Silver Coinage,” *Hesperia* 43, no. 2 (1974): 157–88. Buttrey's argument about the inscription's interpretation is fundamental. T.V. Buttrey, “The Athenian Currency Law of 375/4 B.C.,” in *Greek Numismatics and Archaeology: Essays in Honor of Margaret Thompson*, ed. Otto Mørkholm and Nancy Waggoner (Wetteren, Belgium: Cultura Press, 1979), 33–45.

⁴⁵ Buttrey has a lot to say about the syntax of the sentences involved here and insists that the law must exclude all counterfeits regardless of their origin. Buttrey, “The Athenian Currency Law,” 34. I'm not sure that adding the unexpressed phrase “someone proffer money which is” to line 10 is necessary, since ἡ ξ[ε]ν[ικὸν] may certainly imply a coin of any origin other than the official Attic minting apparatus.

⁴⁶ Peter G. van Alfen has a helpful rubric to distinguish types of coinage even further. Peter G. van Alfen, “Problems in Ancient Imitative and Counterfeit Coinage,” in *Making, Moving, and Managing: The New World of Ancient Economies, 323–31 BC*, ed. Z. Archibald, J. Davies, and V. Gabrielsen (London: Oxbow, 2005), 322–354.

expand the term *kibdelon* to be a more general term covering the other kinds of non-legal, base coinage that appears as early as the poet Theognis in the sixth century BCE.⁴⁷ But John Kroll, I think, is right to point out that, although the word does take on this more general meaning later, this interpretation cannot be supported in the law here or in the passage of Theognis that is key to her interest.⁴⁸ The same holds true for Herodotus' *Histories*. The historian tells what he thinks is a dumb story about how Polycrates issued gold-plated, lead coins with Samian mark to pay off the Lacedaemonians, but he does not describe them as *kibdela*.⁴⁹ In the context of this law, the *kibdelon* coin is clearly a specific category of unacceptable currency to be kept out of circulation, along with bronze-core, lead-core coins, and coins of good silver but unofficial *character*. It is not the mark, though, that makes the coin *kibdelon*. The fine coin and the *kibdelon* coin may share the same *character* and neither is legal tender. It is the inferior fineness of the latter in comparison to the Attic standard that makes a coin *kibdelon*. This use of the term is exactly what one would expect given the literal meaning of the term: "alloyed," meaning "not worth as much as it appears." I argue that Herodotus' use of *kibdelos* should, therefore, be understood in the same sense.⁵⁰

Herodotus' numismatic metaphors ask us to think about an "economy of oracles" on the model of a "civic economy." By conjecturing an interpretation of an oracle, consultants

⁴⁷ Stroud, "An Athenian Law," 171–2; Kurke, *Coins, Bodies, Games, and Gold*, 53–57, 153–6; Kurke, "'Counterfeit Oracles' and 'Legal Tender,'" 425–8.

⁴⁸ John H. Kroll, review of *Review of Coins, Bodies, Games, and Gold: The Politics of Meaning in Archaic Greece*, by Leslie Kurke, *The Classical Journal* 96, no. 1 (2000): 89. See also Buttrey, "The Athenian Currency Law," 35. The relevant passage in Theognis (117–24) neither excludes the possibility of understanding κίβδηλος in the sense of alloyed or base nor requires that κίβδηλος mean silver-washed slug of base metal. Like the coin of Attic type with base metal, the evil man presents the *character* of a real friend but has an "alloyed" heart.

⁴⁹ ... Πολυκράτεια ἐπιχώριον νόμισμα κόψαντα πολλὸν μολύβδου καταχρυσώσαντα δοῦναί σφι... Hdt. 3.56.2.

⁵⁰ This interpretation of *kibdelos* is also consistent with the context where Herodotus has the Athenians use the alpha-privative form of the adjective (ἀκίβδηλος, 9.7.α.2). The Athenians are trying to explain that their threat to make a truce with the Persians and save their city if the rest of the Greeks do not help them cannot be taken as an uncertain policy with respect to the Greeks since they would prefer to side with them. The value of their commitment to the common cause of the Greeks is not worth the potentially permanent loss of their homeland and the destruction of their people unless the rest of the Greeks undertake the same danger with them.

transform unmarked (ἄσημοι) oracles from their bullion form into coinage that can be used in trade. If one thinks about interpreters of oracles as moneyers, as I think Soclees' Corinthian tale recommends, the meaning behind Herodotus' use of the word *kibdelos* becomes clearer. At some point in their transition from bullion to coinage, a problem arose in the issue of these coins that caused them to be rejected as alloyed when they were proffered in the economy of oracles. The question is how oracles become alloyed. With regard to the Spartan oracles about freeing Athens, the problem was clearly the accusation of bribing the Pythia. More specifically, the charge was that human agents intervened in the issue of the oracles and that their actions debased Apollo's message even before the Spartans received them. In our analogy, this would be like minting coins from what one assumes to be fine bullion only to find out after one has already spent them that someone had alloyed the bullion with base metal. The analogy is borne out in the Spartans' reaction to what they had done. Believing that their oracles had the value that they supposed for them, they eventually succeeded in trading on that assumed value in the economy of oracles. However, they had, in their view, cheated the market since the oracles did not turn out to have the value they assumed. The Spartans rightly felt sorry for this, and so, they desired to make whole (ἀκεόμενοι) the loss and return (ἀποδοῦμεν) what they had stolen (τὰ καὶ ἀπειλόμεθα).

What makes the other two oracles *kibdeloi* is a "failure" in conjecture. Both Croesus and the Spartans assigned meanings to their oracles that did not turn out to be valid. It is not by accident that Herodotus adds what value the consultants presumed these oracles to have had immediately after using the word κίβδηλος. The Lacedaemonians "trusted" in their *kibdelos* oracle that they would enslave the Tegeans (χρησµῶ κιβδήλω πίσυνοι, ὥς δὴ ἐξανδραποδιεύµενοι τοὺς Τεγέητας), and Croesus "expected" from his *kibdelos* oracle that it

pertained to himself (χρησιμοῦ κιβδήλου, ἐλπίσας πρὸς ἑωυτοῦ τὸν χρησμόν εἶναι).⁵¹ In each case, it is clear that these thoughts are critical interpretive errors on the part of consultants according to the stories that follow. Herodotus' association of the term *kibdelos* with these clear signals of “failed” conjecture in the oracular tale recommends that we understand his use of the term to reflect the fact that these consultants were not able to trade in the economy of oracles on the value they supposed their oracles to have had. In terms of our analogy, this would be like accidentally assaying the fineness of unmarked bullion far too highly, minting coins from it, and then seeing them rejected as alloyed coins by the sellers in the marketplace. Again, this analogy between the economy of oracles and the civic economy is borne out by the attitude that Croesus and the Spartans end up having toward the Delphic oracle. Croesus understood that he was ultimately at fault for misinterpreting the oracle, and the Spartans went back to the Oracle two more times and did a more careful job interpreting their oracles moving forward. Disparities that arose between presumed and actual value did not fundamentally call into question the economies in which oracles and silver coinage were used.

It is worth noting at this point that the regular method of assaying the fineness of metal in the ancient world, like the interpretation of oracles, actually involved conjecture. An assayer would rub two coins (one of standard fineness as well as the one being tested) across a touchstone and compare the color of the streaks that they left behind. Similarly, its accuracy is also debatable.⁵² One modern study found that, while there is about a five-and-a-half-percent margin of error in assaying gold with the touchstone, the method is even more difficult and less

⁵¹ See above.

⁵² Herodotus has Artabanus explain the process of assaying gold as a simile for evaluating two different opinions. “... just as we do not know the gold that is itself fine by itself, but whenever we should test it alongside another piece of gold, we know the one that is better” ... ὥσπερ τὸν χρυσὸν τὸν ἀκήρατον αὐτὸν μὲν ἐπ’ ἑωυτοῦ οὐ διαγινώσκομεν, ἐπεὰν δὲ παρατρίγωμεν ἄλλῳ χρυσῷ, διαγινώσκομεν τὸν ἀμείνω. Hdt. 7.10.α.1.

precise when dealing with silver.⁵³ Theoretically, this means that a polis might circulate silver issues that differ in fineness by greater than eleven percent without even detecting the difference. In fact, a polis may intentionally produce official, debased coinage to drive up state revenues, and so our evidence is not good enough to help us draw a clear line between official and unofficial, debased coins.⁵⁴ Thus, nothing prevents us from thinking that even a coin marked with an official *character* could be considered *kibdelon* if it did not meet the prevailing standard of the sellers or the *dokimastes* in the market where the buyer proffered it.

The idea of minting a coin that would be rejected within the market of its intended use raises a question about the nature of the market. Kurke, drawing on Maurizio's redefinition of Delphic oracular authenticity, thinks that the "economy of oracles" is one that is governed by the community that authorizes oracles as currency. "Oracles become 'legal tender,' *chrêmata dokima*, as a result of human interpretation, deliberation, and consent."⁵⁵ To a certain extent, she is correct. As I have argued, conjectural interpretation of oracles is like the process of striking coin ("*chrêmata*") out of unmarked bullion. However, a community can only define legal tender (*chrêmata dokima*) for the markets under its governance. Kurke's insistence that it is "communal discussion and interpretation" that produces legal tender out of oracles does not square with Herodotus' numerous instances of failures in communal interpretation. In fact, in her analysis of the Theban oracle, she glosses over the inconvenient fact of their initial "failed" conjecture and speaks of the oracle being "transmuted into manifest civic truth (φαίνεσθαι) through the medium of the 'many-voiced' citizen assembly."⁵⁶ If a polis actually governed the "economy of oracles"

⁵³ Raymond Bogaert, "L'Essai des monnaies dans l'antiquité," *Revue belge de numismatique et de sigillographie* 122 (1976): 11–12.

⁵⁴ van Alfen, "Problems in Ancient Imitative and Counterfeit Coinage," 326–8, 336–8.

⁵⁵ Kurke, "'Counterfeit Oracles' and 'Legal Tender,'" 429. "If the first oracle was 'counterfeit' gold, this response, for all its seeming iron, is transmuted into "gold" by a proper, civic reading." Kurke, *Coins, Bodies, Games, and Gold*, 155.

⁵⁶ Kurke, "'Counterfeit Oracles' and 'Legal Tender,'" 435.

and determined its legal tender as Kurke thinks, one wonders how any community could ever “get it wrong.” Rather, Herodotus’ *Histories* imagines a marketplace of possible futures where the fineness of one’s oracular silver may not be sufficient to make the exchange one desires. Again, what this means is that oracles may be *kibdeloi* both by their nature (cases of clear manipulation) and with respect to where a transaction on their value is sought (“failed” conjecture). However, just like any coin that is *dokimon*, any real oracle is worth what you can get for it at the market of futures. Where a successful exchange for a possible future is made, the oracle is presumed to be of acceptable value because it was accepted.⁵⁷ In this analogy, it is up to consultants to assay the true value of their oracles, to strike them with the correct value, and then to find the table within the market of futures where their currency is acceptable in exchange.

Conclusion: The Utility of Enigmatic Oracles

These metaphors help clarify the issue of oracular ambiguity. From the way that Herodotus depicts the Greeks, their thinking about oracles does not show a trust in ambiguous

⁵⁷ That some oracular centers may not be trustworthy is a necessary corollary to the belief that some are. However, the only pronouncements explicitly called false in the *Histories* (ψευδέα τε μαντήια, 2.174) come from random, unnamed oracles in Egypt that acquitted Amasis of theft. If his expression Αἰγυπτίοισι ἐστὶ μαντήιον ἀψευδέστατον (2.152.3) is telling, Herodotus may not have much regard for Egyptian oracles generally, apart from Bouto, Ammon, and Thebes, which he references elsewhere (2.18, 2.54–7). Croesus’ test of has been taken to suggest a criticism of the prophetic value of oracles (1.46–49, 53.2). See Legrand, “Hérodote croyait-il aux oracles?,” 273; Donald Lateiner, “Oracles, Religion, and Politics in Herodotus,” in *The Landmark Herodotus: The Histories*, ed. Robert B. Strassler, trans. Andrea L. Purvis (New York: Pantheon Books, 2007), 813. However, many in the list (Ammon, Dodona, Branchidae, Trophonius) are among the most venerable oracles in the Greek world and even appear again in the narrative as truthful. Further, in this scene it is Croesus, a man noted for his lack of reflection on oracles, who decides on their falseness. We should be skeptical. As I have shown mentioned in chapter three (“*The Mantic session: questions and pronouncements*”), Croesus’ question bears the exact same verbal expression as some in the extant tablets at Dodona, but there is clearly a significant difference in intended meaning that would allow the oracles to answer in two different ways. What Croesus means is “What do I happen to be doing?” but the phrase in an oracular context usually means “What should I do to have good fortune?” In light of this fact, we should, I think, suppose that the other oracles offered Croesus advice about how to have good fortune that did not share any correspondence to cooking the stew. The Pythia, on the other hand, who “understands the mute and hears the one who does not speak,” as the oracle says, earns superior prestige for having understood what Croesus meant by his question. Thus, Croesus’ judgement does not cast aspersions on the prophetic value of oracles but indicates once again the personal failings of the tyrant Croesus to understand the way that gods speak to humans.

oracles at all but in oracles that always indicated a specific set of circumstances to be fulfilled. “Enigmatic” is surely a better adjective to describe this quality that the Greeks perceived in their oracles. Nevertheless, enigmatic language can still be useful. Their belief in the prophetic value of oracles was similar to their trust in contract tokens, σύμβολα, which was a term also used for other divine signs like oracles. Just as the contract token has a natural fit with its other half and signifies a deal agreed to by convention, the language of the oracles has natural connections to particular circumstances, and these connections were guaranteed by the conventions of divine-to-human communication. Thus, consultants could reconsider their crises and their objectives literally in different terms, as Robert Parker has argued,⁵⁸ and they could use enigmatic language to give a frame to a likely ‘future story’ that they might then act out.

Since oracles used poetic and sometimes metaphorical language, the difficulty rested in trying to understand in advance how oracles were going to be fulfilled and what to do in order to avoid negative outcomes and achieve positive ones. This process involved conjecture, just like assaying the fineness of silver. However, the only way to determine whether one’s conjecture was valid, like legal tender, or invalid, like a debased coin, was by the ultimate result of an action taken on the basis of that conjecture. One must assign an oracle a certain value, which Herodotus likens metaphorically to minting coinage, and then pursuing that interpretation, which I have likened to the attempt at a transaction in the market of futures. Importantly, both ‘future stories’ and historical oracular tales are provisional; consultants and other narrators often revise and recompose their stories whenever their circumstances change or when their previous narratives are no longer persuasive. This is how enigmatic oracles are useful for diminishing uncertainty about the future: they provide a constant frame of reference for understanding one’s

⁵⁸ Parker, “Greek States and Greek Oracles,” 301–2.

circumstances, for forming expectations about the future, and for planning actions to achieve beneficial results. This is just how the Greeks depicted themselves using their oracles. Thus, belief sustains oracular tale-telling which is what makes enigmatic oracles useful.

Conclusion: The ‘Oracular Tale’ and Belief

Understanding the narrative schema of the ‘oracular tale’ through Herodotus’ *Histories* is useful for more than simply the narratorial strategies of the author, that is to say, why he tells certain stories the way that he does. Since the *Histories* also reflects the historical and cultural realities of fifth-century Greece, the ‘oracular tale’ is one aspect of that reality, and it is by understanding this pattern of thought and action that we may understand why the Greeks did what they did. The evidence shows that they used the pattern of the ‘oracular tale’ to craft narratives that helped them both to make sense of the events that had already happened and to decide on an outcome and a course of action to pursue in the uncertain future. ‘Divinatory thinking’ is the same whether its aim is to discover how an oracle was fulfilled or what fulfillment might look like.

This ‘divinatory thinking’ is an impulse stemming from the belief that oracles had single and true meanings that were verified in real events. The coincidence between the enigmatic words of oracles and the events that happened was powerful enough that the Greeks felt a sense of meaning and intention behind those words. Thus, oracular divination worked in the same way that much of ancient medicine worked, as R.J. Hankinson has pointed out.¹ Most infectious diseases resolve without treatment thanks to the mechanisms of the human body’s natural immune response, and so, if a healer applied any treatment at all that was not actually harmful, that treatment would seem to have been empirically proven as effective when the patient recovered. We moderns may chuckle at such unscientific naiveté, but it should be remembered that lack of a causal explanation for an effect does not negate even anecdotal, empirical evidence of a causal correlation between the treatment prescribed and the resolution of disease. Our

¹ R.J. Hankinson, “Stoicism, Science and Divination,” *Apeiron* 21, no. 2 (1988): 123–60.

modern world has drawn clear lines in its preference for physical and natural explanations over divine and supernatural, but even today, many can feel that sense of deeper meaning in amazing coincidences. The story of Alvin Dark's prophecy of Gaylord Perry's homerun is a case in point. Though few, perhaps, would go to the extreme and believe that Dark was a prophet or that he unintentionally spoke a divine utterance, the marvelous coincidence may spark an attractive thought that there is some kind of order to the universe. This effect was likely even more pronounced in the ancient world and in a culture steeped in tales of prophetic and divinatory success. It is not by accident or chance that Cicero in his work *On Divination* has his brother Quintus defend the art of divination with what is mostly a lengthy collection of stories in which it proved correct.² Such stories were and are the only evidence that divination actually worked and that belief in it is justified. Thus, telling oracular tales about the utility of oracles sustains belief in oracular divination.

David Mikkelson, writing for Snopes, has done some investigating into Dark's modern-day prophecy and has classified the story as a legend.³ This classification means that the events described are too vague and lacking in agreement on the details to be provable. While the fact that Perry hit a homerun minutes after the lunar landing can be verified easily, exactly who made the quip that apparently predicated Perry's homerun on the Apollo 11 mission and when that person made it is less easily established. Further, Mikkelson claims that Dark was "curiously vague about his prediction" in a later interview, saying only, "It was just an expression," and he also points out that Perry was a better batter than many other pitchers in Major League Baseball. I do not think Dark's statement is as vague as Mikkelson seems to think or that Perry's quality as

² Cic. *De div.* 1.

³ David Mikkelson, "Gaylord Perry's 'Moon Shot' Home Run: Did Gaylord Perry's Manager Predict He'd Hit His First Home [Sic] Only after Men Had Walked on the Moon?," Snopes, July 22, 2002, <https://www.snopes.com/fact-check/gaylord-perry-home-run/>.

a batter relative to other pitchers has any bearing on the issue, but the problem of the different versions of the facts is hard to overcome. However, one might have expected this problem to arise with the sources. Hitting his first homerun just moments after the successful landing on the moon was undoubtedly memorable to Perry, and to devoted baseball fans no doubt, but the original words connecting the two would have been more ephemeral. After all, the only reason they became memorable at all was because they were to be proved true after the fact and when they were remembered. In the end, Mikkelson wisely runs a middle course regarding the truth of the tale. “Maybe this tale is true, and the memories of the participants—as often happens—have become fuzzy over time. Or maybe—as also often happens—this tale was made up after the fact, but it’s such a good story that the participants now remember it as something that really happened at the time.” So, something like this may actually have happened, or this prophecy is a *post eventum* forgery. Similarly, the oracular tales that come down to us may have been subject to all kinds of traditional distortion, up to and including outright fabrication, provided that the events described could have been believed as having really happened at the time. However, to insist that all oracular tales are *post eventum* forgeries when prophetic words conform too closely with the events that they are supposed to predict is to deny that amazing coincidences happen and that the human mind is well equipped to see such patterns and to find powerful meaning in them. In the end, one does not necessarily need to think that the Pythia was in possession of genuine prophetic powers or that divine providence actually sent oracles as signs of the future to humans in order to take oracular tales as historical. But one could, and the Greeks clearly did.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

I have argued for the existence in ancient Greece of a genre of narrative about oracles that I call, the ‘oracular tale.’ Herodotus’ *Histories* is full of excellent examples of this pattern. Through a narratological analysis of these stories, I have shown that there is a regular pattern of the episodes of action within such tales and that divergences from this pattern—the use of colloquialism, the inter-substitution of certain actions and agents, and even the omission of certain scenes and episodes—are the effect of system of implication that I call ‘narrative compression.’ Simply put, some of Herodotus’ stories about oracles would not make sense without the pattern of the ‘oracular tale’ to provide a framework for his audience’s understanding. This narrative pattern of the ‘oracular tale,’ therefore, must have been familiar enough that Herodotus could count on his audience to be able to think within that pattern.

The ‘oracular tale,’ though, was more than just a traditional genre of story with a familiar pattern of episodes. I have argued that this pattern was an expression not just of culturally familiar ways of thinking about oracular divination, but also a reflection of the way that the ancient Greeks of the fifth century historically went about the business of obtaining, interpreting, and putting oracles to use. Historians have typically drawn a clear line of demarcation between literary texts like Herodotus’ *Histories*, whose work represents a socially constructed, fantasy world, and documentary evidence like inscriptions and Thucydides (sometimes), which provide the surest evidence of what was really happening with divination in ancient Greece. In my re-examination of this evidence, I have demonstrated that these scholars misunderstood the documentary evidence to mean that oracles from places like Delphi were nuggets of advice about particular courses of action, given in plain prose, and requiring no real interpretation. This misunderstanding was occasioned by the effect of ‘narrative compression.’ Inscriptions tend to

avoid direct quotation of oracular language and mention of debate over interpretation because these texts generally seem to have been intended to foster community consensus about what an individual or deliberative body had decided about an oracle's meaning and what to do about it—mentioning either would risk fracturing that consensus. Thucydides does, in fact, quote some oracles in their original meters. Further, although he does not often include an episode of conjecture in his stories, the fact that his contemporaries thought of oracles as sometimes requiring elaborate interpretations is clearly implied in some tales by the correlation between an oracle's language and the consultant's actions as well as the debates he has with his contemporaries over the validity of their claims about oracular fulfillment. Essentially, narrators may compose their oracular tales differently according to their own interests and rhetorical aims, but the pattern of the 'oracular tale' remains a constant and helps inform the audience's understanding. I have argued that both the consistency of the underlying narrative pattern among these different kinds of the evidence as well as the evidence for a more significant cultural familiarity with how oracular divination was performed indicate that the 'oracular tale' is actually closely aligned with how the Greeks consulted and interpreted oracles.

Scholars have been concerned that if oracles actually required enigmatic interpretation, they would not have been very useful for consultants. However, I have explained that the 'oracular tale' itself actually explains the utility that the Greeks derived from verse and poetically phrased oracles. Their belief that oracles were divine signs that held single meanings and related to specific circumstances allowed them to use oracles as somewhat flexible frameworks for making sense of what had happened and might still happen to them. The conjectural interpretation of the oracles found in Herodotus' *Histories* involved a kind of storytelling that I have been calling 'divinatory thinking.' At first, consultants told themselves 'future stories'

about how they thought that their oracles could be fulfilled and then followed those stories as if they were scripts. Sometimes, the results of their actions failed to meet their expectations. In such cases, consultants either told alternative ‘future stories,’ like additional acts to these scripts, or they came to understand the resultant events as fulfilling the oracle in a different way and told themselves a historical narrative that tied the language of the oracle to that outcome. Other times, the Greeks recalled older oracles that they then used in new ‘future stories’ as a way to respond to particular crises. This ‘divinatory thinking’ often appears extremely subjective, opportunistic, and tendentious, when viewed with an eye for contingency in how events came to happen. However, there is a danger in taking such an etic approach and only appreciating oracular divination as a socio-political institution that helped consultants reconsider their crises more intuitively and bring out a clearer understanding of the stakes and their subconscious preferences when making a decision. If we do not acknowledge the fact that the Greeks made decisions on the basis of vertical axis of communication between gods and humans that they believed was real, we fail to understand their decisions. Their belief in communicative and knowledgeable gods prompted them to seek out and act toward the fulfillment of their messages. The marvelous coincidences between oracular pronouncements and moments of fulfillment came embedded in a clear pattern of narrative that rendered divine causes intelligible and supported their belief in the validity of oracular divination. This is the world in which divination works.

Under this analysis, it is possible to appreciate Herodotus’ *Histories* in a more nuanced way. Taking the author as a sincere investigator into what is true does not mean that one must believe that he was correct in all of his judgements. My claim that his work is an important and reliable historical source for how the Greeks thought about and actually used oracles does not affirm the historicity of any of the stories that he tells. Some may accurately reflect historical

consultations, and others perhaps not entirely or not at all. However, many of these stories, as Herodotus explicitly says on occasion, were believable both to him and to his audience in the fifth century. Thus, even if all of the details were not historical in the end, the generalities of the ‘oracular tale’ must have formed the basis of believability, and I have highlighted a number of specific examples where Herodotus uses the pattern of the ‘oracular tale’ to evaluate the truth of stories he heard.

Additionally, understanding this narrative pattern gives readers a point of connection with Herodotus’ audience. The consequence of the fact that the ‘oracular tale’ was a culturally familiar pattern of narrative and thought means that this pattern was part of his audience’s “horizon of expectation.”¹ Thus, if one reads the *Histories* with the expectation of this pattern, certain passages that once seemed unrelated and uninteresting appear to be more deeply connected and of far greater significance.² In this dissertation, I have only addressed a few of these moments, but there is plenty of work still to be done, and the appendix below may be a useful map for further study in this area.³ Further, narratological research focused through the ‘oracular tale’ may help illuminate more than just the deeper organization of the work; it may lead to new insights into why Herodotus tells certain stories in the way he does that would allow for a greater appreciation of his artistry.

¹ Hans Robert Jauss and Elizabeth Benzinger, “Literary History as a Challenge to Literary Theory,” *New Literary History* 2, no. 1 (1970): 7–37.

² In a recent paper and book chapter that is hopefully forthcoming, I argued that an overlooked sentence of transition between Herodotus’ account of the start of the Athenian-Aeginetan war and the beginning of Darius’ preparations for a second invasion of Greece (Hdt. 6.94.1) should be read as more important hinge point in the *Histories*. The beginning of the Athenian-Aeginetan war is the fulfillment of the Delphic oracle (Hdt. 5.89.2) that promised that the Athenians would suffer and accomplish many things if they violated the god’s command to observe a thirty-year truce. Thus, their war ushered in the victories and Marathon and Salamis (the great accomplishments), but also the devastation of Attica and Athens (the sufferings). Daniel J. Crosby, “The ‘Oracular Tale’ and Audience Expectation: Reading for Fulfillment in Herodotus’ *Histories*,” in *Perspectivas Jóvenes de la Antigüedad Grecolatina*, edited by Alejandro Abritta and Luisina Abrach. Neuquén, Argentina: EDUCO—Universidad Nacional del Comahue, (*under review*).

³ See “Appendix 2: Analysis of Oracular Tales in Herodotus’ *Histories*” below.

The ‘oracular tale,’ though, can yield insights into texts even beyond epigraphy and the genre of historiography. It even has utility in appreciating the nuances of humor in comedy. Aristophanes’ *Wealth*, for example, opens in the middle of the action of an oracular tale, and this text will be a helpful way to review some of my conclusions in more detail. At the beginning of this comedy, an Athenian man named Chremylus is following behind a blind man, and his slave, Carion, who is fed up with being kept in the dark about his master’s purpose, begins to complain. Carion eventually convinces Chremylus to explain what he is doing, and his master tells him an incomplete oracular tale.

Chremylus: I, though being a reverent and just man, was faring badly and was poor.

Carion: I know that for sure.

Chremylus: But other people were rich: the sacrilegious, orators, extortionists, and the evil.

Carion: I’m convinced.

Chremylus: Therefore, I was going to the god in order to inquire, reckoning my life of suffering nearly already shot, but seeking to learn for my only son whether it is necessary that he change his habits and be knavish, unjust, and no good, since I think that this offers advantage for life.

Carion: What, then, did Phoebus utter from his fronds?

Chremylus: You will learn. For the god spoke this to me clearly: whomsoever I might meet first upon leaving, he commanded me not to let him go again, but to persuade him to follow me home.

Carion: Whom do you meet first, then?

Chremylus: This man here.

Carion: [Carion can tell that the man is blind.] Do you really not understand, you complete idiot, that the god’s notion points out to you in the clearest possible way to train your son in the local manner.

Chremylus: How do you come to that?

Carion: Because it is obvious even for a blind man to know that practicing nothing good is very beneficial in the present moment.

Chremylus: It cannot be that the oracle means that, but something else that’s better. But if this man should explain to us who in the world he is and for what reason and needing what he came with us to this place, we might discover what our oracle means.⁴

⁴ {XP.} Ἐγὼ θεοσεβῆς καὶ δίκαιος ὢν ἀνὴρ
κακῶς ἔπραττον καὶ πένης ἦν. {KA.} Οἶδά τοι.
{XP.} Ἄτεροι δ’ ἐπλούτουν. ἱερόσυλοι, ῥήτορες
καὶ συκοφάνται καὶ πονηροί. {KA.} Πείθομαι.
{XP.} Ἐπερησόμενος οὖν ὥχόμην ὡς τὸν θεόν,

Although Aristophanes' *Wealth* is obviously a fictional comedy, the humor here depends on familiar realities about oracles in the ancient world. These realities are rooted in what I have called the 'oracular tale,' which is a traditional narrative pattern, a pattern of thinking that helped them make sense of experiences (their own and those of others), and a social script that they could act out when dealing with oracles.

The pattern consists of five episodes in a sequence: *crisis*, *consultation*, *conjecture*, *action*, and *fulfillment*. The *Wealth* is susceptible to the same narratological analysis that I have applied to Herodotus. It provides the first three episodes here, and the other two may be identified in the rest of the play. Chremylus explains to Carion that he was in a *crisis* about how he and his son should live their lives since, although they were trying to live justly and reverently, they suffered in poverty while the unjust and irreverent grew wealthy. For this reason, he decided on oracular *consultation* at Delphi. There, he asked whether he should raise his son to

τὸν ἐμὸν μὲν αὐτοῦ τοῦ ταλαιπώρου σχεδὸν
ἤδη νομίζων ἐκτετοξεῦσθαι βίον,
τὸν δ' υἱόν, ὅσπερ ὦν μόνος μοι τυγχάνει,
πευσόμενος εἰ χρή μεταβαλόντα τοὺς τρόπους
εἶναι πανούργον, ἄδικον, ὑγιὲς μὴδὲ ἐν,
ὡς τῷ βίῳ τοῦτ' αὐτὸ νομίσας ξυμφέρειν.
{KA.} Τί δῆτα Φοῖβος ἔλακεν ἐκ τῶν στεμμάτων;
{XP.} Πεύσει. Σαφῶς γὰρ ὁ θεὸς εἶπέ μοι ταδί·
ὅτῳ ξυναντήσαιμι πρῶτον ἐξιόν,
ἐκέλευε τούτου μὴ μεθίεσθαι μ' ἔτι,
πεῖθαι δ' ἐμαυτῷ ξυνακολουθεῖν οἴκαδε.
{KA.} Καὶ τῷ ξυναντᾷς δῆτα πρῶτον; {XP.} Τουτῶι.
{KA.} Εἴτ' οὐ ξυνίης τὴν ἐπίνοιαν τοῦ θεοῦ
φράζουσιν, ὧ σκαιότατέ, σοι σαφέστατα
ἀσκεῖν τὸν υἱὸν τὸν ἐπιχώριον τρόπον;
{XP.} Τῷ τοῦτο κρίνεις; {KA.} Δῆλον ὅτι καὶ τυφλῷ
γῶναι δοκεῖ τοῦθ', ὡς σφόδρ' ἐστὶ συμφέρον
τὸ μὴδὲν ἀσκεῖν ὑγιὲς ἐν τῷ νῦν γένει.
{XP.} Οὐκ ἔσθ' ὅπως ὁ χρησμὸς εἰς τοῦτο ῥέπει,
ἀλλ' εἰς ἕτερόν τι μεῖζον. Ἦν δ' ἡμῖν φράση
ὅστις ποτ' ἐστὶν οὐτοσὶ καὶ τοῦ χάριν
καὶ τοῦ δεόμενος ἦλθε μετὰ νῶν ἐνθαδί,
πυθοίμεθ' ἂν τὸν χρησμὸν ἡμῶν ὃ τι νοεῖ. Ar. *Plut.* 28–55.

become a rogue, and the god commanded him that whomsoever he might meet first upon leaving (ὅτῳ ξυναντήσαιμι πρῶτον ἐξιών), not to let him go (μεθίεσθαί), but to persuade (πείθειν) him to follow (ξυνακολουθεῖν) him home. More or less caught up to the present, Chremylus then explains that he met this blind man first. Then, the two men explain their *conjectures* to each other in a short debate. Carion thinks that what the oracle means by the blind man is obvious: Chremylus should raise his son to profit from being a rogue. Chremylus, on the other hand, insists that there must be something else less visible about the man that will resolve his ethical crisis. As the rest of the scene unfolds, Chremylus undertakes a series of *actions* that he thinks will bring him benefit. First, he convinces the blind man to explain who he is, and after learning that he is the god Wealth, Chremylus convinces him by the promise of restoring his eyesight to come home with him, which marks the *fulfillment* of the oracle.⁵ Thus, the oracular consultation of Aristophanes' *Wealth* may be entirely fictional, but its narrative pattern is consistent with those that found in Herodotus' *Histories* and Thucydides, and it clearly shows that Aristophanes is also indebted to the same traditional genre of story.⁶

This story pattern was apparently so familiar in the fifth century that narrators could rely on their audiences to think with the pattern and anticipate events that could happen and understand those that did happen. As I have demonstrated by my analysis of Herodotus' oracular tales, that historian constructs his narratives to suit his interests and purposes. He may omit or abbreviate certain episodes or scenes from any given narrative, but I have argued from specific examples that this 'narrative compression' would render the story incomprehensible without the narrative pattern of the 'oracular tale' as a larger framework for understanding informing the

⁵ Ar. *Plut.* 56–252.

⁶ Even the type of oracular pronouncement may be compared to the story of the consultation of the Dolonci at Delphi regarding their war with the Apsinthians: Ἡ δὲ Πυθίη σφι ἀνεῖλε οἰκιστὴν ἐπάγεσθαι ἐπὶ τὴν χώραν τοῦτον ὃς ἂν σφεας ἀπιόντας ἐκ τοῦ ἱεροῦ πρῶτος ἐπὶ ξείνια καλέσῃ. Hdt. 6.34.2.

audience's understanding. The 'oracular tale,' therefore, is a narrative schema whose episodes are temporally, logically, causally linked one to the next. More than that, it is a culturally familiar pattern of thinking involved in composing and listening to or reading oracular tales that forms the foundation of a system of implication that allows for understanding between narrator and audience.

The effect of this system of implication is clear in the *Wealth*, too. When the audience hears the words that Chremylus attributes to the oracle and his insistence on his rather literal interpretation, they naturally expect that Chremylus will try hard not to let him go (μὴ μεθίεσθαι) and to persuade (πείθειν) him to follow him home. This expectation sets up a series of jokes. First, the smelly old blind man unexpectedly turns out to be very rude and very much wants to get away from Chremylus and Carion. Wealth's demands to be released (e.g., Μέθεσθέ νύν μου πρῶτον. 75) as well as the pair's initial refusal, then agreement (Ἦν, μεθίεμεν. 75), then refusal again, all represent a back and forth of grabbing and releasing that humorously plays on the audience's expectation of oracular fulfillment. The oracular tale and the whole play even threaten to break down completely when Carion thinks to precipitate the old man from the nearest cliff (67–70). Second, the audience expects that Chremylus would try to persuade Wealth, but it would have been unexpected that Chremylus offers to make the god see again after Zeus had taken that ability from him (114–15). Again, the resulting action of the scene plays with the audience expectation of oracular fulfillment in a humorous way by threatening to break the pattern. As it turns out, Wealth does not actually want his eyesight back at first and has to be convinced to want it (116). Also, Chremylus himself, as Wealth points out (211), does not have the power to make good on his promise, and as his later conversation with Blepsidemus suggests (400–414), he did not actually know how he is going to make Wealth see again when he

promises to do so. Rather, he seems to put more than typical amount of trust in the oracle. He apparently thinks it to mean that he could offer anything in order to fulfill its prescription to persuade Wealth—a way to make good would be provided (212–13). Thus, Aristophanes uses his audience’s expectation of the familiar narrative pattern of the ‘oracular tale’ in order to introduce moments that humorously and abortively attempt to make the narrative into an incoherent series of happenstances.

Following the conclusions of mid-century, skeptical historians, much of modern scholarship has nearly univocally refused to believe that this pattern of narrative and thought is also one of action. Instead, most scholars today treat central aspects of the ‘oracular tale’ as reflecting a socially constructed alternative reality of oracular divination that was entirely divorced from its practice as a matter of fact in the ancient past. Earlier scholars like Pierre Amandry and Joseph Fontenrose sought to establish the epigraphic evidence for oracular activity as the objective metric by which to judge historical reliability, and in this way, they ended up classifying our evidence as “historical” or “literary,” depending on the degree to which it corresponded with the inscriptions. Consequently, it came to be believed that verse oracles and conjectural oracular interpretation were part of a literary conceit that was consciously designed and popularly repeated for its entertainment or ethical value as opposed to offering any reliable evidence for the reality of oracular consultation and interpretation. As I have shown, the case for the incommensurability of our evidence, though, hinges on two related observations: a disparity in the quality of oracular responses as recorded in these sources (clear prose versus potentially enigmatic verse) and the ubiquity of the episode of conjecture in “literary” texts as opposed to its paucity in “historical” ones.

On the contrary, I have argued that these points of disagreement are only apparent. First, I have shown Amandry and Fontenrose misunderstood the plain and indirect reports of oracular pronouncements among the inscriptions to be direct reflections, rather than interpretations, of the actual words of oracles and that there is more evidence for verse oracles in Thucydides and the extant inscriptions than is typically acknowledged. Thus, as is clear from the examples of Herodotus' indirect translation of oracular verse into plain, indirect speech, there is good reason to think that Aristophanes' audience would not have imagined Chremylus' fictional Delphic oracle to have been delivered in exactly the same terms, syntax, and meter that he uses to report it to Carion. Rather, Chremylus' indirect report should be understood as a good-faith summary of what he believed the oracle told him. Second, I have shown that there is strong evidence in Thucydides and some evidence among the inscriptions that the Greeks interpreted oracles conjecturally by considering the relationship between their particular circumstances and the words of their oracles. This fact does more than vindicate the historical plausibility of a debate over the correct interpretation of this oracle, like the one between Chremylus and Carion. It also demonstrates that the conjectural interpretation of oracles was a culturally familiar feature of thought and action. As I have argued, the differences previous scholars have observed between "historical" and "literary" sources for oracular divination have more to do with differences between the narrators and the genres of their narrations than with differences between the world of books and the one of reality. Just as Herodotus sometimes compresses his oracular tales by abbreviating and omitting certain episodes or scenes that are clearly implied or otherwise taken for granted, other narrators may compress or expand their oracular tales depending on their own interests and emphases.

The other reason that modern scholars have difficulty embracing the idea that the oracular tales of literature offer insight into historical practice is because of a strange modern bias. Their “common sense” assumption is that oracles would have needed to give clear advice in order to have been at all helpful to their clients. Consequently, the “ambiguity” that typifies a number of oracles in Herodotus’ *Histories* would not have been useful for consultants, and therefore, the idea that oracles sometimes required elaborate interpretations was one of popular fantasy. On the contrary, I have demonstrated that it was conjectural and sometimes enigmatic interpretation that made oracles useful to the Greeks. In this way, oracles could provide them with somewhat flexible frames of reference by which to construct narratives for understanding their past, considering their present, and planning their future. This ‘divinatory thinking,’ therefore, is essentially narrative thinking and is helpful for dealing with the uncertainties of life.

The scene from the *Wealth* is also an excellent example of the utility of ‘divinatory thinking.’ Importantly, the story begins *in medias res*, after the consultation but before the fulfillment. Here, ‘divinatory thinking’ is in process. After Chremylus finishes his explanation of the crisis, consultation, and pronouncement, the two begin to debate the meaning of the oracle. Their debate centers on the significance of the blind man they have been following, and in particular, whether he himself or an apparent quality of him is significant for understanding Apollo’s intended meaning. Carion insists that his master is stupid for not understanding that the god meant to indicate by this blind man “in the clearest possible way” (σαφέστατα) that the answer to his question would be “obvious even for a blind man” (Δῆλον ὅτι καὶ τυφλῷ γινῶναι δοκεῖ τοῦθ’).⁷ In the context prevailing in Athens where evil people get ahead in life, it ought to be obvious to Chremylus that he should raise his son in “the local manner” (τὸν ἐπιχώριον

⁷ Ar. *Plut.* 45–7.

τρόπον) if he wants his son to get ahead. Thus, Carion considers the pronouncement in conjunction with the question, the old man's blindness, and circumstances at Athens in order to create a concise 'future story' about how Chremylus should raise his son: he should raise him to be a rogue. Chremylus, on the other hand, also believes that the god spoke clearly (σαφῶς) to him, but he thinks that Apollo would not have meant what Carion believes he did. Rather, he insists that the god's meaning went to "something else that's better" (ἕτερόν τι μείζον) and supposes that there is something about the man himself that is significant to understand the meaning of the oracle.⁸ Thus, he proposes a different and equally short "future story" about asking the man who he is and what he is doing there. Importantly, both men assert the clarity of the oracle, but they end up with different clarities.

When the pair eventually discovers that the old man is in fact the god Wealth, Carion's original interpretation, which was obviously foolish to begin with, seems less valid, because Chremylus' literal interpretation creates a more convincing narrative. First, that Apollo would recommend becoming a rogue seems improbable. Second, if Chremylus desires that he and his son be wealthy, then it makes comical sense to try to persuade Wealth himself to follow him home as the oracle seems to say. Finally, if the greater problem in Athenian society is that the evil are wealthy and the just, poor, the humorous solution is to try to restore Wealth's eyesight with the help of Asclepius so he can discern the ethical and reorient the economic gap between the good and evil in society. In this way, the Delphic oracle provides Chremylus with a frame of reference that he uses to plan a series of actions that he believes will result in wealth for himself and his good people of Athens. It is this kind of conjectural, narrative thinking that makes this oracle useful. The particulars of this situation in Aristophanes' *Wealth* are clearly fictional,

⁸ Ar. *Plut.* 51–5.

exaggerated, and funny, but as I have shown, the basic pattern of behavior involved in ‘divinatory thinking’ is consistent with texts that present a more serious aspect like those of Herodotus and Thucydides. Thus, the ‘oracular tale’ is also a familiar pattern of societal expectations, like a social script, for dealing with oracles.

The ‘oracular tale’ is fundamental to how the Greeks told and understood stories about oracles and how they made use of them in their lives. Moreover, the pattern is important for understanding the beliefs that support the pattern of narrative, thought, and behavior that is the ‘oracular tale.’ The Greeks believed that their gods and heroes possessed a superhuman amount of insight into the events of the past, present, and future and that they were able to transmit that knowledge to humans in various ways. This much about Greek belief in the vertical axis of communication (gods to humans) is commonly accepted, but recent scholarship on divination has been keener to focus attention on the horizontal axis of communication (humans to humans) and to explain away the belief in the vertical axis in psychological terms.

There is certainly some justification for approaching the phenomenon in this way. Chremylus, for example, refuses to believe Carion’s interpretation of the oracle, since he does not believe that Apollo would actually recommend that he raise his son to be a rogue (51–2). Oddly, his thought humorously raises the question of why he asked the question at all if he did not expect that an affirmative answer was possible. Using a modern psychological approach to divination, it may seem that Chremylus already, even subconsciously, knew in advance the kind of advice that he wanted to hear and interpreted Apollo’s oracle in the way he wanted to understand it all along. Chremylus’ son might have been successful being a rogue in fulfillment of the oracle, as Carion suggests, but the fact that the blind man turns out to be Wealth seemed to him to fulfill the oracle and to validate Apollo’s oracular foresight. In this interpretation, Apollo

is really only an extension of Chremylus' own mind. As I have shown by a close examination of causality in Herodotus' oracular tales, the Greeks not only interpreted oracles in an similarly opportunistic and deeply subjective ways; they also had a tendency to look for patterns in contingent events that appeared to be meaningful and to construct narratives that cast these patterns as evidence of divine knowledge of the past, present, and future. In this modern theoretical framework, these patterns and their gods are the artificial products of the Greek mind. It was their conjectural way of interpretation that fulfilled oracles.

This explanation for how divination really worked may make sense to us in our post-Enlightenment world today. However, because it denies the reality of the vertical axis of communication outright, it is so completely removed from the way that the Greeks thought about divination as not to be an explanation for how divination worked at all. Without the gods, one is not studying divination, but aspects of human psychology and social interactions that the Greeks misunderstood as divine communication. If we are to understand divination, we must tentatively accept the beliefs that the Greeks held. Using a more emic approach to oracular divination, the story of Aristophanes' *Wealth* follows a man who progressively comes to understand the divine meaning of his oracle as the action unfolds. Chremylus happens to meet a blind man first when coming from the sanctuary; the blind man happens to be the god Wealth; and Chremylus happens to be able to persuade Wealth to come to his house with an outlandish promise. The marvelous coincidences between the oracle's language and the action of the play validates the truth of the oracle, makes visible the specter of divine intention, and proves that there was a (comedic) 'prophetic plan' involved in the course of events. As I have argued, this same pattern is central to the oracular tales in Herodotus' *Histories*. There, the belief in a 'prophetic plan' motivates the thoughts and actions of the historical figures as well as the narrator's expository asides.

In this emic analysis, the meaning of the coincidence between oracular pronouncements and their moments of fulfillment is guaranteed by the gods who speak through oracles, and it becomes understandable to humans through their experience of these marvelous coincidences. This is the world in which oracular divination works. I have argued that this was the world in which the ancient Greeks actually lived in word and deed. Whether that world is truly real is not a question for classicists and historians, but philosophers and theologians.

Appendix A: Structure of the ‘Oracular Tale’

- A. Crisis
- B. Consultation
 - 1. Oracular Commission
 - a. Commissioner (Individual or State)
 - i. Forming Question (only #2)
 - ii. Commanding
 - iii. Sending
 - b. Commissioned (ἄγγελος/θεοπρόπος)
 - i. Going
 - ii. Consulting
 - iii. Substance of Inquiry (See “Substance of Inquiry Below”)
 - iv. Recording
 - v. Bringing Back
 - 2. Oracular Quest
 - a. Oracular Sanctuary, Oraclemonger, or Oracle Collection
 - b. Consultant or Commissioned
 - i. Going
 - ii. Consulting
 - iii. Substance of Inquiry
- [Pronouncement 1]
 - iv. Recording (Delegates)
 - v. Going Back (Either of Delegates or Oracles)
- 3. Oracular Reception
 - a. Commissioned (Either of Delegates or Oracles)
 - i. Reporting
- [Pronouncement 2]
- 4. Commissioner/Consultant
 - a. Receiving
 - b. Learning
- C. Conjecture
 - 1. Positive
- [Pronouncement 3]
 - a. Interpreting
 - b. Expecting
 - c. Planning
- 2. Negative
- D. Action
- E. Fulfillment
- [Pronouncement 4]

Appendix B: Analysis of Oracular Tales in Herodotus' *Histories*

Episodes

- A: Crisis
- B: Consultation
- C: Conjecture
- D: Action
- E: Fulfillment

Syntactical Divergence (Order)

- Sa: Explicit Narratorial Intervention
- Sb: Directive/Treated as Directive
- Sc: Oracular Knowledge of Past and Present
- Sd: Memory
- Se: Explanation
- Sf: Fact of Interest

Syntactical Divergence (Duplication)

- Da: Multiple Predictions, Conditions, or Directives
- Db: Multiple Knowledgeable Agents
- Dc: Failure
- Dd: Debate
- De: Repetition

#1. Heraclid Dynasty

D—E

D—E

Action (Sf): The Heraclidae become successors to the Lydians and hold the kingship “according to an oracle.” (Παρά τούτων Ἡρακλεῖδαι ἐπιτραφέντες ἔσχον τὴν ἀρχὴν ἐκ θεοπροπίου) 1.7.4

Fulfillment: Twenty-two generations of Heraclid rulers follow (1.7.4)

#2. King Gyges

E1a(Sf) | E1b(Sf)—B1a—{P1a(Da1)}—E1c(De)—{P1b(Da2)}—C—E2a(Sa)—E1d(Sf) |
E2b(Da2) | E2c(Da2, De)

B—{P1}—E1(Da1)—C—E2(Da2)

Fulfillment 1a (Sf): The rule of Lydia passed from the Heraclidae to the Mermnadae, the family of Croesus. 1.7.1

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Fulfillment 1b (Sf): Gyges rules the Lydians. (ἐκρατύνη ἐκ τοῦ ἐν Δελφοῖσι χρηστηρίου). 1.13.1

{Indirect Pronouncement 1a (Da1)}: “And in fact the oracle declared it” (1). (Ἀνεῖλέ τε δὴ τὸ χρηστήριον ...). 1.13.2

Consultation 1b:

Conjecture: Lydians and the descendants of Gyges disregarded the second half of the oracle.
(Τούτου τοῦ ἔπεος Λυδοὶ τε καὶ οἱ βασιλεῖς αὐτῶν λόγον οὐδένα ἐποιεῦντο...) 1.13.2

Fulfillment 1d (De): The Mermnadae take the tyranny from the Heraclidae. 1.14.1

Fulfillment 2 (Da1, De): The words of the oracle are recalled in the Pythia’s “Defense Oracle” at 1.91.1 (Κροῖσος δὲ πέμπτου γονέος ἀμαρτάδα ἐξέπλησε, ὃς ἐὼν δορυφόρος Ἡρακλειδέων δόλῳ γυναικίῳ ἐπισπόμενος ἐφόνευσε τὸν δεσπότην καὶ ἔσχε τὴν ἐκείνου τιμὴν οὐδέν οἱ προσήκουσαν.)

A—B1a—{P}—B1b(Db1)—D1(Db1)—E1(Se, Db1)—B1c(Db2)—D2(Db2)—B1d(Db3)—C2(Db3)—D3(Db3)—C2(Se, Db3)—C3(Se, Db2)—D4(Db2, 3)—D5/E(Sb)

Crisis: Temple of Athena of Assesus burned, and Alyattes becomes sick (1.19.1–2). Herodotus suggests an important connection between the two events.

{Indirect Pronouncement}: “The Pythia said that she would not declare an oracle to those who arrived at Delphi earlier than they would rebuild the temple of Athena that they burned in Assesus in Milesian territory.” (Τοῖσι δὲ ἡ Πυθίη ἀπικομένοινοι ἐς Δελφοὺς οὐκ ἔφη χρήσιν, πρὶν ἢ τὸν νηὸν τῆς Ἀθηναίης ἀνορθώσωσι, τὸν ἐνέπρησαν χώρας τῆς Μιλησίης ἐν Ἀσσησῶ.) 1.19.3.

Action 1 (Db1): Periander passes the information along to his guest-friend Thrasyboulus. 1.20.

Conjecture 1 (Se, Db1): Periander shares the information “in order that he [Thrasyboulus] might take counsel, knowing something in advance pertaining to the matter at hand.” (ὅπως ἂν τι προειδὼς πρὸς τὸ παρεὸν βουλευῇται.) 1.20.

Consultation 1c (Db2): The oracle is brought to Alyattes (ὥς οἱ ταῦτα ἐξηγγέλθη). 1.21.1.

Action 2 (Db2): Alyattes asks the Milesians for a truce as long as it would take to rebuild the temple. 1.21.1.

Consultation 1d (Db3): Thrasyboulus learns beforehand about the oracle. (Ὁ μὲν δὴ ἀπόστολος ἐς τὴν Μίλητον ἦν,...) 1.21.1.

Conjecture 2 (Db3): Thrasyboulus knew what Alyattes was intending to do. (Θρασύβουλος δὲ σαφέως προπετυσμένος πάντα λόγον καὶ εἰδὼς τὰ Ἀλυάττης μέλλοι ποιήσιν, μηχανᾶται τοιάδε) 1.21.1.

Action 3 (Db3): Thrasyboulus, who had been informed of the pronouncement by Periander, develops ruse that involved piling up the city’s stores and having a party. 1.21.2.

Conjecture 2 (Db3, Se): Thrasyboulus did these things in order to get the messenger of Alyattes to report back that the Milesians were well supplied. (ὅπως ἂν δὴ ὁ κῆρυξ ὁ Σαρδιηνὸς ἰδὼν τε σωρὸν μέγαν σίτου κεχυμένον καὶ τοὺς ἀνθρώπους ἐν εὐπαθείῃσι ἐόντας ἀγγείλῃ Ἀλυάττη.) 1.22.1.

Conjecture 3 (Db2, Se): Alyattes had hoped that the Milesians would have been worn out by the war and would make the truce. (Ἐλπίζων γὰρ ὁ Ἀλυάττης σιτοδείην τε εἶναι ἰσχυρὴν ἐν τῇ Μιλήτῳ καὶ τὸν λεὼν τετρῦσθαι ἐς τὸ ἔσχατον κακοῦ, ἤκουε τοῦ κήρυκος νοστήσαντος ἐκ τῆς Μιλήτου τοὺς ἐναντίους λόγους ἢ ὥς αὐτὸς κατεδόκε.) 1.22.3.

Action 4 (Db2, 3): Alyattes and Thrasyboulus become allies.

Action 5/Fulfillment (Sb): Alyattes builds two temples to Athena in Assesus. (καὶ δύο τε ἀντὶ ἐνὸς νηοῦς τῇ Ἀθηναίῃ οἰκοδόμησε ὁ Ἀλυάττης ἐν τῇ Ἀσσησῷ.) 1.22.3

[Resolution]: Alyattes is cured of his illness. (... αὐτὸς τε ἐκ τῆς νόσου ἀνέστη) 1.22.3.

#4. Croesus’ “Test Oracle”

A—B1a—{P1}—B1b—C/E1a(Sd)—E1b(Sa) | B2—C2

A—B1a—{P1}—B1b—C/E1(Sd)
B2—C2

Crisis: Whether any oracles know the truth. 1.46.3.

Consultation 1a: Delegates of Croesus at a number of oracular institutions (Delphi, Abae, Phocis, Dodona, the Amphiareion at Oropos, Trophonius, Branchidae, Ammon, 1.46.2–3) regarding what Croesus was doing on the hundredth day ([Direction to Delegates] Indirect Question: Ἐντειλάμενος δὲ τοῖσι Λυδοῖσι τάδε ἀπέπεμπε ἐς τὴν διάπειραν τῶν χρηστηρίων, ἀπ’ ἧς ἂν ἡμέρης ὀρμηθέωσι ἐκ Σαρδίων, ἀπὸ ταύτης ἡμερολογέοντας τὸν λοιπὸν χρόνον ἑκατοστῇ ἡμέρῃ χρᾶσθαι τοῖσι χρηστηρίοις, ἐπειρωτῶντας ὅ τι ποιέων τυγχάνοι ὁ Λυδῶν βασιλεὺς Κροῖσος ὁ Ἀλυάττεω· ἅσσα δ’ ἂν ἕκαστα τῶν χρηστηρίων θεσπίσῃ, συγγραψαμένους ἀναφέρειν παρ’ ἐωυτόν.) ([Delegates] Matter: ... ἐν δὲ Δελφοῖσι, ὡς ἐσηλθον τάχιστα ἐς τὸ μέγαρον οἱ Λυδοὶ χρῆσόμενοι τῷ θεῷ καὶ ἐπειρώτων τὸ ἐντεταλμένον ... (Pronouncement) 1.47.1–2.

{Direct Pronouncement 1 (Sc)}: “The Pythia says these things in hexameter strain: ‘But I know both the number of sand and measures of the sea, and I understand the mute and hear the one who does not speak. The smell of a hard-shelled tortoise comes to my

senses, cooked in bronze along with lamb's meat, under which lies bronze and upon which will rest bronze.”

ἡ Πυθίη ἐν ἑξαμέτρῳ τόνῳ λέγει τάδε·

Οἶδα δ' ἐγὼ ψάμμου τ' ἀριθμὸν καὶ μέτρα θαλάσσης,

καὶ κωφοῦ συνίημι καὶ οὐ φωνεῦντος ἀκούω.

Ὅδμή μ' ἐς φρένας ἦλθε κραταιρίνοιο χελώνης

ἐπομένης ἐν χαλκῷ ἅμ' ἀρνείοισι κρέεσσιν,

ἧ χαλκὸς μὲν ὑπέστρωται, χαλκὸν δ' ἐπίεσται.

Ταῦτα οἱ Λυδοὶ θεσπισάσης τῆς Πυθίης. 1.47.2

Consultation 1b: “After writing it down, they went away going back to Sardis. And when the others who had been sent were present and bearing the oracles, then Croesus, opening each one, was looking over the writings. None of them, in fact, was pleasing him, but when he heard the one from Delphi, immediately he made vows and accepted it, since he thought that the only oracle was the one at Delphi, because it had discovered what things he did.” (...συγγραψάμενοι οἷχοντο ἀπίνοντες ἐς τὰς Σάρδεις. Ὡς δὲ καὶ ὄλλοι οἱ περιπεμφθέντες παρήσαν φέροντες τοὺς χρησμούς, ἐνθαῦτα ὁ Κροῖσος ἕκαστα ἀναπτύσσων ἐπώρα τῶν συγγραμμάτων. Τῶν μὲν δὴ οὐδὲν προσιέτο μιν· ὁ δὲ ὡς τὸ ἐκ Δελφῶν ἤκουσε, αὐτίκα προσεύχετό τε καὶ προσεδέξατο, νομίσας μῦθον εἶναι μαντήιον τὸ ἐν Δελφοῖσι, ὅτι οἱ ἐξευρήκεε τὰ αὐτὸς ἐποίησε.) 1.48.1.

Conjecture/Fulfillment 1a (Sd): Croesus is excited upon reading Delphic response and considers the oracle to have gotten it exactly right (... οἱ ἐξευρήκεε τὰ αὐτὸς ἐποίησε). Croesus chopped up tortoise and lamb and boiled the meat in a bronze cauldron (φυλάξας τὴν κυρίην τῶν ἡμερέων ἐμηχανᾶτο τοιάδε· ἐπινοήσας τὰ ἦν ἀμήχανον ἐξευρεῖν τε καὶ ἐπιφράσασθαι, χελώνην καὶ ἄρνα κατακόψας ὁμοῦ ἤψε αὐτὸς ἐν λέβητι χαλκῷ χάλκεον ἐπίθημα ἐπιθείς.) 1.48.2.

Fulfillment 1b (Sa): The narrator emphasizes fulfillment at 1.49 (Τὰ μὲν δὴ ἐκ Δελφῶν οὕτω τῷ Κροίσῳ ἐχρήσθη).

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Consultation 2: “... when the Lydians had done the customary things around the temple, he declared to them...” (...τοῖσι Λυδοῖσι ἔχρησε ποιήσασι περὶ τὸ ἱερὸν τὰ νομιζόμενα...) 1.49.

Conjecture: Amphiareion: something true (οὐτόν ἐνόμισε μαντήιον ἀψευδὲς ἐκτῆσθαι.) 1.49.

Note: Also, the bronze kettle (λέβητι χαλκῷ) is a masculine thing, and the bronze lid (χάλκεον ἐπίθημα), a neuter thing, as suggested in the oracle. The story of Croesus' consultations at the different oracular sanctuaries in Greece comes up again in the story of how the Alcmeonidae became wealthy (6.125.2).

#5. “Great Empire” Oracle

A1a—#4—B1a—{P(Da)}—B1b—C1(Da1, 2) | C2(Da3)—D1—E1(Da3) | C1b | A1b(De)—B(De)—C1c—D2/E2(Da1) | C2—D3 | E3a(Da2) | E3b(Da2, De)

A—#4—B—{P(Da)}—B1b—C1(Da1, 2)—C2(Da3)—D1—E1(Da3)—D2/E2(Da1)—C2—D3—E3(Da2)

Crisis 1a: Croesus is concerned about the growing power of Cyrus and the Persian Empire (1.46.1). This crisis also sets off the “Test Oracle” story.

/#4

Consultation 1a: Delegates of Croesus at Delphi and Amphiareion concerning whether he should wage war against the Persians and whether he ought to bring allies to his cause.

([Direction to Delegates] Indirect Question: ... Τοῖσι δὲ ἄγειν μέλλουσι τῶν Λυδῶν ταῦτα τὰ δῶρα ἐς τὰ ἱρὰ ἐνετέλλετο ὁ Κροῖσος ἐπειρωτᾶν τὰ χρηστήρια εἰ στρατεύηται ἐπὶ Πέρσας Κροῖσος καὶ εἴ τινα στρατὸν ἀνδρῶν προσθέοιτο φίλον.) ([Delegates] Direct Speech: Ὡς δὲ ἀπικόμενοι ἐς τὰ ἀπεπέμφθησαν οἱ Λυδοὶ ἀνέθεσαν τὰ ἀναθήματα, ἐχρέωντο τοῖσι χρηστηρίοις λέγοντες· Κροῖσος ὁ Λυδῶν τε καὶ ἄλλων ἐθνέων βασιλεύς, νομίσας τάδε μαντήια εἶναι μοῦνα ἐν ἀνθρώποισι, ὑμῖν τε ἄξια δῶρα ἔδωκε τῶν ἐξευρημάτων, καὶ νῦν ὑμέας ἐπειρωτᾷ εἰ στρατεύηται ἐπὶ Πέρσας καὶ εἴ τινα στρατὸν ἀνδρῶν προσθέοιτο σύμμαχον. Οἱ μὲν ταῦτα ἐπειρώτων,... (1.53.1–3).

{Indirect Pronouncement (Da)}: “The opinions of both oracles accorded to the same meaning, foretelling to Croesus that if he should wage war against the Persians (1), he would destroy a great empire (2). But they advised that, finding for himself the most powerful of the Greeks, he add them as friends (3).” (...τῶν δὲ μαντηίων ἀμφοτέρων ἐς τὸ αὐτὸ αἰ γινῶμαι συνέδραμον, προλέγουσαι Κροίσῳ, ἣν στρατεύηται ἐπὶ Πέρσας, μεγάλην ἀρχὴν μιν καταλύσειν· τοὺς δὲ Ἑλλήνων δυνατωτάτους συνεβούλευόν οἱ ἐξευρόντα φίλους προσθέσθαι.) 1.53.3–54.1

Consultation 1b: “But when Croesus learned the prophecies that were brought back...” (Ἐπεῖτε δὲ ἀνενειχθέντα τὰ θεοπρόπια ἐπύθετο ὁ Κροῖσος...) 1.54.1.

Conjecture 1a (Da1, 2): “... expecting that he was going to destroy the kingdom of Cyrus...” (...ἐλπίσας καταλύσειν τὴν Κύρου βασιληίην...) 1.54.1.

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Conjecture 2 (Da3): Croesus discovers that the Spartans and Athenians are the strongest of the Greeks (1.56.2: Μετὰ δὲ ταῦτα ἐφρόντιζε ἱστορέων τοὺς ἂν Ἑλλήνων δυνατωτάτους ἐόντας προσκτῆσαι φίλους.), but ultimately decides to approach the Spartans, who were not at the time oppressed by tyranny like Athens. See 1.65.1.

Action 1: Croesus’ delegates report the offer of alliance and the oracle to the Spartans and ask them to help in accordance with the oracle (κατὰ τὸ χρηστήριον). 1.69.1–2.

Fulfillment 1 (Da3): Spartans accept the alliance with Croesus. (Λακεδαιμόνιοι δὲ ἀκηκοότες καὶ αὐτοὶ τὸ θεοπρόπιον τὸ Κροίσῳ γενόμενον ἤσθησάν τε τῇ ἀπίξιν τῶν Λυδῶν καὶ ἐποίησαντο ὄρκια ξεινῆς πέρι καὶ συμμαχίης.) 1.69.3.

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Conjecture 1b (De): Croesus, who “misunderstands,” assumes that the oracle meant that he would defeat the Persians. (Κροῖσος δὲ ἀμαρτῶν τοῦ χρησμοῦ ἐποιέετο στρατηίην ἐς Καππαδοκίην, ἐλπίσας καταρῆσειν Κῦρόν τε καὶ τὴν Περσέων δύναμιν) 1.71.1.

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Crisis 1b (De): Cyrus defeats the grandfather of Croesus, Astyages, and it was this event that prompted Croesus to consult the oracles (1.75.1–2), already narrated at 1.46.1.

Consultation 1a: At oracles of Delphi and Amphiaraus regarding whether he should make war on the Persians (1.75.2). This is already narrated at 1.53.1.

Conjecture 1c: Croesus expects that the oracle pertains to himself (1.75.2). The oracle is called κιβδήλου.

Action 2/Fulfillment 2 (Da1): Croesus wages war against the Persians. (... ἐστρατεύετο ἐς τὴν Περσέων μοῖραν) 1.75.3

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Conjecture 2: Croesus now thinks that his army is not big enough to defeat Cyrus and plans to summon allies (Egyptians, Babylonians, and Spartans). 1.77.1

Action 3: Croesus calls upon his allies to assemble at Sardis in four months. 1.77.3–4

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Fulfillment 3a (Da2): Fall of Croesus is summarized and emphasized by the narrator at 1.86.1.

(Οἱ δὲ Πέρσαι τάς τε δὴ Σάρδις ἔσχον καὶ αὐτὸν Κροῖσον ἐζώγρησαν, ἄρξαντα ἔτεα τεσσσερεσκαίδεκα καὶ τεσσσερεσκαίδεκα ἡμέρας πολιορκηθέντα, κατὰ τὸ χρηστήριόν τε καταπαύσαντα τὴν ἐωυτοῦ μεγάλην ἀρχήν.).

/

Fulfillment 3b (Da2, De): The fulfillment is reemphasized in the Pythia's defense oracle.

(Προηγόρευε γάρ οἱ Λοξίης, ἣν στρατεύηται ἐπὶ Πέρσας, μεγάλην ἀρχὴν αὐτὸν καταλύσειν. Τὸν δὲ πρὸς ταῦτα χρῆν, εὖ μέλλοντα βουλευέσθαι, ἐπειρέσθαι πέμψαντα κότερα τὴν ἐωυτοῦ ἢ τὴν Κύρου λέγοι ἀρχήν.) 1.91.4.

Note: The messengers do not ask the question exactly as Croesus said it to them... Also Croesus only calls on his allies, including the Lacedaemonians, after his unsuccessful invasion! 1.77.1–3.

#6. “Mule King” Oracle

B1a—{P1(Da)}—B1b—C1 | D | {P2}/C2/E2(Sc, Da1)

B1a—{P1(Da)}—B1b—C1—D—{P2}/C2/E2(Sc, Da1)

Consultation 1a: Croesus (probably through delegates?) at Delphi concerning whether his reign would last long (Indirect Question: Ἐπειρώτα δὲ τάδε χρηστηριαζόμενος, εἴ οἱ πολυχρόνιος ἔσται ἡ μοναρχία....) 1.55.1.

Direct Pronouncement (Da): “The Pythia declares these things to him: ‘But whenever a mule should become king of the Medes (1), even then, tender-footed Lydian, flee from the much-pebbled Hermus and do not remain nor feel ashamed to be a coward (2).’”

(Ἡ δὲ Πυθίη οἱ χρᾶ τάδε·

Ἄλλ’ ὅταν ἡμίονος βασιλεὺς Μήδοισι γένηται,
καὶ τότε, Λυδὲ ποδαβρέ, πολυψήφιδα παρ’ Ἑρμον
φεύγειν μηδὲ μένειν, μηδ’ αἰδεῖσθαι κακὸς εἶναι.) 1.55.2.

Consultation 1b: The words come to Croesus. (Τούτοις ἐλθοῦσι τοῖσι ἔπεσι ὁ Κροῖσος πολλὸν τι μάλιστα πάντων ἤσθη). 1.56.1.

Conjecture 1: Croesus thinks that man will always rule the Medes, so his dynasty would rule forever. (ἐλπίζων ἡμίονον οὐδαμὰ ἀντ’ ἀνδρὸς βασιλεύσειν Μήδων, οὐδ’ ὦν αὐτὸς οὐδ’ οἱ ἐξ αὐτοῦ παύσεσθαι κοτε τῆς ἀρχῆς.) 1.56.1.

/

Action (Sb, Da2): Croesus wages war against the Persians. 1.75.3.

/

Pronouncement/Conjecture 2/Fulfillment 2 (Sc, Da1): Explained in the Pythia's defense oracle (1.91.5–6). Cyrus is half Median and half Persian. ([ῶ] Καὶ τὸ τελευταῖον

χρηστηριαζομένῳ [εἶπε] τὰ εἶπε Λοξίης περὶ ἡμίονου, οὐδὲ τοῦτο συνέλαβε. Ἦν γὰρ δὴ ὁ Κῦρος οὗτος ἡμίονος· ἐκ γὰρ δυῶν οὐκ ὁμοεθνέων ἐγεγόνεε, μητρὸς ἀμείνωνος, πατρὸς δὲ ὑποδεεστέρου· ἡ μὲν γὰρ ἦν Μηδὶς καὶ Ἀστυάγεος θυγάτηρ τοῦ Μήδων βασιλέως, ὁ δὲ Πέρσης τε ἦν καὶ ἀρχόμενος ὑπ’ ἐκείνοισι, καὶ ἔνερθε ἐὼν τοῖσι ἅπασιν δεσποίνῃ τῇ ἐωυτοῦ συνοίκεε.)

#7. Peisistratus' Battle

A—B—{P1b(Da)}—C—D/E1—E2

A—B—{P1(Da)}—C—D/E1—E2

Crisis: The forces of Peisistratus and the Athenians meet for battle. 1.62.2–3.

Consultation: The seer Amphilytus recites an oracle to Peisistratus (Ἐνθαῦτα θεΐη πομπῇ χρεώμενος παρίσταται Πεισιστράτῳ Ἀμφίλυτος ὁ Ἀκαρνᾶν χρησμολόγος ἀνὴρ, ὅς οἱ προσίων χρᾶ ἐν ἐξαμέτρῳ τόνῳ τάδε λέγων·). 1.62.4.

{**Direct Pronouncement (Da)**}: “Amphilytus the Acarnian comes next to Peisistratus, and the oraclemonger, when he approaches him, prophesies in a hexameter strain, saying these things: ‘But the *bolos* is cast, and the net is spread out, and the tuna will swarm through a moonlit night.’”

(Ἀμφίλυτος ὁ Ἀκαρνᾶν χρησμολόγος ἀνὴρ, ὅς οἱ προσίων χρᾶ ἐν ἐξαμέτρῳ τόνῳ τάδε λέγων·

Ἔρριπται δ' ὁ βόλος, τὸ δὲ δίκτυον ἐκπεπέτασται,
θύννοι δ' οἰμήσουσι σεληναίης διὰ νυκτός.

Ὁ μὲν δὴ οἱ ἐνθεάζων χρᾶ ταῦτα...) 1.62.4.

Conjecture 1a: Peisistratus thinks he understands the oracle (συλλαβὼν τὸ χρηστήριον καὶ φᾶς δέκεσθαι τὸ χρησθέν). 1.63.

Action/Fulfillment 1: Peisistratus and his allies attack the Athenians when some are playing at dice and sleeping after lunch (1.63.1). This would seem to be conjectured from the *bolos*, which is another word for a die or something that is cast (See Williams 1983, 134n21; *contra* Lavelle 1991, 322n32), and from moonlit night, which perhaps suggested sleeping in broad daylight, or as Lapini has argued, “lunar night” meaning day (Lapini 2011, 88–92; *contra* Lavelle). Perhaps, Peisistratus knew how the Athenians soldiers tended to pass time following their midday meal and conjectured that the oracle advised the timing of a successful attack.

Conjecture 1b (Se): Peisistratus devises a way to gather in the Athenians. (Φευγόντων δὲ τούτων βουλὴν ἐνθαῦτα σοφωτάτην Πεισίστρατος ἐπιτεχνᾶται, ὅκως μήτε ἀλισθεῖεν ἔτι οἱ Ἀθηναῖοι διεσκεδασμένοι τε εἶεν·)

Fulfillment 2: The Athenians flee, which was perhaps conjectured from the darting of the tuna. 1.63.2.

#8. Cleansing Delos

D1a—D1b/E(Sb)

D1/E

Action 1a: Peisistratus orders the island of Delos to be purified in obedience to oracles (ἐκ τῶν λογίων). 1.64.2.

Action 1b/Fulfillment (Sb): They dig up the graves within sight of the sanctuary there and rebury them further away. 1.64.2.

#9. Lycourgus Oracle

A—B—{P(Da)} | D1/E1(Sb, Da2)—D2/E2(Da1, Sb)

A—B—{P(Da)}—D1/E1(Sb, Da2)—D2/E2(Da1, Sb)

Crisis: The Spartans possessed a bad government (1.65.2). Though this is the crisis of the story, it aligns more with the point of the oracle than with Lycourgos' purpose.

Consultation: Lycourgos' at Delphi regarding a matter that is not disclosed (Λυκούργου τῶν Σπαρτητέων δοκίμου ἀνδρὸς ἐλθόντος ἐς Δελφοὺς ἐπὶ τὸ χρηστήριον...). 1.65.2.

{**Direct and Indirect Pronouncement (Da)**}: "... Immediately, the Pythia says these things: 'You come, Lycourgos, to my rich temple as beloved of Zeus and all who have Olympian homes. I hesitate whether I shall prophesy you to be a god or a man, but still even more do I expect you to be a god, Lycourgos (1).' Some in fact say in addition to these things that the Pythia indicated to him the arrangement now constituted among the Spartans (2)."

(ἰθὺς ἡ Πυθίη λέγει τάδε·

Ἦκεις, ὦ Λυκόοργε, ἐμὸν ποτὶ πίονα νηὸν

Ζηνὶ φίλος καὶ πᾶσιν Ὀλύμπια δώματ' ἔχουσι.

Δίξω ἢ σε θεὸν μαντεύσομαι ἢ ἄνθρωπον·

ἀλλ' ἔτι καὶ μᾶλλον θεὸν ἔλπομαι, ὦ Λυκόοργε.

Οἱ μὲν δὴ τινες πρὸς τούτοις λέγουσι καὶ φράσαι αὐτῷ τὴν Πυθίην τὸν νῦν κατεστεῶτα κόσμον Σπαρτιήτησι.) (1.65.3–4). Narrator claims that this part of the oracle is claimed by some people.

/

Action 1/Fulfillment 1 (Da2, Sb): These laws come to be established, and then the Spartans have good government. (... μετέστησε τὰ νόμιμα πάντα καὶ ἐφύλαξε ταῦτα μὴ παραβαίνειν. 1.65.4. See also 1.65.4–66.1.

Action 2/Fulfillment 2 (Da1, Sb): The Spartans build a shrine for Lycourgos and honor him with reverence. (τῷ δὲ Λυκούργῳ τελευτήσαντι ἱρὸν εἰσάμενοι σέβονται μέγας.) 1.66.1

Notes: It is difficult to determine whether this should be two oracles or one. The response is spontaneous.

#10. "Tegean Plains" Oracle

A—B1a—{P}—B1b—D1a—C(Se)—D1b—E

A—B1a—{P}—B1b—C—D1—E

Crisis: Spartans consider war against the Arcadians. 1.66.1.

Consultation 1a: Spartans at Delphi regarding their claim to all of Arcadia (Matter: ... ἐχρηστηρίαζοντο ἐν Δελφοῖσι ἐπὶ πάσῃ τῇ Ἀρκάδων χώρῃ...) 1.66.2.

{**Direct Pronouncement**}: "The Pythia declares these things to them: 'You ask me for Arcadia? You ask me for a lot. I will not give it to you. There are many acorn-eating men in Arcadia who will prevent you. But not in any way do I begrudge you. I grant you foot-stomped Tegea to dance in and to measure out a beautiful field with a cord.'" (Ἡ δὲ Πυθίη σφὶ χρᾶ τάδε·

Ἀρκαδίην μ' αἰτεῖς; Μέγα μ' αἰτεῖς· οὐ τοι δώσω.

Πολλοὶ ἐν Ἀρκαδίῃ βαλανηφάγοι ἄνδρες ἔασιν,

οἱ σ' ἀποκωλύσουσιν. Ἐγὼ δέ τοι οὔτι μεγάρω·
δώσω τοι Τεγέην ποσσίκροτον ὀρχήσασθαι
καὶ καλὸν πεδῖον σχοίνῳ διαμετρήσασθαι.) 1.66.2.

Consultation 1b: “When the Lacedaemonians heard the things that were brought back...”

(Ταῦτα ὡς ἀπενειχθέντα ἤκουσαν οἱ Λακεδαιμόνιοι...) 1.66.3.

Action 1a: Spartans keep away from other Arcadians and march against Tegea. 1.66.3.

Conjecture: They trusted in the oracle, thinking that they were going to enslave the Tegeans.
(...χρησµῶ κιβδήλῳ πίσυνοι, ὡς δὴ ἐξανδραποδιεύµενοι τοὺς Τεγεήτας.) 1.66.3.

Fulfillment: Spartans are defeated in battle and are shackled with the very same bonds that they brought with them to the field—measuring it out with a line. (Ἐσσωθέντες δὲ τῇ συμβολῇ, ὅσοι αὐτῶν ἐζωγρήθησαν, πέδας τε ἔχοντες τὰς ἐφέροντο αὐτοὶ καὶ σχοίνῳ διαμετρησάµενοι τὸ πεδῖον τὸ Τεγεητέων ἐργάζοντο.) 1.66.4.

#11. “Bones of Orestes” Oracle

A—B—{P}—#12 | D/E(Sb)

A—B—{P}—#12—D/E(Sb)

Crisis: Spartans cannot defeat the Tegeans (1.67.1–2). See also 1.65.1.

Consultation: Spartans at Delphi regarding which god to propitiate in order to achieve success
(Indirect Question: ... πέµψαντες θεοπρόπους ἐς Δελφοὺς ἐπειρώτων τίνα ἂν θεῶν ἱλασάµενοι κατύπερθε τῷ πολέμῳ Τεγεητέων γενοίαιτο) 1.67.2.

{**Indirect Pronouncement**}: “The Pythia commanded them to bring back the bones of Orestes, son of Agamemnon.” (Ἡ δὲ Πυθίη σφι ἔχρησε τὰ Ὀρέστεω τοῦ Ἀγαμέµνονος ὅστέα ἐπαγαγομένους.) 1.67.2

/#12

Action/Fulfillment (Sb): The Spartans send Lichas back to Tegea to collect the bones. He brings them back.

[**Resolution**]: The Spartans defeat the Tegeans in war. 1.68.5–6.

Note: That they are the bones of Orestes is confirmed by the fact that the Spartans go on to have steady success against the Tegeans. 1.68.6

#12. “Bane upon Bane” Oracle

A—B1a—{P(Sc)}—B1b—C/E(Sd)—[D]

A—B1a—{P(Sc)}—B1b—C/E(Sd)—[D]

Crisis: The Spartans are unable to discover the location of the bones of Orestes. 1.67.3.

Consultation 1a: Spartans at Delphi regarding the location of the bones of Orestes (Like Indirect Question: ... ἔπεµπον αὐτίς ἐς τὸν θεὸν ἐπειρησομένους τὸν χῶρον ἐν τῷ κέοιτο Ὀρέστης...) 1.67.3.

Direct Pronouncement (Sc): “When they ask those things, the Pythia says to them the following things: ‘There is a certain Tegea in the level land of Arcadia, where two winds blow under strong compulsion, and strike lies upon strike, and bane upon bane. There the life-producing earth holds the son of Agamemnon. Collecting him, you will be defender of Tegea.’”

(Εἰρωτῶσι δὲ ταῦτα τοῖσι θεοπρόποισι λέγει ἡ Πυθίη τάδε·
 Ἔστι τις Ἀρκαδίης Τεγέη λευρᾷ ἐνὶ χώρῳ,
 ἐνθ' ἄνεμοι πνεῖουσι δύω κρατερῆς ὑπ' ἀνάγκης,
 καὶ τύπος ἀντίτυπος, καὶ πῆμ' ἐπὶ πῆματι κεῖται.
 Ἐνθ' Ἀγαμεμνονίδην κατέχει φυσίζοος αἷα·
 τὸν σὺ κομισσάμενος Τεγέης ἐπιτάρροθος ἔσση.) 1.67.4.

Consultation 1b: “But when the Lacedaemonians heard these things, ...” (Ὡς δὲ καὶ ταῦτα ἤκουσαν οἱ Λακεδαιμόνιοι, ...) 1.67.5.

Conjecture/Fulfillment (Sd): Lichas puts together the winds with the bellow, the strike upon strike with the hammer and anvil, and the bane upon bane with the iron itself. Earlier the smithy found a giant human corpse while digging a well, and Lichas concludes that this must be Orestes. (ὁ δὲ ἐννώσας τὰ λεγόμενα συνεβάλλετο τὸν Ὀρέστην κατὰ τὸ θεοπρόπιον τοῦτον εἶναι, τῇδε συμβαλλόμενος· τοῦ χαλκέος δύο ὁρέων φύσας τοὺς ἀνέμους εὔρισκε ἐόντας, τὸν δὲ ἄκμονα καὶ τὴν σφῦραν τὸν τε τύπον καὶ τὸν ἀντίτυπον, τὸν δὲ ἐξελαυνόμενον σίδηρον τὸ πῆμα ἐπὶ πῆματι κείμενον, κατὰ τοιόνδε τι εἰκάζων, ὥς ἐπὶ κακῷ ἀνθρώπου σίδηρος ἀνεύρηται. Συμβαλόμενος δὲ ταῦτα...) 1.68.1–4.

Action: Lichas goes back to Sparta and reports his findings. 1.68.5.

Note: That they are the bones of Orestes is confirmed by the fact that the Spartans go on to have steady success against the Tegeans. 1.68.6.

#13. “Unlucky Day” Oracle

A—B—{P}—E

A—B—{P}—E

Crisis: Croesus has a mute son (1.85.1). See also 1.34.2.

Consultation: Delegates of Croesus at Delphi regarding his son (Matter: ... καὶ δὴ καὶ ἐς Δελφοὺς περὶ αὐτοῦ ἐπετόμφεε χρησομένους.) 1.85.1.

Direct Pronouncement: “The Pythia told him these things: ‘You Lydian, king of many, great fool Croesus, do not desire to hear the much-prayed-for voice of your crying son in your halls. But it is much better for you to be far away. For he will speak first on an unlucky day.’”

(ἡ δὲ Πυθίη οἱ εἶπε τάδε·

Λυδὲ γένος, πολλῶν βασιλεῦ, μέγα νήπιε Κροῖσε,
 μὴ βούλευ πολύευκτον ἱὴν ἀνὰ δώματ' ἀκούειν
 παιδὸς φθεγγομένου. Τὸ δέ σοι πολὺ λώιον ἀμφὶς
 ἔμμεναι· αὐδήσει γὰρ ἐν ἡματι πρῶτον ἀνόλβῳ.) 1.85.2.

Fulfillment/[Resolution]: Seeing Croesus about to be killed, his son yells at the soldiers who were taking the city of Sardis (1.85.3–4). Narrator emphasizes that these were the first words he spoke and that he could then speak for the rest of his life (1.85.4). (Οὗτος μὲν δὴ τοῦτο πρῶτον ἐφθέγγετο).

#14. The “Defense Oracle”

A—B1a—{P}/C/E(Sc)—B1b—R

A—B1a—{P}/C/E(Sc)—B1b—R

Crisis: Croesus feels betrayed by Pythian Apollo, who did not seem to help him or tell the truth despite his many gifts. 1.90.2.

Consultation: Delegates of Croesus at Delphi regarding whether Apollo felt shame at recommending war to Croesus ([Directions to Delegates] Indirect Question: ... πέμπων τῶν Λυδῶν ἐς Δελφοὺς ἐνετέλλετο τιθέντας τὰς πέδας ἐπὶ τοῦ νηοῦ τὸν οὐδὸν εἰρωτᾶν εἰ οὐ τι ἐπαισχύνεται τοῖσι μαντήιοισι ἐπάρας Κροῖσον στρατεύεσθαι ἐπὶ Πέρσας ὥς καταπαύσοντα τὴν Κύρου δύναμιν, ἀπ' ἧς οἱ ἀκροθίνια τοιαῦτα γενέσθαι, δεικνύντας τὰς πέδας· ταῦτά τε ἐπειρωτᾶν καὶ εἰ ἀχαρίστοισι νόμος εἶναι τοῖσι Ἑλληνικοῖσι θεοῖσι.) ([Delegates] Matter: Ἀπικομένοισι δὲ τοῖσι Λυδοῖσι καὶ λέγουσι τὰ ἐντεταλμένα...) 1.90.4–91.1 .

{**Direct Pronouncement**}/**Conjecture 1/Fulfillment (Sc):** (Ἀπικομένοισι δὲ τοῖσι Λυδοῖσι καὶ λέγουσι τὰ ἐντεταλμένα τὴν Πυθίην λέγεται εἰπεῖν τάδε·) Fulfillment of Gyges' oracle regarding the four generations (1.91.1). Croesus misunderstood oracle about war against the Persians and did not consult further (1.91.4). Oracle about the mule king was said regarding Cyrus. (Τὴν πεπρωμένην μοῖραν ἀδύνατά ἐστι ἀποφυγεῖν καὶ θεῶ. Κροῖσος δὲ πέμπτον γονέος ἀμαρτάδα ἐξέπλησε, ὃς ἐὼν δορυφόρος Ἡρακλειδέων δόλῳ γυναικίῳ ἐπισπόμενος ἐφόνευσσε τὸν δεσπότην καὶ ἔσχε τὴν ἐκείνου τιμὴν οὐδὲν οἱ προσήκουσαν. Προθυμωμένου δὲ Λοξίῳ ὅκως ἂν κατὰ τοὺς παῖδας τοῦ Κροίσου γένοιτο τὸ Σαρδίων πάθος καὶ μὴ κατ' αὐτὸν Κροῖσον, οὐκ οἷός τε ἐγένετο παραγαγεῖν Μοίρας. Ὅσον δὲ ἐνέδωκαν αὐται, ἦνυσέ τε καὶ ἐχαρίσατό οἱ· τρία γὰρ ἔτεα ἐπανεβάλετο τὴν Σαρδίων ἄλωσιν· καὶ τοῦτο ἐπιστάσθω Κροῖσος, ὥς ὕστερον τοῖσι ἔτεσι τούτοις ἀλούς τῆς πεπρωμένης. Δεύτερα δὲ τούτων καιομένῳ αὐτῷ ἐπήρκεσε. Κατὰ δὲ τὸ μαντήιον τὸ γενόμενον οὐκ ὀρθῶς Κροῖσος μέμφεται. Προηγόρευε γὰρ οἱ Λοξίης, ἣν στρατεύεται ἐπὶ Πέρσας, μεγάλην ἀρχὴν αὐτὸν καταλύσειν. Τὸν δὲ πρὸς ταῦτα χρῆν, εὖ μέλλοντα βουλεύεσθαι, ἐπειρέσθαι πέμπσαντα κότερα τὴν ἑωυτοῦ ἢ τὴν Κύρου λέγοι ἀρχὴν. Οὐ συλλαβὼν δὲ τὸ ῥηθὲν οὐδ' ἐπανειρόμενος ἑωυτὸν αἴτιον ἀποφαινέτω. [ῥ] Καὶ τὸ τελευταῖον χρηστηριαζομένῳ [εἶπε] τὰ εἶπε Λοξίης περὶ ἡμίωνου, οὐδὲ τοῦτο συνέλαβε. Ἦν γὰρ δὴ ὁ Κῦρος οὗτος ἡμίονος· ἐκ γὰρ δυῶν οὐκ ὁμοεθνέων ἐγεγόνεε, μητρὸς ἀμείνωνος, πατρὸς δὲ ὑποδεεστέρου· ἡ μὲν γὰρ ἦν Μηδὶς καὶ Ἀστυάγεος θυγάτηρ τοῦ Μήδων βασιλέως, ὁ δὲ Πέρσης τε ἦν καὶ ἀρχόμενος ὑπ' ἐκείνοισι, καὶ ἔνερθε ἐὼν τοῖσι ἅπασιν δεσποίνῃ τῇ ἑωυτοῦ συνοίκεε. Ταῦτα μὲν ἡ Πυθίη ὑπεκρίνατο τοῖσι Λυδοῖσι, οἱ δὲ ἀνήνεικαν ἐς Σάρδις καὶ ἀπήγγειλαν Κροίσῳ.

Consultation 1b: “But hearing it, ...” (Ὁ δὲ ἀκούσας...) 1.91.6.

Conjecture 2: Croesus understands that the fault is his. (...συνέγνω ἑωυτοῦ εἶναι τὴν ἀμαρτάδα καὶ οὐ τοῦ θεοῦ.) 1.91.6.

Note: It is the Pythia doing the *post eventum* conjecturing.

#15. Suppliant Oracle 1

A—B1a—{P}—B1b—C1—C2—#16—#17—D—E

A—B1a—{P}—B1b—C1—C2—#16—#17—D—E

Crisis: Cymaeans are uncertain about whether to hand Pactyes over to Cyrus. 1.157.3.

Consultation 1a: Delegates of the Cymaeans at Branchidae regarding what course of action concerning Pactyes would be pleasing to the gods (Matter and Indirect: Πέμπαντες ὧν οἱ Κυμαῖοι ἐς τοὺς Βραγχίδας θεοπρόπους εἰρώτων περὶ Πακτὺν ὁκοῖόν τι ποιεῦντες θεοῖσι μέλλοιεν χαριεῖσθαι... Ἐπειρωτῶσι δέ σφι ταῦτα χρηστήριον ἐγένετο...) 1.157.3–158.1

Indirect Pronouncement/[Resolution]: “An oracle came about for them, when they were asking these things, to give Pactyes back to the Persians.” (Ἐπειρωτῶσι δέ σφι ταῦτα χρηστήριον ἐγένετο ἐκδιδόναι Πακτὺν Πέρσησι.) 1.158.1.

Consultation 1b: “But when the Cymaeans heard the things that were brought back, ...” (Ταῦτα δὲ ὡς ἀπενειχθέντα ἤκουσαν οἱ Κυμαῖοι,...) 1.157.3–158.1.

Conjecture 1: The Cymaeans are minded to hand over Pactyes when they hear the oracle. (...ὀρμέατο ἐκδιδόναι. Ὀρμημένου δὲ ταύτη τοῦ πλήθους...) 1.158.1.

Conjecture 2: Aristodicus distrusts the oracle and suspects that the delegates are not speaking the truth. (Ὀρμημένου δὲ ταύτη τοῦ πλήθους Ἀριστόδικος ὁ Ἡρακλείδew ἀνὴρ τῶν ἀστῶν ἐὼν δόκιμος ἔσχε μὴ ποιῆσαι ταῦτα Κυμαίους, ἀπιστέων τε τῷ χρησμῷ καὶ δοκέων τοὺς θεοπρόπους οὐ λέγειν ἀληθέως...) 1.158.2.

/#16 and 17

Action: The Cymaeans do not hand over Pactyes, but send him to Mytilene, and then to Chios. 1.160.1–2.

Fulfillment: Chians violate the suppliant’s privilege at one of their temples and hand Pactyes over to the Persians. 1.160.3.

#16. Suppliant Oracle 2

A—B—{P}—#17—D—E

A—B—{P}—#17—D—E

Crisis: Aristodicus disbelieves that the oracle would give the response to hand over the suppliant Pactyes. He thinks that the delegates were lying. 1.158.2.

Consultation: Aristodicus and delegates of the Cymaeans at Branchidae present the dilemma again. (Matter and Direct: ...ἐς ὃ τὸ δεύτερον περὶ Πακτύew ἐπειρησόμενοι ἦσαν ἄλλοι θεοπρόποι, τῶν καὶ Ἀριστόδικος ἦν. Ἀπικομένων δὲ ἐς Βραγχίδας, ἐχρηστηριάζετο ἐκ πάντων Ἀριστόδικος ἐπειρωτέων τάδε· ὼναξ, ἦλθε παρ’ ἡμέας ἰκέτης Πακτύης ὁ Λυδὸς φεύγων θάνατον βίαιον πρὸς Περσέων· οἱ δέ μιν ἐξαιτέονται προεῖναι Κυμαίους κελεύοντες. Ἡμεῖς δὲ δειμαίνοντες τὴν Περσέων δύναμιν τὸν ἰκέτην ἐς τόδε οὐ τετολμήκαμεν ἐκδιδόναι, πρὶν ἂν τὸ ἀπὸ σέο ἡμῖν δηλωθῇ ἀτρεκέως ὁκότερα ποιέωμεν.) 1.159.1–2.

Indirect Pronouncement: “And in turn he declared an oracle, ordering that they hand over Pactyes to the Persians.” (ὁ δ’ αὖτις τὸν αὐτὸν σφι χρησμὸν ἔφαινε κελεύων ἐκδιδόναι Πακτὺν Πέρσησι.) 1.159.2

/#17

Action: The Cymaeans do not hand over Pactyes, but send him to Mytilene, and then to Chios. 1.160.1–2.

Fulfillment: Chians violate the suppliant’s privilege at one of their temples and hand Pactyes over to the Persians. (Ἐνθεῦτεν δὲ ἐξ ἱεροῦ Ἀθηναίης Πολιούχου ἀποσπασθεὶς ὑπὸ Χίων ἐξεδόθη) 1.160.3.

#17. Suppliant Oracle 3

A—{P1}—B—{P2}—D—E

A—{P1}

B

{P2}—D—E

Crisis: Aristodicus is upset by the apparent impiety of the response and goes around bothering the pigeons at the shrine at Branchidae. 1.159.3.

Direct Pronouncement 1: Why do you do this? (λέγεται φωνὴν ἐκ τοῦ ἀδύτου γενέσθαι φέρουσαν μὲν πρὸς τὸν Ἀριστόδικον, λέγουσαν δὲ τάδε· Ἀνοσιώτατε ἀνθρώπων, τί τάδε τολμᾷς ποιεῖν; Τοὺς ἰκέτας μεθ' ἐκ τοῦ νηοῦ κεραΐζεις;) 1.159.3.

Consultation: Aristodicus at Branchidae regarding why the god protects his own suppliants and not those of Cymae (Direct: Ἀριστόδικον δὲ οὐκ ἀπορήσαντα πρὸς ταῦτα εἰπεῖν· «ὦναξ, αὐτὸς μὲν οὕτω τοῖσι ἰκέτησι βοηθέεις, Κυμαίους δὲ κελεύεις τὸν ἰκέτην ἐκδιδόναι;»... Ταῦτα ὡς ἀπενειχθέντα ἤκουσαν οἱ Κυμαῖοι...). 1.159.4, 160.1.

Direct Pronouncement 2: “And [that] he responded back with these things: ‘Yes, I command it in order that you may be destroyed the quicker for being irreverent, so that you might not consult the oracle again about handing over suppliants.’” (Τὸν δὲ αὖτις ἀμείψασθαι τοῖσδε· Ναὶ κελεύω, ἵνα γε ἀσεβήσαντες θᾶσσον ἀπόλησθε, ὥς μὴ τὸ λοιπὸν περὶ ἰκετέων ἐκδόσιος ἔλθῃτε ἐπὶ τὸ χρηστήριον.) 1.159.4.

Action: The Cymaeans do not hand over Pactyes, but send him to Mytilene, and then to Chios. 1.160.1–2.

Fulfillment: The Chians hand Pactyes over. 1.160.3.

Note: We are not told much about the doom of the Cymaeans. See 5.123 (capture of Cyme by Artaphrenes) and 8.130 (Xerxes’ fleet winters at Cyme).

#18. Phocaeen Troubles

D1(Dc) | D2—B{P}/C(Se)

B{P}—D1(Dc)—C—D2

Action 1 (Dc): The Phocaeans found a city called Alalie on Corsica (Cyrnus) “according to an oracle.” (ἐν γὰρ τῇ Κύρνῳ εἴκοσι ἔτεσι πρότερον τούτων ἐκ θεοπροπίου ἐνεκτίσαντο πόλιν, τῇ οὖνομα ἦν Ἀλαλίη.) 1.165.1.

/

Action 2: Phocaeans found the city of Hyele for themselves.

Consultation/Conjecture/{Indirect Pronouncement} (Se, Sd): Poseidonian man explains that the Pythia, whom they consulted about an unknown matter meant for them to institute worship of Cyrnus not to found city on Corsica. (Ἐκτισαν δὲ ταύτην πρὸς ἀνδρὸς Ποσειδωνιῆτεω μαθόντες ὥς τὸν Κύρνον σφί ἢ Πυθίῃ ἔχρησε κτίσαι ἥρων ἐόντα, ἀλλ’ οὐ τὴν νῆσον.) 1.167.4.

Note: The Phocaeans are forced to abandon this colony when they win a Pyrrhic victory against the Tyrrhenians and Carthaginians (1.166.1–3, 1.167.3). Compare the role of the Poseidonian man to that of the oraclemongers.

#19. Phocaean Heroes

A—B—{P}—D/E(Sb)

A—B—{P}—D/E(Sb)

Crisis: All living things that passed the spot where the Phocaeans were slaughtered become ill. 1.167.1.

Consultation: Agyllaeans at Delphi wishing to make amends (Purpose: Οἱ δὲ Ἀγυλλαῖοι ἐς Δελφοὺς ἔπεμπον, βουλόμενοι ἀκέσασθαι τὴν ἀμαρτάδα) 1.167.2.

{**Indirect Pronouncement**}: “The Pythia commanded them to do the things that the Agyllaeans fulfill still even now.” (Ἡ δὲ Πυθίη σφέας ἐκέλευσε ποιεῖν τὰ καὶ νῦν οἱ Ἀγυλλαῖοι ἔτι ἐπιτελέουσιν) 1.167.2.

Action/Fulfillment (Sb): “For they sacrifice lavishly to them and they set up a gymnastic and horse competition.” (...καὶ γὰρ ἐναγίζουσιν σφιν μεγάλως καὶ ἀγῶνα γυμνικὸν καὶ ἵππικὸν ἐπιστάσι.) 1.167.2

#20. “Stop Digging” Oracle

A—B—{P}—D/E(Sb)

A—B—{P}—D/E(Sb)

Crisis: While digging a channel to make their peninsula into an island, the Cnidian workers suffer supernatural numbers of casualties. 1.174.3–4.

Consultation: Cnidian delegates at Delphi regarding the opposing force (Matter: ...ἔπεμπον ἐς Δελφοὺς θεοπρόπους ἐπειρησομένους τὸ ἀντίζοον) 1.174.4.

Direct Pronouncement: “The Pythia, as the Cnidians themselves say, declares these things to them in a trimeter strain: ‘Do not wall off or dig through the isthmus. For Zeus would have made it an island, if, at least, he was wishing it to be one.’”

(Ἡ δὲ Πυθίη σφιν, ὥς αὐτοὶ Κνίδιοι λέγουσι, χρᾶ ἐν τριμέτρῳ τόνῳ τάδε·

Ἴσθμὸν δὲ μὴ πυργοῦτε μηδ’ ὀρύσσετε·

Ζεὺς γάρ κ’ ἔθηκε νῆσον, εἴ γ’ ἐβούλετο.) 1.174.5.

Action/Fulfillment (Sb): The Cnidians stop digging (Κνίδιοι μὲν ταῦτα τῆς Πυθίης χρησάσης τοῦ τε ὀρύγματος ἐπαύσαντο...). 1.174.6.

Note: Kebric (1983:39–40) argues for authenticity against Fontenrose and others. Apparently, there is also evidence of the incomplete work.

#21. Defining Egypt

A—B—{P}

A—B—{P}

Crisis: People of Mareia and Apis consider themselves to be Libyan but are forced by the Egyptians to adhere to their sacred dietary restrictions as though they were Egyptians. 2.18.1–2.

Consultation: People of Mareia and Apis at Ammon regarding permission to consume all foods (Purpose and Indirect: ...βουλόμενοι θηλέων βοῶν μὴ ἔργεσθαι, ἔπεμψαν ἐς Ἄμμωνος φάμενοι οὐδὲν σφίσι τε καὶ Αἰγυπτίοισι κοινὸν εἶναι· οἰκέειν τε γὰρ ἔξω τοῦ Δέλτα καὶ οὐκ ὁμολογέειν αὐτοῖσι {κατὰ γλῶσσαν}, βούλεσθαι τε πάντων σφίσι ἐξεῖναι γεύεσθαι.) 2.18.2.

{Indirect Pronouncement}: “The god was not allowing them to do these things, saying that Egypt was that land which the rising Nile covers in water, and that Egyptians were those who drink from that river and dwell below the Elephantine polis. Thus, were these things declared to them.” (Ὁ δὲ θεὸς σφεας οὐκ ἔα ποιέειν ταῦτα, φὰς Αἴγυπτον εἶναι ταύτην τὴν ὃ Νεῖλος ἐπιὼν ἄρδει, καὶ Αἰγυπτίους εἶναι τούτους οἱ ἔνερθε Ἐλεφαντίνης πόλιος οἰκέοντες ἀπὸ τοῦ ποταμοῦ τούτου πίνουσι. Οὕτω σφι ταῦτα ἐχρήσθη.) 2.18.3.

Note: Fulfillment is implied at 4.186. The pronouncement seems disconnected. The first half indicates what seems to be the message taken by the consultants, and the latter half, a more poetic description of the extent of Egypt. It seems that the definition of Egypt in the oracle was understood as disallowing their proposed diet. Herodotus uses this oracle to confirm his own idea of the extent of Egyptian territory.

#22. Pelasgian Religion (Dodonaean Tale)

A—B—{P}—D/E(Sb)

A—B—{P}—D/E(Sb)

Crisis: The Pelasgians, ignorant of the names of the gods, finally receive knowledge of their names from the barbarians. 2.52.1.

Consultation: The Pelasgians at Dodona regarding whether they ought to use these names for the gods. (Indirect Question: Ἐπεὶ ὧν ἐχρηστηρίαζοντο ἐν τῇ Δωδώνῃ οἱ Πελασγοὶ εἰ ἀνέλωνται τὰ οὐνόματα τὰ ἀπὸ τῶν βαρβάρων ἦκοντα...) 2.52.2–3.

{Indirect Pronouncement}: “The oracle declared that they use them.” (ἀνεῖλε τὸ μαντήιον χρᾶσθαι) 2.52.3.

Action/Fulfillment (Sb): The Pelasgians use these names and pass them on to the Greeks. (Ἀπὸ μὲν δὴ τούτου τοῦ χρόνου ἔθνον τοῖσι οὐνόμασι τῶν θεῶν χρεώμενοι) 2.52.3.

#23. The Talking Black Dove 1 (Tale of Priestess of Dodona)

{P}—C—D/E(Sb)

{P}—C—D/E(Sb)

{Indirect Pronouncement}: “... that sitting upon an oak, it [the dove] spoke in a human voice that it was necessary that there be an oracle of Zeus there.” (ἰζομένην δέ μιν ἐπὶ φηγὸν αὐδάξασθαι φωνῇ ἀνθρωπική ὥς χρεὸν εἶη μαντήιον αὐτόθι Διὸς γενέσθαι...) 2.55.2.

Conjecture: The Dodonaean consider the words to be a divine utterance. (...καὶ αὐτοὺς ὑπολαβεῖν θεῖον εἶναι τὸ ἐπαγγελλόμενον αὐτοῖσι...) 2.55.2.

Action/Fulfillment (Sb): The Dodonaean establish the oracle. (...καὶ σφεα ἐκ τούτου ποιῆσαι.) 2.55.2.

#24. The Talking Black Dove 2 (Tale of Priestess of Dodona)

{P}—E

{P}—E

Indirect Pronouncement: “They say that the dove, when it arrived among the Libyans, commanded that the Libyans make an oracle.” (Τὴν δὲ ἐς τοὺς Λίβυας οἰχομένην πελειάδα λέγουσι Ἀμμωνος χρηστήριον κελεῦσαι τοὺς Λίβυας ποιέειν.) 2.55.3.

Fulfillment: There is an oracle of Zeus at Ammon. (ἔστι δὲ καὶ τοῦτο Διός.) 2.55.3.

#25. Blindness of Pherus

A—B—{P}—D1(Dc)—D2/E(Sb)

A—B—{P}—D1(Dc)—D2/E(Sb)

Crisis: Pherus casts a spear into a river and goes blind. 2.111.2.

Consultation: “But in the eleventh year, an oracle for him arrived from the city of Bouto ...”

(ἐνδεκάτῳ δὲ ἔτεϊ ἀπικέσθαι οἱ μαντήιον ἐκ Βουτοῦς πόλιος...)

{Indirect Pronouncement}: “But in the eleventh year, an oracle for him arrived from the city of Bouto, [saying] that the time of penalty for him has reached its end and that he will see again after washing his eyes with the urine of a woman, whoever has had sex only with her husband, being inexperienced of other men.” (ἐνδεκάτῳ δὲ ἔτεϊ ἀπικέσθαι οἱ μαντήιον ἐκ Βουτοῦς πόλιος ὥς ἐξήκει τέ οἱ ὁ χρόνος τῆς ζημίας καὶ ἀναβλέψει γυναικὸς οὐρῷ νιψάμενος τοὺς ὀφθαλμούς, ἥτις παρὰ τὸν ἐωυτῆς ἄνδρα μῶνον πεφοίτηκε, ἄλλων ἀνδρῶν ἐοῦσα ἄπειρος.) 2.111.2.

Action 1 (Dc): Pherus tries the urine of his wife, but it does not work. 2.111.3.

Action 2/Fulfillment (Sb): He tries a number of other womens’ urine until he is cured. 2.111.3.

#26. The Death of Mycerinus

B—{P}—#27—D—C(Se)

B—{P}—#27—C—D

Consultation: “There came an oracle for him from the city of Bouto...” (ἐλθεῖν οἱ μαντήιον ἐκ Βουτοῦς πόλιος) 2.133.1.

{Indirect Pronouncement}: “There came an oracle for him from the city of Bouto that having lived only six more years, he was going to die in the seventh.” (ἐλθεῖν οἱ μαντήιον ἐκ Βουτοῦς πόλιος ὥς μέλλοι ἐξ ἑτα μῶνον βιοῦς τῷ ἐβδόμῳ τελευτήσιν.) 2.133.1.

/#27

Action: Attempting to prove the oracle false, Mycerinus orders that lights be lit whenever night falls. 2.133.4–5.

Conjecture (Se): Mycerinus thinks how to prove the oracle false and arranges to double his years by turning the nights into days. (Ταῦτα δὲ ἐμηχανᾶτο θέλων τὸ μαντήιον ψευδόμενον ἀποδέξει, ἵνα οἱ δωδέκα ἑτα ἀντὶ ἐξ ἐτέων γένηται, αἱ νύκτες ἡμέραι ποιεύμεναι.) 2.133.5.

#27. Mycerinus' Complaint

A—B1a—{P}/E(Sc)—B1b

A—B1a—{P}/E(Sc)—B1b

Crisis: Mycerinus is indignant that he has only six years left to live. 2.133.2.

Consultation 1a: Mycerinus reproaches the oracle of Bouto, saying that his ancestors did not pay any attention to the gods, but lived long lives, while he, who paid the gods respect, will die so soon. (Indirect: ... πέμψαι ἐς τὸ μαντήιον τῷ θεῷ ὀνειδισμα ἀντιμεμφόμενον ὅτι ὁ μὲν αὐτοῦ πατήρ καὶ ὁ) πάτρως, ἀποκληρίσαντες τὰ ἱρὰ καὶ θεῶν οὐ μεμνημένοι ἀλλὰ καὶ τοὺς ἀνθρώπους φθείροντες, ἐβίωσαν χρόνον ἐπὶ πολλόν, αὐτὸς δ' εὐσεβῆς ἐὼν μέλλοι ταχέως οὕτω τελευτήσειν. Ἐκ δὲ τοῦ χρηστηρίου αὐτῷ δεύτερα ἐλθεῖν ...) 2.133.2.

{Indirect Pronouncement}/Fulfillment (Sc): “But from the oracle, there came to him additional words, saying that it was even on account of these things that his life was hurrying on, for he did not do what was necessary for him to do. For it was necessary that Egypt fare badly for one hundred and fifty years, and that the two kings before him knew this, but that he did not.” (Ἐκ δὲ τοῦ χρηστηρίου αὐτῷ δεύτερα ἐλθεῖν λέγοντα τούτων εἵνεκα καὶ συνταχύνειν αὐτὸν τὸν βίον· οὐ γὰρ ποιῆσαι μιν τὸ χρεὸν ἦν ποιέειν· δεῖν γὰρ Αἴγυπτον κακοῦσθαι ἐπ' ἔτεα πεντήκοντά τε καὶ ἑκατόν, καὶ τοὺς μὲν δύο τοὺς πρὸ ἐκείνου γενομένους βασιλέας μαθεῖν τοῦτο, κείνον δὲ οὐ.) 2.133.3.

Consultation 1b: Mycerinus heard it. (Ταῦτα ἀκούσαντα τὸν Μυκερίνον...) 2.133.4.

#28. Restitution for the Death of Aesop

D1a(Sf, Sb)—D1b/E(Sb)

D1/E(Sb)

Action 1a (Sf, Sb): “For when the Delphians in obedience to an oracle were often summoning him who would wish to take recompense for the life of Aesop, no one appeared, but another Iadmon, the son of his son Iadmon, took it.” (ἐπεῖτε γὰρ πολλάκις κηρυσσόντων Δελφῶν ἐκ θεοπροπίου ὃς βούλοιο ποινήν τῆς Αἰσώπου ψυχῆς ἀνελέσθαι, ἄλλος μὲν οὐδεὶς ἐφάνη, Ἰάδμονος δὲ παιδὸς παῖς ἄλλος Ἰάδμων ἀνείλετο.) 2.134.4.

Action 1b/Fulfillment (Sb): Delphians offer restitution, and Iadmon accepts it. 2.134.4

#29. The Abdication of Sabacus (Priests' tale)

A—B(Sd, Se)—{P}—C—D/E(Sb)

B(Sd, Se)—{P}—A—C—D/E(Sb)

Crisis: Sabacus had a dream that disturbed him. It seemed to indicate that he should cut the priests in half. 2.139.1.

Consultation (Sd, Se): Sabacus at Ethiopian oracles about an uncertain issue. 2.139.3.

{Indirect Pronouncement}: “For the oracles in Ethiopia that the Ethiopians consult declared that it was necessary that he rule Egypt for fifty years.” (Ἐν γὰρ τῇ Αἰθιοπίᾳ

έόντι αὐτῷ τὰ μαντήια τοῖσι χρέωνται Αἰθίοπες ἀνεῖλε ὥς δέοι αὐτὸν Αἰγύπτου βασιλεῦσαι ἔτεα πεντήκοντα.) 2.139.3.

Conjecture: Herodotus explains that Sabacus believed his time for ruling to be up and was scared by the dream. (Ὡς ὧν ὁ χρόνος οὗτος ἐξήιε καὶ αὐτὸν, ἢ ὅψις τοῦ ἐνυπνίου ἐπετάρασσε...) 2.139.3.

Action/Fulfillment (Sb): Sabacus leaves Egypt. 2.139.3

#30. Rulership in Egypt

D—B(Se, Da)—{P} | C1a/E1/{P}(Sd, Da1)—C1b(Sd, Db1)—D1(Db1) | C1c(Db2)—#31—D2/E2(Db2, Da2)

B(Se, Da)—{P}—D(Dc)— C1a/E1/{P}(Sd, Da1)

Db1: C1b—D1

Db2: C1c—#31—D2/E2(Da2)

Action (Dc): The twelve kings in Egypt put in place special safeguards in order to assure their joint rule as allies. 2.147.3.

Consultation (Se, Da): The kings of Egypt at an uncertain oracle at the very beginning of their reign.

{Indirect Pronouncement}: “It had been declared to them straightway at the beginning when they had entered upon their tyrannies that the one of them who will pour a libation with a bronze bowl in the temple of Hephaestus (1) will rule as king over all of Egypt (2).” (ἐκέχρητό σφι κατ’ ἀρχὰς αὐτίκα ἐνισταμένοισι ἐς τὰς τυραννίδας τὸν χαλκῆ φιάλῃ σπείσαντα αὐτῶν ἐν τῷ ἱερῷ τοῦ Ἡφαίστου, τοῦτον ἀπάσης βασιλεύσειν Αἰγύπτου) 2.147.4.

/

Conjecture 1a/Fulfillment 1/{Pronouncement} (Sd, Da1): A priest mistakenly brings out only eleven cups for a ceremonial libation, and Psammetichus substitutes his helmet without thinking about it (οὐδενὶ δολερῷ νόῳ χρεώμενος, 2.151.1–3). The kings understand a connection between the words of the oracle and the event. (Οἱ δὲ ἐν φρενὶ λαβόντες τό τε ποιηθὲν ἐκ Ψαμμήτιχου καὶ τὸ χρηστήριον ὃ τι ἐκέχρητό σφι, τὸν χαλκῆ σπείσαντα αὐτῶν φιάλῃ τοῦτον βασιλέα ἔσεσθαι μούνον Αἰγύπτου.) 2.151.3.

Conjecture 1b (Sd, Db1): “Remembering the oracle, they [the other kings] did not think it right to kill Psammetichus.” (ἀναμνησθέντες τοῦ χρησμοῦ κτεῖναι μὲν οὐκ ἐδικαίωσαν Ψαμμήτιχον) 2.151.3

Action 1 (Db1): The other kings strip Psammetichous of power and banish him. 2.151.3.

/

Conjecture 1c (Db2): Psammetichus tries to get vengeance and the kingship. 2.152.3–5.

/#31

Action 2/Fulfillment 2 (Db2, Da2): Psammetichus deposes the other kings with the help of Ionians and Carians and becomes the sole ruler of all of Egypt. 2.152.5.

#31. “Bronze Men from the Sea” Oracle

A—B—{P}(Da)—C1(Dc)—C2/E1(Sd, Da1)—D1—E2(Da2)

A—B—{P}(Da)—C1(Dc)— C2/E1(Sd, Da1)—D1—E2(Da2)

Crisis: Banishment and desire of Psammetichus for revenge (...ἐπενόεε τείσασθαι τοὺς διώξαντας.) 2.151.3

Consultation: Psammetichus at Bouto, probably regarding vengeance. (Πέμπαντι δέ οἱ ἐς Βουτοῦν πόλιν ἐς τὸ χρηστήριον τῆς Λητοῦς, ἔνθα δὴ Αἰγυπτίοισι ἐστι μαντήιον ἀψευδέστατο, ἦλθε χρησμὸς...) 2.152.3.

{**Indirect Pronouncement (Da)**}: “An oracle came that his vengeance will come (1) from the sea, when bronze men (χαλκέων ἀνδρῶν) appear (2).” (ἦλθε χρησμὸς ὥς τίσις ἦξει {οἱ} ἀπὸ θαλάσσης χαλκέων ἀνδρῶν ἐπιφανέντων.) 2.152.3.

Conjecture 1 (Dc): Psammetichus disbelieves that bronze men would come as his allies. (Καὶ τῷ μὲν δὴ ἀπιστὴ μεγάλη ὑπεκέχυτο χαλκέους οἱ ἄνδρας ἦξιν ἐπικούρους.) 2.152.4.

Conjecture 2/Fulfillment 1 (Sd, Da1): Learning from a messenger that “men of bronze had arrived from the sea” (χάλκεοι ἄνδρες ἀπιγμένοι ἀπὸ θαλάσσης, 2.152.4), Psammetichus recognizes the fulfillment of the oracle (Ὁ δὲ μαθὼν τὸ χρηστήριον ἐπιτελεόμενον). 2.152.5.

Action 1: Psammetichus allies himself with the Ionians and the Carians, and he gets their help in deposing the other kings. 2.152.5.

Fulfillment 2/[Resolution] (Da2): Psammetichus deposes the other kings. 2.152.5

#32. Nechus' Canal

E1a(Sf) | A—D1a(Sf)—B(Se)—{P}—D1b | E1b

A—B—{P}—D—E1

Fulfillment 1a (Sf): Darius completes the canal begun by Nechus. 2.158.1.

/

Crisis: An incredibly high death toll on laborers during the canal's construction. 2.158.5.

Action 1a: Nechus stops the construction of the canal. 2.158.5.

Consultation (Se): An oracle came about (...μαντήιου ἐμποδίου γενομένου τοιοῦδε...) 2.158.5.

{**Indirect Pronouncement**}: “...when there came about an impending oracle such that he was laboring for the barbarian.” (...μαντήιου ἐμποδίου γενομένου τοιοῦδε, τῷ βαρβάρῳ αὐτὸν προεργάζεσθαι) 2.158.5.

Action 1b: Nechus stops the construction of the canal (2.159.1). See also 4.42.2.

/

Fulfillment 1b: The Persians under Cambyses capture Memphis and depose the king of Egypt. This is the beginning of Persian rule in Egypt (3.13). Darius is said to have extended the canal (4.39.1).

#33. The Thief Who Would Be King

E1a(Sf)—A—B—{P1}/E1b(Sc, Da1)—{P2}/-E2(Da2)—[D1(Da1)—D2(Da2)]

A—B—{P1}/E1(Sc, Da1)—[D1(Da1)]
{P2}/-E2(Sc, Da2)—[D2(Da2)]

Fulfillment 1a (Sf): Amasis is a thief. 2.174.1.

Crisis: People accuse Amasis of thieving their property, but Amasis denies it. 2.174.1.

Consultation: Injured parties and Amasis at nearby Oracles regarding the identity of the thief (Indirect: Οἱ δ' ἄν μιν φάμενοι ἔχειν τὰ σφέτερα χρήματα ἀρνεόμενον ἄγεσκον ἐπὶ μαντήιον, ὅκου ἐκάστοισι εἴη·). 2.174.1.

{Indirect Pronouncement 1}/Fulfillment 1b (Sc, Da1): Some identify Amasis as the thief (πολλὰ μὲν δὴ καὶ ἡλίσκετο ὑπὸ τῶν μαντήϊων). 2.174.1

{Pronouncement 2}/-Fulfillment 2 (Da2): Others do not (πολλὰ δὲ καὶ ἀπέφευγε). 2.174.1.

Action 1 (Da1): Amasis regards those oracles that denounce him with honor. 2.174.2.

Action 2 (Da2): Amasis allows those that failed to name him as a thief to fall into disrepair. 2.174.2.

Note: Compare the test oracle (#4).

#34. The Corpse of Amasis (Egyptian Tale)

-E1a(Sf)—B—{P}—C—-E1b(Se)—D

B—{P}—C—D—-E1

-Fulfillment 1a (Sf): Amasis does not suffer the maltreatment of his corpse that Cambyses ordered, but some other dead man. 3.16.6.

Consultation: “Amasis learned from an oracle” (πυθόμενος ἐκ μαντηίου) 3.16.6.

{Indirect Pronouncement}: “For they say that when Amasis learned from an oracle the things that were going to happen to him when he died, ...” (Λέγουσι γὰρ ὡς πυθόμενος ἐκ μαντηίου ὁ Ἄμασις τὰ περὶ ἐωυτὸν ἀποθανόντα μέλλοντα γίνεσθαι...) 3.16.6.

Conjecture: Amasis considers way to avoid prophecy (ἀκεόμενος τὰ ἐπιφερόμενα). 3.16.6.

-Fulfillment 1b (Se): A different dead man ends up being flogged. 3.16.6.

Action: Amasis buries a different dead man in his tomb, and orders that his son bury his corpse deeper in the chamber. 3.16.6.

Note: Herodotus disbelieves this story and thinks of it as an Egyptian story to save face (3.16.7).

#35. “Wooden Ambush and Red Herald”

A—B—{P}(Sc, Da)—E1(Se, Da1)—C1(Dc)—C2/E2(Sd, Da2)

E1(Da1)—A—B—{P}(Sc)—C1—C2/E2(Sd, Da2)

Crisis: The Samians become incredibly wealthy. 3.57.2.

Consultation: The Samians at Delphi regarding whether their prosperity would last a long time. (Indirect Question: ... ἐχρέωντο τῷ χρηστηρίῳ εἰ αὐτοῖσι τὰ παρεόντα ἀγαθὰ οἷά τέ ἐστι πολλὸν χρόνον παραμένειν·) 3.57.3.

{Direct Pronouncement (Sc, Da)}: “The Pythia declared to them these things: ‘But whenever there should come about a white prytany and a white-browed agora (1), then, in fact, there is need for the wise man to beware of a wooden ambush and a red herald (2).’”

(ἡ δὲ Πυθίη ἔχρησέ σφι τάδε·

Ἄλλ' ὅταν ἐν Σίφῳ πρυτανία λευκὰ γένηται

λεύκοφρὺς τ' ἀγορή, τότε δὴ δεῖ φράδμονος ἀνδρὸς

φράσσασθαι ξύλινόν τε λόχον κήρυκά τ' ἐρυθρόν) 3.57.3.

Fulfillment 1 (Se, Da1): The prytany and agora at the time were made of marble. (Τοῖσι δὲ Σιφνίοισι ἦν τότε ἡ ἀγορὴ καὶ τὸ πρυτανήιον Παρίῳ λίθῳ ἡσκημένα.) 3.57.3.

Conjecture 1 (Dc): The Siphnians are unable to interpret the oracle then or even later. (Τοῦτον τὸν χρησμὸν οὐκ οἶοί τε ἦσαν γνῶναι οὔτε τότε ἰθὺς οὔτε τῶν Σαμίων ἀπιγμένων.) 3.58.1.

Conjecture 2/Fulfillment 2 (Sd, Da2): The Samians arrive in red ships, and the narrator performs a conjecture that connects the oracle to their arrival (Ἐπεῖτε γὰρ τάχιστα πρὸς τὴν Σίφνον προσῖσχον οἱ Σάμιοι, ἔπεμπον τῶν νεῶν μίαν πρέσβεας ἄγουσαν ἐς τὴν πόλιν. Τὸ δὲ παλαιὸν ἅπασαι αἱ νέες ἦσαν μιληλιφέες· καὶ ἦν τοῦτο τὸ ἡ Πυθίη προηγόρευε τοῖσι Σιφνίοισι φυλάξασθαι τὸν ξύλινον λόχον κελεύουσα καὶ κήρυκα ἐρυθρόν.).

Note: After the Siphnians lose a battle, they are forced to pay one-hundred talents of silver. 3.58.2–4.

#36. Cambyses in Ecbatana

E1a(Sf)—B—{P}—C1(Dc)—C2(Sd) | E1b

B—{P}—C1(Dc)—C2(Sd)—E1

Fulfillment 1a (Sf): Cambyses jumps from his horse, and his sword accidentally and mortally slices his thigh open. 3.64.2–3.

Consultation: Cambyses at Bouto regarding unknown issue. 3.64.4.

{Indirect Pronouncement}: “But earlier still, it had been declared to him from the city of Bouto that he will end his life in Ecbatana.” (Τῷ δὲ ἔτι πρότερον ἐκέχρητο ἐκ Βουτοῦς πόλιος ἐν Ἀγβατάνοισι τελευτήσῃν τὸν βίον.) 3.64.4.

Conjecture 1 (Dc): Cambyses thought that he would die in Ecbatana of Media. (Ὁ μὲν δὴ ἐν τοῖσι Μηδικοῖσι Ἀγβατάνοισι ἐδόκεε τελευτήσῃν γηραιός, ἐν τοῖσι οἱ ἦν τὰ πάντα πρήγματα). 3.64.4.

Conjecture 2 (Sd): Narrator claims that the oracle meant Ecbatana of Syria. (τὸ δὲ χρηστήριον (ἐν) τοῖσι ἐν Συρίῃ Ἀγβατάνοισι ἔλεγε ἄρα.) Cambyses put things together (συλλαβὼν δὲ τὸ θεοπρόπιον) when he heard the name of the town. He thinks that he will die soon. (Ἐνθαῦτα Καμβύσῃν τὸν Κύρου ἐστὶ πεπρωμένον τελευτᾶν) 3.64.5.

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Fulfillment 1b: Cambyses dies a number of days later after his leg turns gangrenous (3.66.2).

#37. Polycrates Visits Magnesia

B—{P}—C—E

B—{P}—C—E

Consultation: Polycrates at or with unknown oracles, probably regarding a visit to Magnesia. 3.124.1.

{Indirect Pronouncement}: “Many things of the oracles” were forbidding Polycrates to visit Magnesia. (πολλὰ μὲν τῶν μαντίων) 3.124.1.

Conjecture: Polycrates ignores the advice (Πολυκράτης δὲ πάσης συμβουλῆς ἀλογήσας) and sails to visit Oroetes. 3.125.1.

Fulfillment: Polycrates is brutally killed when he arrives in Magnesia. 3.125.2–3.

Note: Herodotus is more interested in the exact fulfillment of the dream of Polycrates' daughter.

#38. The Ghost of Aristeeas (Metapontine Tale)

A—B1a—{P}—B1b—D/E(Sb)

A—B1a—{P}—B1b—D/E(Sb)

Crisis: The ghost of Aristeeas appeared to the Metapontines and commanded them to build an altar to Apollo and set up a statue of Aristeeas of Proconnesus. 4.15.2.

Consultation 1a: Metapontines at Delphi regarding what the apparition of the man was.

(Indirect Question: ... σφέας δὲ Μεταποντῖνοι λέγουσι ἐς Δελφοὺς πέμψαντας τὸν θεὸν ἐπειρωτᾶν ὅ τι τὸ φᾶσμα τοῦ ἀνθρώπου εἴη...) 4.15.3.

{**Indirect Pronouncement**}: “That the Pythia commanded them to obey the apparition, and [told them] that it will go better for them if they were persuaded.” (Τὴν δὲ Πυθίην σφέας κελεύειν πείθεσθαι τῷ φάσματι, πειθομένοισι δὲ ἄμεινον συνοίσεσθαι) 4.15.3.

Consultation 1b: “... and accepting those things...” (καὶ σφέας δεξαμένους ταῦτα...) 4.15.3.

Action/Fulfillment (Sb): The Metapontines do as ordered. (... ποιῆσαι ἐπιτελέα) 4.15.4.

#39. The Aegeidae (Theraean and Lacedaemonian tale)

A—D/E(Sb)

A—D/E(Sb)

Crisis: All of the children born to the men of the Aegeidae tribe died young. 4.149.2.

Action/Fulfillment (Sb): The Aegeidae dedicate a sanctuary to the Erinyes of Laius and Oedipus according to an oracle (ἐκ θεοπροπίου). 4.149.2.

[**Resolution**]: Thereafter, their children survived. 4.149.2.

#40. Colonization of Libya 1 (Theraean tale)

B1a—{P1(Da1)}—{P1(Da2)}—B1b—C(Dc)—#41—D2/E1(Sb, Da2) | D3/E2(Sb, Da1)

B1a—{P1(Da1)}—{P1(Da2)}—B1b—C(Dc)—#41—D2/E1(Sb, Da2)—D3/E2(Sb, Da1)

Consultation 1a: King Grinnus, Battus, and other delegates at Delphi regarding the unspecified, unrelated matter (Matter: Χρεωμένω δὲ τῷ Γρίννω τῷ βασιλεῖ τῶν Θηραίων περὶ ἄλλων...) 4.150.2.

{**Indirect Pronouncement 1 (Da1)**}: “The Pythia declares that they should found a city in Libya.” (χρᾶ ἡ Πυθίη κτίζειν ἐν Λιβύῃ πόλιν) 4.150.3.

{**Direct Pronouncement 1 (Da2)**}: “But he was responding, saying, ‘I, King, am already both old and heavy to undertake this. Command someone of these younger men to do these things.’ At the same time, he was both saying these things and was pointing at Battus.” (Ὁ δὲ ἀμείβετο λέγων· Ἐγὼ μὲν, ὄναξ, πρεσβύτερός τε ἤδη εἰμὶ καὶ βαρὺς

αείρεσθαι· σὺ δέ τινα τῶνδε τῶν νεωτέρων κέλευε ταῦτα ποιέειν. Ἄμα τε ἔλεγε ταῦτα καὶ ἐδείκνυε ἐς τὸν Βάττον.) 4.150.3–4.

Consultation 1b: They depart. (Τότε μὲν τοσαῦτα, μετὰ δὲ ἀπελθόντες) 4.150.4

Conjecture (Dc): They believed the oracle to be without sense (ἀλογίην εἶχον τοῦ χρηστηρίου) the oracle. The Theraeans did not know where Libya was, nor did they want to send off a colony into the unknown. (οὔτε Λιβύην εἰδότες ὅκου γῆς εἴη οὔτε τολμῶντες ἐς ἀφανὲς χρῆμα ἀποστέλλειν ἀποικίην.) 4.150.4.

/#41

Action 2/Fulfillment 1 (Sb, Da2): The Theraeans arrange for the help of a Cretan fisherman in locating Libya. He takes a small party to the island of Plateia. The Theraeans return to Thera to arrange the colonization with Battus as the leader. 4.151.2–153.

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Action 3/Fulfillment 2 (Sb, Da1): Battus and Theraean colonists found Cyrene in Libya. 4.159.1

#41. Colonization of Libya 2 (Theraean tale)

A—B—{P}—C—D1 | D2/E(Sb)

A—B—{P}—C—D1—D2/E(Sb)

Crisis: No rain falls on Thera for seven years and all but one tree on the island wither. 4.151.1.

Consultation: Theraeans at Delphi presumably regarding the rainfall (Χρεωμένοισι δὲ τοῖσι Θηραίοισι...). 4.151.1.

{**Indirect Pronouncement**}: “To those of Thera who were consulting the oracle, the Pythia proposed the colonization of Libya.” (Χρεωμένοισι δὲ τοῖσι Θηραίοισι προέφερε ἡ Πυθίη τὴν ἐς Λιβύην ἀποικίην) 4.151.1.

Conjecture: Supplied by narrator: There was no expedient way of fulfilling the oracle (Ἐπείτε δὲ κακοῦ οὐδὲν ἦν σφι μῆχος). 4.151.2.

Action 1: The Theraeans arrange for the help of a Cretan fisherman in locating Libya. He takes a small party to the island of Plateia. The Theraeans return to Thera to arrange the colonization with Battus as the leader. 4.151.2–153.

/

Action 2/Fulfillment (Sb): Battus and Theraean colonists found Cyrene in Libya. 4.159.1.

#42. Battus Oracle 1 (Cyrenaean tale)

E1(Sa)—C1a(Se)—A—B—C1b—#43—#44—#45—E2/F(Sb)

A—B—{P}—#43—#44—#45—D2/E(Sb)—D1

Action 1 (Sa): Herodotus thinks that Battus changed his name after he came to Libya on account of the honor accorded him by the Delphic oracle he was given (4.155.1–2). The Theraeans and Cyrenaean think that Battus was his birth name (4.155.1).

Conjecture 1a (Se): Herodotus thinks that the Pythia knew he would be king in Libya, and so she called him Battus, which is the Libyan word for king. (Λίβυες γὰρ βασιλέα βάττον καλέουσι, καὶ τούτου εἵνεκα δοκέω θεσπίζουσιν τὴν Πυθίην καλέσαι μιν Λιβυκῇ γλώσσῃ, εἰδυῖαν ὡς βασιλεὺς ἔσται ἐν Λιβύῃ.) 4.155.2.

Crisis: Battus has a speech defect. 4.155.3.

Consultation: Battus at Delphi regarding his speech defect (Matter: ... ἦλθε ἐς Δελφοὺς περὶ τῆς φωνῆς) (4.155.3)

{**Direct Pronouncement**}: “To the one asking, the Pythia declares these things: ‘Battus, you have come for a voice, but Phoebus Apollo sends you as a founder to flock-nourishing Libya.’”

(ἐπειρωτῶντι δέ οἱ χρᾶ ἡ Πυθίη τάδε·

Βάττ’, ἐπὶ φωνὴν ἦλθες· ἄναξ δέ σε Φοῖβος Ἀπόλλων

ἐς Λιβύην πέμπει μηλοτρόφον οἰκιστῆρα.) 4.155.3.

Conjecture 1b: “... as if she would have said, prophesying in Greek, ‘King, you come for your voice.’” (ὥσπερ εἰ εἴποι Ἑλλάδι γλώσση χρεωμένη· Ὡ βασιλεῦ, ἐπὶ φωνὴν ἦλθες.) 4.155.3.

/#43, 44, and 45

Action 2/Fulfillment 1b (Sb): Battus and Theraean colonists found Cyrene in Libya. 4.159.1.

#43. Battus Oracle 2 (Cyrenaean Tale)

B1a—{P}—B1b—#44—#45—D1/E(Sb)

B1a—{P}—B1b—#44—#45—D1/E(Sb)

Consultation 1a: Battus at Delphi complaining about the irrelevance of the earlier pronouncement to his problem with his voice and asks how he would be capable of founding a colony and what people to take with him. (Direct: Ὁ δ’ ἀμείβετο τοῖσδε· Ὡναξ, ἐγὼ μὲν ἦλθον παρὰ σὲ χρησόμενος περὶ τῆς φωνῆς, σὺ δέ μοι ἄλλα ἀδύνατα χρᾶς, κελεύων Λιβύην ἀποικίζειν· τέφ’ δυνάμει, κοίῃ χειρί; ...

{**Indirect Pronouncement**}: “Saying these things, he was not persuading her to declare other things. But since she prophesied to him the very same things as she did even earlier...” (Ταῦτα λέγων οὐκ ἔπειθε ἄλλα οἱ χρᾶν· ὥς δὲ κατὰ ταῦτα ἐθέσπιζέ οἱ καὶ πρότερον...) 4.155.4.

Consultation 1b: Battus goes back to Thera (...οἶχετο μεταξὺ ἀπολιπὼν ὁ Βάττος ἐς τὴν Θήρην.) 4.155.4.

/#44 and 45

Action 1/Fulfillment (Sb): Battus and Theraean colonists found Cyrene in Libya. 4.159.1

Note: Battus tries but cannot persuade the Pythia to give another oracle related to the purpose of his visit.

#44. Colonization of Libya 3 (Cyrenaean tale)

A—B—{P}—D1(Dc)—D2(Db)—#45—D3/E(Sb)

A—B—{P}—D1(Dc)—D2(Db)—#45—D3/E(Sb)

Crisis: The Theraeans have bad luck and do not know the cause. 4.156.1.

Consultation: The Theraeans at Delphi regarding their present misfortune (Matter: ... οἱ Θηραῖοι ἔπεμπον ἐς Δελφοὺς περὶ τῶν παρόντων κακῶν.) 4.156.1.

{Indirect Pronouncement}: “The Pythia declared to them that things would go better for them if they should found Cyrene in Libya with Battus.” (ἡ δὲ Πυθίη σφι ἔχρησε συγκτιζουσι Βάττω Κυρήνην τῆς Λιβύης ἄμεινον πρήξειν.) 4.156.2.

Action 1 (Dc): The Theraeans send Battus and colonists to Libya, but they return. 4.156.3.

Action 2 (Db): The Theraeans repel Battus and the colonists, and their ships are forced to sail away. Eventually, they settle on the Libyan island of Plateia. 4.156.3.

/#45

Action 3/Fulfillment (Sb): Battus and Theraean colonists found Cyrene in Libya. 4.159.1.

#45. Colonization of Libya 4 (Cyrenaean tale)

A—B1a—{P1a}—B1b—{P1b(Se)}—B1c—D/E

A—B1a—{P1}—B1bc—D/E

Crisis: Battus and the Theraean colonists had settled the island of Plateia for two years, but nothing went well for them. 4.157.1.

Consultation: Battus and the colonists at Delphi regarding their poor circumstances after settling at Plateia (Indirect Complaint: ... ἀπικόμενοι δὲ ἐπὶ τὸ χρηστήριον ἐχρέωντο, φάμενοι οἰκέειν τε τὴν Λιβύην καὶ οὐδὲν ἄμεινον πρήσσειν οἰκέοντες...) 4.157.1.

{Direct Pronouncement 1a}: “And to those things, the Pythia declares these things to them: ‘If having not been there you know flock-nourishing Libya better than I, who have been there, I marvel at your extreme wisdom.’”

(Ἡ δὲ Πυθίη σφι πρὸς ταῦτα χρᾶ τάδε·

Αἰ τὸ ἐμεῦ Λιβύην μηλοτρόφον οἶδας ἄμεινον,

μὴ ἐλθὼν ἐλθόντος, ἄγαν ἄγαμαι σοφίην σευ.) 4.157.2.

Consultation 1b: “After having heard these things, those with Battus sailed back ...”

(Ἀκούσαντες [δὲ] τούτων οἱ ἀμφὶ τὸν Βάττον ἀπέπλεον ὀπίσω...) 4.157.2.

{Indirect Pronouncement 1b (Se)}: “... for in fact, the god was not releasing them from colonization, until they would actually arrive in Libya proper.” (οὐ γὰρ δὴ σφεας ἀπίει ὁ θεὸς τῆς ἀποικίης, πρὶν δὴ ἀπίκωνται ἐς αὐτὴν τὴν Λιβύην.) 4.157.2. Here, the narrator inserts a conjectured interpretation of the oracle as a fact.

Consultation 1c: “Arriving at the island...” (Ἀπικόμενοι δὲ ἐς τὴν νῆσον ...) 4.157.2.

Action/Fulfillment: Battus and the colonists settle on the mainland opposite the island. After six years, local Libyans show them a location to settle. 4.157.3–158.3.

#46. Colonization of Libya 5

A—B—{P}—D/E(Sb)

A—B—{P}—D/E(Sb)

Crisis: The population of Cyrene remains stagnant. 4.159.1.

Consultation: Unknown consultants at Delphi regarding uncertain issue (4.159.3).

{Indirect and Direct Pronouncement}: “... the Pythia urged all Greeks, declaring that they set sail in order to settle Libya with the Cyrenaeans. For the Cyrenaeans were inviting them to a distribution of land. She declared in this way: “But who should come

to much-beloved Libya after land has been divided, I say that it will at some time later be a concern to him.””

(...Ἑλληνας πάντας ὥρμησε χρήσασα ἡ Πυθίη πλέειν συνοικήσοντας Κυρηναίοισι Λιβύην· ἐπεκαλέοντο γὰρ οἱ Κυρηναῖοι ἐπὶ γῆς ἀναδασμῷ· ἔχρησε δὲ ὧδε ἔχοντα· Ὅς δέ κεν ἐς Λιβύην πολυήρατον ὕστερον ἔλθῃ γὰς ἀναδαιομένης, μετὰ οἷ ποκά φαμι μελήσειν.) 4.159.3.

Action/Fulfillment (Sb): A huge number of Greeks arrive at Cyrene. 4.159.4.

Note: There is an issue with the specific fulfillment of the “one arriving late” “being sorry.” We may be able to explain this with an appeal to conjecture. It is as if the Greeks understood the response as a directive, just as Herodotus indicates, rather than as a condition.

#47. Cyrenaean Constitution

A—B—{P}—D/E(Sb)

A—B—{P}—D/E(Sb)

Crisis: The Cyrenaeans are devastatingly defeated in battle, and their king Arcesilaus is murdered by his brother Learchos. 4.160.

Consultation: Cyrenaeans at Delphi regarding a beneficial constitution (Indirect Question: Οἱ δὲ Κυρηναῖοι πρὸς τὴν καταλαβοῦσαν συμφορὴν ἔπεμπον ἐς Δελφοὺς ἐπειρησομένους ὄντινα τρόπον καταστησάμενοι κάλλιστα ἂν οἰκέοιεν.) 4.161.1.

{Indirect Pronouncement}: “The Pythia commanded that they get a mediator from Mantinea among the Arcadians.” (Ἡ δὲ Πυθίη ἐκέλευε ἐκ Μαντινέης τῆς Ἀρκάδων καταρτιστῆρα ἀγαγέσθαι.) 4.161.2.

Action/Fulfillment (Sb): The Cyrenaeans ask for a mediator from the Mantineians, and they are sent Demonax. Demonax divided the people into three tribes based on ethnicity, established precincts and priesthoods for King Battus, and made public most of the property of the kings. 4.161.3.

[Resolution]: The peace lasts a generation, but Arcesilaus, who wanted a return to ancestral privilege, agitates, and is punished.

#48. Doom of Arcesilaus

A—B—{P(Da)}—D1/E1(Sb, Da1)—C—D2/E2(Sb, Da2, Dc)—D3(Dc)—C2/E3(Sb; Da3, 4, 5)—D(Dc)—C3(Se, Dc)—D5/E4(Da6, 7; Dc)—E8(Da8)

A—B—{P(Da)}—D1/E1(Sb, Da1)—C1—D2/E2(Sb, Da2, Dc)—D3(Dc)—C2/E3(Sb; Da3, 4, 5)—C3(Dc)—D4(Dc)—D5/E4(Da6, 7; Dc)—E5(Da8)

Crisis: Arcesilaus fights a civil war, loses, and is exiled from Cyrene. He then prepares an army in support of his return. 4.162.2–163.1.

Consultation: Delegates of Arcesilaus at Delphi regarding his return to Cyrene (Matter: ... ἐστάλῃ ἐς Δελφοὺς ὃ Ἀρκεσίλεως χρησόμενος τῷ χρηστηρίῳ περὶ κατόδου.) 4.163.1.

Direct Pronouncement (Da): “The Pythia declares these things to him: ‘For four Battuses and four Arcesilauses, eight generations of men, does Loxias give to you to rule over Cyrene (1). He encourages you not to make trail for more than this. Going back to

what is yours, be at rest (2). But if you should find a kiln full of amphorae (3), do not fire the amphorae but send them forth to the boundary (4). But if you will fire them (5), do not go into the place where water flows around (6). And if not [if you do] (7), you will die, both yourself and the prize bull (8).’ The Pythia declares those things to Arcesilaus.” (Ἡ δὲ Πυθίη οἱ χρᾶ τάδε· Ἐπὶ μὲν τέσσερας Βάττους καὶ Ἀρκεσίλεως τέσσερας, ὁκτὼ ἀνδρῶν γενεάς, διδοῖ ὑμῖν Λοξίης βασιλεύειν Κυρήνης· πλεόν μέντοι τούτου οὐδὲ πειρᾶσθαι παραινέει. Σὺ μέντοι ἥσυχος εἶναι κατελθὼν ἐς τὴν σεωυτοῦ· ἣν δὲ τὴν κάμινον εὗρης πλέην ἀμφορέων, μὴ ἐξοπτήσης τοὺς ἀμφορέας ἀλλ’ ἀπόπεμπε κατ’ οὔρον· εἰ δὲ ἐξοπτήσεις [τὴν κάμινον], μὴ ἐσέλθῃς ἐς τὴν ἀμφίρρυτον· εἰ δὲ μή, ἀποθανέαι καὶ αὐτὸς καὶ ταῦρος ὁ καλλιστεύων. Ταῦτα ἡ Πυθίη Ἀρκεσίλεω χρᾶ.) 4.163.2–3.

Action 1/Fulfillment 1/[Resolution] (Sb, Da1): Arcesilaus returns to Cyrene and takes back control of the government (4.164.1). This Arcesilaus is the third Arcesilaus.

Conjecture 1: Arcesilaus forgets the oracle. (τοῦ μαντηίου οὐκ ἐμέμνητο) 4.164.2.

Action 2/Fulfillment 2 (Sb, Da2): Arcesilaus pursues revenge. 4.164.2.

Action 3 (Dc): Arcesilaus burns a tower full of his enemies. 4.164.2.

Conjecture 2/Fulfillment 3 (Sb; Da3, 4, 5): Arcesilaus thinks that what he did brought the fulfillment of the oracle (Μαθὼν δὲ ἐπ’ ἐξεργασμένοισι τὸ μαντήιον ἐὼν τοῦτο, ὅτι μιν ἡ Πυθίη οὐκ ἔα εὐρόντα ἐν τῇ καμίνῳ τοὺς ἀμφορέας ἐξοπτῆσαι). 4.164.3.

Action 4 (Dc): Arcesilaus stays far from Cyrene. 4.164.3.

Conjecture 3 (Se, Dc): Arcesilaus fears death and thinks of Cyrene as the place surrounded by water. (δειμαίνων τε τὸν κεχρημένον θάνατον καὶ δοκέων τὴν ἀμφίρρυτον Κυρήνην εἶναι) 4.164.3.

Action 5/Fulfillment 4 (Da6, 7; Dc): Arcesilaus goes to Barce (4.164.4). We are not told explicitly, but Barce is just as surrounded by water as Cyrene, being on the same peninsula (see 4.42.2).

Fulfillment 5 (Da8): Locals and exiles from Cyrene kill both Arcesilaus and his father-in-law Alazeir, presumably the “prize bull.” The fulfillment is emphasized by the narrator with the claim that Arcesilaus failed to understand the oracle, and intentionally or unintentionally, brought about his fate. 4.164.4.

(Fulfillment 1) (Da1): The Battidae would rule until Arcesilaus IV around 440 BCE.

#49. Lacedaemonian Phla

{Indirect Pronouncement}: “They say that there is an oracle for the Lacedaemonians to colonize this island [Phla].” (Ταύτην δὲ τὴν νῆσον Λακεδαιμονίοισι φασὶ λόγιον εἶναι κτίσαι.) 4.178.

#50. The Prophecy of Triton

B1—{P}—B2—D

B1—{P}
 \ B2—D

Consultation 1: Triton shows the Argonauts the way out of the lake in exchange for the tripod they were taking to Delphi, and he prophesies to them. (Πειθομένου δὲ τοῦ Ἰήσονος οὕτω δὴ τόν

τε διέκπλοον τῶν βραχέων δεικνύναι τὸν Τρίτωνά σφι καὶ τὸν τρίποδα θεῖναι ἐν τῷ ἑωυτοῦ ἱρῷ ἐπιθεσπίσαντά τε τῷ τρίποδι καὶ τοῖσι σὺν Ἰήσωνι σημήναντα τὸν πάντα λόγον,...) 4.179.3.

{Indirect Pronouncement}: “Whenever a descendant of the Argonauts should take the tripod, then it is entirely necessary to dwell in one hundred Greek cities around the Tritonian lake.” (ὥς ἐπεὰν τὸν τρίποδα κομίσηται τῶν τις ἐγγόνων τῶν ἐν τῇ Ἀργοῖ συμπλεόντων, τότε ἑκατὸν πόλιν οἰκῆσαι περὶ τὴν Τριτωνίδα λίμνην Ἑλληνίδας πᾶσαν εἶναι ἀνάγκην.) 4.179.3.

Consultation 2: When the native Libyans heard these things... (Ταῦτα ἀκούσαντας τοὺς ἐπιχωρίους τῶν Λιβύων...) 4.179.3.

Action: The native Libyans hide the tripod. 4.179.3.

#51. Persian Passage Through Cyrene

Action: The Cyrenaeans allow the Persians to pass in reverence to an oracle (λόγιόν τι ἀποσιούμενοι). 4.203.1.

#52. Calling the Paeonians

B—{**P**(Da)}—**D**1a/E2a—**C**/E1(Sd, Da1, 2, 4)—**D**1b/E2b(Sb, Da3, 5)

B—{**P**(Da)}—**C**/E1(Sd, Da1, 2, 4)—**D**1/E2(Sb, Da3, 5)

Consultation: Paeonians at an unknown oracle regarding an uncertain issue. 5.1.2.

{Indirect Pronouncement (Da)}: “... when the god declared that they make war against the Perinthians (1) and, if the Perinthians while drawn opposed to them will call them by name (2), that they should attack (3), but if they should not call them by name (4), that they should not attack (5).” (χρήσαντος τοῦ θεοῦ στρατεύεσθαι ἐπὶ Περινθίους καί, ἢν μὲν ἀντικατιζόμενοι ἐπικαλέσωνται σφεας οἱ Περινθιοὶ ὀνομαστὶ βώσαντες, τοὺς δὲ ἐπιχειρέειν, ἢν δὲ μὴ ἐπιβώσωνται, μὴ ἐπιχειρέειν.) 5.1.2.

Action 1a/Fulfillment 2a: “The Paeonians were doing those things.” (ἐποίουν οἱ Παῖονες ταῦτα) 5.1.2.

Conjecture/Fulfillment 1 (Sd, Da1, 2, 4): The Perinthians, after watching the single combat while drawn opposite them (Ἀντικατιζομένων δὲ τῶν Περινθίων ἐν τῷ προαστείῳ), begin to sing the paean, and the Paeonians conjecture this to be the fulfillment of the oracle (συνεβάλοντο οἱ Παῖονες τὸ χρηστήριον αὐτὸ τοῦτο εἶναι... Νῦν ἂν εἴη ὁ χρησμὸς ἐπιτελεόμενος ἡμῖν, νῦν ἡμέτερον τὸ ἔργον.) 5.1.3.

Action 1b/Fulfillment 2b (Sb, Da3, 5): The Paeonians attack and defeat the Perinthians. 5.1.3.

#53. Doreius' Colony 1

A—**B**—**D**(Dc)

A—**B**—**D**(Dc)

Crisis: Doreius does not want to be under the authority of his brother and desires to colonize a different land. 5.42.2.

-Consultation: Doreius did not consult the Delphic oracle. 5.42.2.

Action (Dc): Doreius establishes a settlement in Libya but is driven out by local peoples later. 5.42.3.

#54. Doreius' Colony 2

A—B1a—{P}—C—B1b—#54—E

A—B1a—{P}—C—B1b—#54—E

Crisis: Doreius wants to found a colony, but his first attempt fails. 5.42.2–3.

Consultation 1a: Antichares of Eleon cites an oracle of Laius to Doreius. (Ἐνθαῦτα δέ οἱ Ἀντιχάρης ἀνὴρ Ἑλεώνιος συνεβούλευσε ἐκ τῶν Λαΐου χρησμῶν ...

{**Fragment of Direct Pronouncement**}: “And then Antichares, a man of Eleon, counselled him [Doreius] out of the oracles of Laius to colonize ‘Heracleian land in Sicily’ ...” (Ἐνθαῦτα δέ οἱ Ἀντιχάρης ἀνὴρ Ἑλεώνιος συνεβούλευσε ἐκ τῶν Λαΐου χρησμῶν Ἡρακλείην γῆν ἐν Σικελίῃ κτίζειν...) 5.43.1.

Conjecture “...saying that all the land of Eryx belonged to the Heraclidae, since it came into the possession of Heracles.” (... φᾶς τὴν Ἑρυκος χώραν πᾶσαν εἶναι Ἡρακλειδέων, αὐτοῦ Ἡρακλέος κτησαμένου.) 5.43.1.

Consultation 1b: “When he heard those things, ...” (Ὁ δὲ ἀκούσας ταῦτα...) 5.43.1.

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Fulfillment: Euryleon, called a joint founding figure (μοῦνος δὲ Εὐρυλέων τῶν συγκτιστέων), briefly takes control of Heraclea Minoa in Sicily. 5.46.1–2.

Notes: See Diodorus Siculus 4.23, Pausanias 3.16.4–5. Diodorus actually makes Doreius the founder of Heracleia, though Herodotus says that he died in battle beforehand.

#55. Doreius' Colony 3

A—B—{P}—D1—C1/E—C2—[D2(Dc)]

A—B—{P}—D1—C1/E—[D2(Dc)]

C2

Crisis: The oracle of Laius seems to encourage Doreius to undertake a new effort at colonizing, this time in Sicily. 5.43.1.

Consultation: Doreius at Delphi regarding whether he would conquer the land to which he journeys (Indirect Question: ... ἐς Δελφοὺς οἶχετο χρησόμενος τῷ χρηστηρίῳ, εἰ αἰρέει ἐπ’ ἣν στέλλεται χώραν) 5.43.1.

{**Indirect Pronouncement**}: “The Pythia declares to him that he will take it.” (ἡ δὲ Πυθίη οἱ χρᾶ αἰρήσειν.) 5.43.

Action 1: Doreius went to Italy (5.43) and may or may not have helped the Crotoniates conquer Sybaris (συνελεῖν). 5.44.1.

Conjecture 1/Fulfillment: The Sybarites conjecture that their defeat at the hands of Doreius fulfilled Doreius’ oracle, and as proof of his participation they point to the temple of Athena Crathis that Doreius supposedly founded. 5.45.2.

Conjecture 2: The Crotoniates say that this the oracle was not fulfilled since the descendants of Doreius did not have any land as a result of the campaign. 5.45.2.

Action 2 (Dc): Doreius goes to Sicily, where he is defeated and killed. 5.46.1.

Notes: The counterfactual argument is presented as the opinion of the Sybarites, reasoning about what Doreius should have done. Section 5.46–7 goes into the other members of the expedition that survived longer and temporarily held land in Sicily. Gelon the Tyrant of Syracuse brings up their failure to avenge the death of Dorieus to the Lacedaemonians when they want his help against Xerxes (7.158). He charges the Egestans with the murder of Dorieus. This story explains succession of Leonidas (7.205, see 5.41.3).

#56. “Free the Athenians”

B1a—{P}—B1b—D1(Dc)—D2/E(Sb)

B1a—{P}—B1b—D1(Dc)—D2/E(Sb)

Consultation 1a: Lacedaemonians at Delphi a number of times regarding any matter at all, private or public (... ὅπως ἔλθοιεν Σπαρτιητέων ἄνδρες εἴτε ἰδίῳ στόλῳ εἴτε δημοσίῳ χρησόμενοι...) 5.63.1.

{**Indirect Pronouncement**}: “... that she [the Pythia] proposes for them to free Athens. (... προφέρειν σφι τὰς Ἀθήνας ἐλευθεροῦν.) 5.63.1.

Consultation 1b: “And the Lacedaemonians, since they were always getting the same prophecy...” (Λακεδαιμόνιοι δέ, ὥς σφι αἰεὶ τὸντὸ πρόφαντον ἐγίνετο...) 5.63.2.

Action 1 (Dc): The Spartans send Anchimolius with an army, but he is unsuccessful. 5.63.2–4.

Action 2/Fulfillment (Sb): Cleomenes takes a force himself to Athens (5.64.1) and overthrows the Peisistratidae (5.65.3–5).

Note: The Alcmeonidae were said to have bribed the Pythia to give these pronouncements. See also the summaries at 5.63.1, 5.66.1, 5.90.1, 6.123.2. Hornblower (2013:185) has some helpful sources arguing that the persuasion of the Pythia was actually a true bribe and not just the lavish expenditure on the temple.

#57. Adrastus

A—B1a—{P}—B1b—C1a—D1a/E1a(Sb)—C1b(Se)—D1b/E1b(Sb, Se)

A—B1a—{P}—B1b—C1—D1/E1(Sb)

Crisis: Cleisthenes desires to eliminate Argive Adrastus from Sicyon. 5.67.1–2.

Consultation 1a: Cleisthenes (or delegate) at Delphi regarding whether he should expel Adrastus. (Indirect Question: Ἐλθὼν δὲ ἐς Δελφοὺς ἐχρηστηριάζετο εἰ ἐκβάλῃ τὸν Ἄδρηστον... ἀπελθὼν ὀπίσω...) 5.67.2

{**Indirect Pronouncement**}: “The Pythia declares an oracle to him, saying that Adrastus is King of the Sicyonians, but he, a stone-thrower. Since the god was not granting (παρεδίδου) this, at least, ...” (ἢ δὲ Πυθίῃ οἱ χρᾶ φαῖσα Ἄδρηστον μὲν εἶναι Σικυωνίων βασιλέα, ἐκεῖνον δὲ λευστήρα. Ἐπεὶ δὲ ὁ θεὸς τοῦτό γε οὐ παρεδίδου, ...) 5.67.2. Note that the narrator seems to assert a conjectured interpretation of the oracle as a fact.

Consultation 1b: He went back. (...ἀπελθὼν ὀπίσω...) 5.67.2.

Conjecture 1a: “... he was considering a plan by which Adrastus might himself depart. When he seemed to have discovered one, ...” (...ἐφρόντιζε μηχανὴν τῇ αὐτὸς ὁ Ἄδρηστος ἀπαλλάξεται. Ὡς δὲ οἱ ἐξευρήσθαι ἐδόκεε) 5.67.2.

Action 1a/Fulfillment 1b (Sb): Cleisthenes brought Melanippus, Adrastus' worst enemy, to Sicyon. 5.67.2.

Conjecture 1b (Se): Herodotus explains that Cleisthenes did this because Melanippus and Adrastus were enemies. 5.67.3.

Action 1b/Fulfillment 1b (Sb): Cleisthenes gives Melanippus all of Adrastus' former rites and honors. 5.67.3–5.

#58. "Ask Your Nearest"

A | B1a—{P(Da)}—B1b/E1/F1(Sb, Da2)—{P2}—B1c—C1(Dd1)—C2(Dd2)—C3—
D2(Dc)—D3(Dc)—D4/E2(Sb, Da3)—D5a/E3b(Sb, Da1)—D5a/E3b(Sb, Da1, De)

A— B1a—{P(Da)}—B1b/E1/F1(Sb, Da2)—{P2}—B1c —C1(Dd1)
C2(Dd2)
C3—D2(Dc)—D3(Dc)—D4/E2(Sb, Da3)—D5/E3(Sb, Da1)

Crisis: Thebans are defeated by the Athenians. 5.77.2.

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Consultation 1a: The Thebans at Delphi regarding revenge against the Athenians (Purpose: Θηβαῖοι δὲ μετὰ ταῦτα ἐς θεὸν ἔπεμπον, βουλόμενοι τείσασθαι Ἀθηναίους...). 5.79.1

{**Indirect Pronouncement (Da)**}: "The Pythia said that their revenge would not come from them (1), but was commanding that, after bringing it to the 'many-voiced' (2), they 'ask their nearest' (3)." (Ἡ δὲ Πυθίη ἀπὸ σφέων μὲν αὐτῶν οὐκ ἔφη αὐτοῖσι εἶναι τίσιν, ἐς πολύφημον δὲ ἐξενείκοντας ἐκέλευε τῶν ἄγχιστα δέεσθαι.) 5.79.1.

Consultation 1b/Action 1/Fulfillment 1 (Sb, Da2): The delegates go back and bring the oracle up for debate in the assembly (Ἀπελθόντων ὧν τῶν θεοπρόπων ἐξέφερον τὸ χρηστήριον ἀλίην ποιησάμενοι· ὥς ἐπυνθάνοντο δὲ ...) 5.79.2.

{**Indirect Pronouncement 2**}: λεγόντων αὐτῶν τῶν ἄγχιστα δέεσθαι...

Consultation 1c: (...εἶπαν οἱ Θηβαῖοι ἀκούσαντες τούτων.) 5.79.2.

Conjecture 1 (Dd1): The nearest are their allies who are already with them. (Οὐκ ὧν ἄγχιστα ἡμέων οἰκέουσι Ταναγραῖοί τε καὶ Κορωνάιοι καὶ Θεσπιέες;...) 5.79.2. The thought is dismissed.

Conjecture 2 (Dd2): Thebe and Aegina are daughters of Asopus, and therefore the oracle wants them to call on the Aeginetans. (Ἐγὼ μοι δοκέω συνιέναι τὸ θέλει λέγειν ἡμῖν τὸ μαντήιον.

Ἀσωποῦ λέγονται γενέσθαι θυγατέρες Θήβη τε καὶ Αἴγινα· τουτέων ἀδελφεῶν ἐουσέων δοκέω ἡμῖν Αἰγινήτεων δέεσθαι τὸν θεὸν χρῆσαι τιμωρητῆρων γενέσθαι.) 5.80.

Conjecture 3: No opinion seemed better than Conjecture 2. 5.80.

Action 2 (Dc): The Thebans ask Aeginetans for help, citing the oracle, and the Aeginetans send them the Aeacidae. 5.80.2.

Action 3 (Dc): The Thebans take the Aeacidae into battle but are defeated again. 5.81.1.

Action 4/Fulfillment 2 (Sb, Da3): The Thebans return the Aeacidae and ask the Aeginetans for men. 5.81.1.

Action 5a/Fulfillment 3a (Sb, Da1): The Aeginetans attack Athens while the Athenians are fighting the Thebans somewhere else, and they lay waste to the coast of Attica. 5.81.1–3.

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Action 5b/Fulfillment 3b (Sb, Da1, De): 5.89.1–2.

#59. Epidaurian Statues 1

A—B—{P(Da)}—#59—D/E1(Sb, Da1)—E2(Da2)

A—B—{P(Da)}—#59—D/E1(Sb, Da1)—E2(Da2)

Crisis: There is a famine in Epidauros. 5.82.1.

Consultation: Epidaurians at Delphi regarding the plague (Matter: ... περὶ ταύτης ὧν τῆς συμφορῆς οἱ Ἐπιδαῦριοι ἐχρέωντο ἐν Δελφοῖσι.). 5.82.1.

{**Indirect Pronouncement (Da)**}: “the Pythia commanded them they set up statues of Damia and Auxesia (1) and [told them] that things will go better (ἄμεινον) for them when they set them up (2).” (ἡ δὲ Πυθίη σφέας ἐκέλευε Δαμίας τε καὶ Αὐξησίης ἀγάλματα ιδρύσασθαι καὶ σφι ιδρυσαμένοισι ἄμεινον συνοίσεσθαι.) 5.82.1.

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Action/Fulfillment 1 (Sb, Da1): The Epidaurians build the statues of Damia and Auxesia. 5.82.3.

Fulfillment 2/[Resolution] (Da2): Epidaurian land begins producing. 5.82.3.

#60. Epidaurian Statues 2

B—{P}—D/E(Sb)

B—{P}—D/E(Sb)

Consultation: Epidaurians at Delphi regarding whether to make the statues of bronze or stone (Indirect Question: Ἐπειρώτων ὧν οἱ Ἐπιδαῦριοι κότερα χαλκοῦ ποιέωνται τὰ ἀγάλματα ἢ λίθου.) 5.82.2.

{**Indirect Pronouncement**}: “The Pythia was allowing neither of these things but allowed cultivated olive wood.” (ἡ δὲ Πυθίη οὐδετέρου τούτων ἔα, ἀλλὰ ξύλου ἡμέρης ἐλαίης.) 5.82.2.

Action/Fulfillment/[Resolution] (Sb): After asking the Athenians for olive wood, the Epidaurians make the statues from this olive wood. 5.82.3.

#61. Athenian Revenge

A—B—{P}—D1/E1(Sb, Da2) | D2/E2(Da1, 3, 4, 5)—E3(Da6)

A—B—{P}—D1/E1(Sb, Da2)—D2/E2(Da1, 3, 4, 5)—E3(Da6)

Crisis: The Athenians want to take revenge against the Aeginetans for their attack on Attica. 5.89.1–2.

Consultation: “And an oracle from Delphi came to the Athenians while they were preparing to make war against the Aeginetans, ...” (καὶ Ἀθηναίοισι ὀρμημένοισι ἐπ’ Αἰγινήτας στρατεύεσθαι ἦλθε μαντήιον ἐκ Δελφῶν...) 5.89.2.

{**Indirect Pronouncement (Da)**}: “And an oracle from Delphi came to the Athenians while they were preparing to make war against the Aeginetans, [saying] that having kept away from the injustice of the Aeginetans for thirty years (1), in the thirty first year, and after assigning a sanctuary for Aeacus (2), they should begin the war against the Aeginetans (3), and that their wishes will come true (4); but if they should attack

presently (5), that they will, on the one hand, suffer many things in the intervening time, and will, on the other hand, accomplish many things (6), and will subjugate them in the end (7).” (καὶ Ἀθηναίοισι ὀρμημένοισι ἐπ’ Αἰγινήτας στρατεύεσθαι ἤλθε μαντήιον ἐκ Δελφῶν ἐπισχόντας ἀπὸ τοῦ Αἰγινήτεων ἀδικίου τριήκοντα ἔτεα τῷ ἐνὶ καὶ τριηκοστῷ Αἰακῷ τέμενος ἀποδέξαντας ἄρχεσθαι τοῦ πρὸς Αἰγινήτας πολέμου, καὶ σφι χωρήσειν τὰ βούλονται· ἦν δὲ αὐτίκα ἐπιστρατεύονται, πολλὰ μὲν σφεας ἐν τῷ μεταξύ τοῦ χρόνου πείσεσθαι, πολλὰ δὲ καὶ ποιήσιν, τέλος μέντοι καταστρέψεσθαι.) 5.89.2.

Consultation 1b: “When the Athenians heard the things that were brought back...” (Ταῦτα ὡς ἀπενειχθέντα ἤκουσαν οἱ Ἀθηναῖοι,...) 5.89.3.

Action 1/Fulfillment 1 (Sb, Da2): The Athenians designate a precinct for Aeacus in the agora (τῷ μὲν Αἰακῷ τέμενος ἀπέδεξαν). 5.89.3.

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Action 2/Fulfillment 2 (Da1, 3, 4, 5): The Athenians could not endure to wait for thirty years (5.89.3), and though delayed (6.87), finally attack the Aeginetans (6.88–6.94.1).

Fulfillment 3 (Da6): The beginning of Darius’ invasion of Greece and the beginning of Athenian “suffering and accomplishing.” 6.94.1

(Fulfillment 4) (Da7): The capture of Aegina by the Athenians happens outside of the chronological scope of the narrative.

#62. Lacedaemonian Regret

A—{P}—B(Se)—D—E

A—B—{P}—D—E

Crisis: The Lacedaemonians are troubled by regret over ousting the Peisistratidae, their guest-friends, and by the fact that they were not thanked by the Athenians for having done so. 5.90.1.

{Indirect Pronouncement}: “And still in addition to these things, the oracles were leading them on saying that many and hostile things will come about for them from the Athenians, oracles of which they were ignorant earlier but then learned when Cleomenes brought them to Sparta.” (Ἐτι δὲ πρὸς τούτοις ἐνῆγόν σφεας οἱ χρησμοὶ λέγοντες πολλὰ τε καὶ ἀνάρσια ἔσεσθαι αὐτοῖσι ἐξ Ἀθηναίων, τῶν πρότερον μὲν ἦσαν ἀδαεές, τότε δὲ Κλεομένεος κομίσαντος ἐς Σπάρτην ἐξέμαθον.) 5.90.2.

Consultation (Se): Certain oracles obtained from the Peisistratid collection seized by Cleomenes from the Acropolis. (τῶν πρότερον μὲν ἦσαν ἀδαεές, τότε δὲ Κλεομένεος κομίσαντος ἐς Σπάρτην ἐξέμαθον) 5.90.2.

Conjecture: Fearing the growth of Athenian strength, the Lacedaemonians think that the Athenians would be more inclined to submit to their authority if oppressed by a tyrant. 5.91.1.

Action: The Lacedaemonians send for Hippias and intend to restore him to Athens with the help of their allies. 5.91.1–3.

(Fulfillment): These oracles may be thought of as pointing toward the Peloponnesian War which was being waged when Herodotus was writing. See also Hippias’ threat at 5.93.1–2 which seems to refer to the Corcyrean affair that sparked the Peloponnesian War.

Note: The Spartans allege the counterfeit nature of the oracles in order to explain their desire to return the tyrant Hippias (5.91.2–3).

#63. Cypselus 1 (Soclees)

A—B1a(Db1)—{P(Da)}—B1b(Db2)—C—E1(Da1)—D1(Dc)—E2a(Sa)—D2(Dc) | E2b(Da2, 3)

A—B1a(Db1)—{P(Da)}—B1b(Db2)—C—E1(Da1)—D1(Dc)—D2(Dc)—E2(Da2, 3)

Crisis: Eetion and Labda are unable to have children. 5.92.β.2.

Consultation 1a: Eetion at Delphi regarding children (Matter: ... ἐστάλη ὧν ἐς Δελφοὺς περὶ γόνου.). 5.92.β.2.

{Direct Pronouncement (Da)}: “The Pythia addresses him with these words immediately as he was entering: ‘Eetion, no one honors you, though you are worthy of much honor. Labda will conceive (1), and she will bear a boulder. And it will fall upon the dynastic men (2) and set Corinth to rights (3).’”

(Ἐσιόντα δὲ αὐτὸν ἰθέως ἡ Πυθίη προσαγορεύει τοῖσδε τοῖσι ἔπεσι·

Ἡετίων, οὐτίς σε τίει πολύτιτον ἔοντα.

Λάβδα κύει, τέξει δ’ ὀλοοίτροχον· ἐν δὲ πεσεῖται

ἀνδράσι μουνάρχοισι, δικαιώσει δὲ Κόρινθον.) 5.92.β.2.

Consultation 1b (Db): “The things declared to Eetion are reported by chance to the Bacchiadae... But then, when they learned of Eetion’s oracle...” (Ταῦτα χρησθέντα τῷ Ἡετίωνι ἐξαγγέλλεται κως τοῖσι Βακχιάδῃσι... τότε δὲ τὸ Ἡετίωνι γένεσθαι γόνον διαφθεῖραι.) 5.92.β.3, γ.1.

Conjecture: The Bacchiadae understand this oracle to harmonize with an earlier one they had received (αὐτίκα καὶ τὸ πρότερον συνῆκαν ἐὼν συνῶδον τῷ Ἡετίωνος, 5.92.γ.1). They desire to kill the child when he is born. (ἐθέλοντες τὸν μέλλοντα Ἡετίωνι γίνεσθαι γόνον διαφθεῖραι.)

Fulfillment 1 (Da1): Labda gives birth. 5.92.γ.1.

Action 1 (Dc): The Bacchiadae send a group of men to kill the baby born to Labda and Eetion, but they are moved by pity for the baby the first time. 5.92.γ.1–4.

Fulfillment 2a (Sa): The narrator intervenes to assert that Corinth was fated to suffer evils from the descendants of Eetion. 5.92.δ.1.

Action 2 (Dc): When the gang retruns, Labda hides the child, and the men are not able to carry out their mission. 5.92.δ.1–2.

/

Fulfillment 2b (Da2, 3): Cypselus becomes tyrant of Corinth, seizes private property, and puts many to death. The narrator emphasizes the fulfillment, saying that the oracles proved accurate. 5.92.ε.2.

Note: Spontaneous pronouncement

#64. Cypselus 2 (Soclees)

F1(Sf, Da1)—B1a(Db)—B2a(Sd)—C1a, 2a(Dc)—{P(Se, Da)}—B1b, 2b(Se)—C1b/E2(Da4)—E3(Da2)—D1(Dc)—E4a(Sa, Da3)—E2(Dc) | E4b(Da3)

B2(Sd)—B1(Db)—{P(Se, Da)}—C1(Dc)—E1(Da1)—C2/E2(Sb, Da4)—E3(Da2)—D1(Dc)—D2(Dc)—E4(Da3)

Fulfillment 1 (Sf, Da1): The audience already knows that Eetion is from Petra and is trying to have a child. 5.92.β.1–2.

Consultation 1 (Db): “The things declared to Eetion are reported by chance to the Bacchiadae...” (Ταῦτα χρησθέντα τῷ Ἡετίωνι ἐξαγγέλλεται κως τοῖσι Βακχιάδῃσι...) 5.92.β.3.

Consultation 2 (Sd): “Earlier they [the Bacchiadae] had an oracle pertaining to Corinth that was unmarked, referring to the same thing as that of Eetion ...” (Τοῖσι τὸ μὲν πρότερον γενόμενον χρηστήριον ἐς Κόρινθον ἦν ἄσημον, φέρον τε ἐς τὸντὸ καὶ τὸ τοῦ Ἡετίωνος...) 5.92.β.3.

Conjecture 1a, 2a (Dc): They could not interpret the oracle, although it and the one of Eetion related to the same thing. (χρηστήριον ... ἦν ἄσημον, φέρον τε ἐς τὸντὸ καὶ τὸ τοῦ Ἡετίωνος...) 5.92.β.3.

{**Direct Pronouncement (Da)**}: “saying thus: ‘An eagle breeds among rocks (1), and it will bear a strong lion (2), eating of raw flesh. and he shall produce a mighty, flesh-eating lion, and he shall loosen the knees of many (3). Now mark these things well (4), Corinthians, who dwell around beautiful Peirene and steep Corinth.’”

(... λέγον ὧδε·

Αἰετὸς ἐν πέτρῃσι κύει, τέξει δὲ λέοντα

καρτερὸν ὠμηστήν· πολλῶν δ’ ὑπὸ γούνατα λύσει.

Ταῦτά νυν εὖ φράζεσθε, Κορίνθιοι, οἱ περὶ καλὴν

Πειρήνην οἰκεῖτε καὶ ὄφρυόνεντα Κόρινθον.) 5.92.β.3.

Consultation 1b, 2b: “This earlier oracle belonging to the Bacchiadae was, in fact, without mark. But then, when they learned that of Eetion, ...” (Τοῦτο μὲν δὴ τοῖσι Βακχιάδῃσι γενόμενον πρότερον ἦν ἀτέκμαρτον· τότε δὲ τὸ Ἡετίωνι γενόμενον ὡς ἐπύθοντο, ...) 5.92.γ.1.

Conjecture 2/Fulfillment 2 (Sb, Da4): The Bacchiadae understand this oracle to harmonize with a later one given to Eetion (αὐτίκα καὶ τὸ πρότερον συνῆκαν ἐὼν συνωδὸν τῷ Ἡετίωνος, 5.92.γ.1). They plan to kill the child when he is born.

Fulfillment 3 (Da2): Labda gives birth. 5.92.γ.1.

Action 1 (Dc): The Bacchiadae send a group of men to kill the baby born to Labda and Eetion, but they are moved by pity for the baby the first time. 5.92.γ.1–4.

Fulfillment 4a (Sa, Da3): Narrator intervenes to assert that Corinth was fated to suffer evils from the descendants of Eetion. 5.92.δ.1.

Action 2 (Dc): When the gang returns, Labda hides the child, and the men are not able to carry out their mission. 5.92.δ.1–2

/

Fulfillment 4b (Da3): Cypselus becomes tyrant of Corinth, seizes private property, and puts many to death. 5.92.ε.2.

Note: The Bacchiadae considered this oracle to be ἀτέκμαρτον and ἄσημον. 5.92.γ.1.

#65. Cypselus 3 (Soclees)

F1(Sf, Da1, 2, 3) | B—C—D—E2(Da1)—{P(Se)}—E3(Da1)—E4(Da1, 2)

B—{P}—C—D—E2(Da1)—E4(Da1, 2)—E1(Da3)

Fulfillment 1 (Sf, Da1, 2, 3): The main narrator has already told about some of the woes experienced by the sons of Periander and the decline of the dynasty of the Cypselidae. 3.48–53.

/

Consultation: Cypselus at Delphi (Ἀνδρωθέντι δὲ καὶ μαντευομένῳ Κυψέλῳ ἐγένετο ἀμφιδέξιον χρηστήριον ἐν Δελφοῖσι) (5.92.ε.1)

Conjecture: Cypselus feels encouraged by the Delphic oracle (τῷ πίσυνος γενόμενος). 5.92.ε.1.

Action: Cypselus makes an attempt at tyranny. 5.92.ε.1.

Fulfillment 2 (Da1): Cypselus takes control of Corinth. 5.92.ε.1.

{**Direct Pronouncement (Se)**}: “When he came of age, he got a double-edged oracle while consulting in Delphi,... This was the oracle: ‘This man who enters into my house is blessed, Cypselus son of Eetion, King of famous Corinth (1), he himself and his sons (2), but the sons of his sons, at least, no longer (3).’ This, in fact, was the oracle.”

(Ἀνδρωθέντι δὲ καὶ μαντευομένῳ Κυψέλῳ ἐγένετο ἀμφιδέξιον χρηστήριον ἐν Δελφοῖσι... Ὁ δὲ χρησμὸς ὅδε ἦν·

Ὀλβιος οὗτος ἀνὴρ ὃς ἐμὸν δόμον ἐσκαταβαίνει,

Κύψελος Ἡετίδης, βασιλεὺς κλειτοῖο Κορίνθου,

αὐτὸς καὶ παῖδες, παίδων γε μὲν οὐκέτι παῖδες.

Τὸ μὲν δὴ χρηστήριον τοῦτο ἦν.) 5.92.ε.2.

Fulfillment 3 (Da1): Cypselus becomes tyrant (5.92.ε.2).

Fulfillment 4 (Da1, 2): Cypselus rules for thirty years and his son Periander becomes tyrant. 5.92.ζ.1.

#66. “Loaves in a Cold Oven” 1 (Soclees)

D1a(Sf)—B1a—{P(Sc, Da)}—B1b—C/E2(Sd, Da2)—D1b/E1(Da1)

B1a—{P(Sc, Da)}—B1b—C/E2(Sd, Da2)—D1/E1(Da1)

Action 1a (Sf): Periander strips the women of Corinth and burns their clothes for his Melissa, his wife. 5.92.η.1.

Consultation 1a: Delegates of Periander at Thesprotian oracle of the dead regarding the location of a deposit of a guest-friend (Matter: Πέμψαντι γάρ οἱ ἐς Θεσπρωτοὺς ἐπ’ Ἀχέροντα ποταμὸν ἀγγέλους ἐπὶ τὸ νεκυομαντήριον παρακαταθήκης περὶ ξεινικῆς... 5.92.η.3.

{**Indirect Pronouncement (Sc, Da)**}: “To the one sending messengers about a guest-friend’s deposit to the Thesprotians to the oracle of the dead at the Acheron River, Melissa, after she appeared, said that she would not indicate nor tell plainly in what place the deposit rested, since she was both cold and naked. For she had no use of the clothes buried with her since they were not burned up (1); that a proof to him that she told true things was the fact that Periander put his loaves into a cold oven (2).” (Πέμψαντι γάρ οἱ ἐς Θεσπρωτοὺς ἐπ’ Ἀχέροντα ποταμὸν ἀγγέλους ἐπὶ τὸ νεκυομαντήριον παρακαταθήκης περὶ ξεινικῆς οὔτε σημανέειν ἔφη ἡ Μελίσσα ἐπιφανεῖσα οὔτε κατερέειν ἐν τῷ κεῖται χώρῳ ἢ παρακαταθήκῃ· ῥιγοῦν τε γὰρ καὶ εἶναι γυμνή· τῶν γάρ οἱ συγκατέθαψε ἱματίων ὄφελος εἶναι οὐδὲν οὐ κατακαυθέντων· μαρτύριον δέ οἱ εἶναι ὥς ἀληθεῖα ταῦτα λέγει, ὅτι ἐπὶ ψυχρὸν τὸν ἱπνὸν Περιάνδρος τοὺς ἄρτους ἐπέβαλε.) 5.92.η.2.

Consultation 1b: “But when these things were reported back to Periander...” (Ταῦτα δὲ ὡς ὀπίσω ἀπηγγέλθη τῷ Περιάνδρῳ...). 5.92.η.3.

Conjecture/Fulfillment 2 (Sd, Da2): Periander understands the token of the oracle. He had sex with her corpse. (πιστὸν γάρ οἱ ἦν τὸ συμβόλαιον, ὃς νεκρῷ εὐύσῃ Μελίσσῃ ἐμίγη). 5.92.η.2.

Action 1b/Fulfillment 1 (Da1): Periander strips the women of Corinth and burns their clothes for Melissa, his wife. 5.92.η.3.

#67. “Loaves in a Cold Oven” 2 (Soclees)

A—#65—B—{P}

A—#65—B—{P}

Crisis: Some issue regarding the unknown location of a guest-friend’s deposit. 5.92.η.1–2.
/#65

Consultation: Periander sends delegates back to the oracle of the dead (τὸ δεύτερον πέμπαντι). 5.92.η.4

{**Pronouncement**}: “The ghost of Melissa indicated in what place she put the deposit of the guest-friend.” (ἔφρασε τὸ εἶδωλον τὸ Μελίσσης ἐς τὸν κατέθηκε χώρον τοῦ ξείνου τὴν παρακαταθήκην.) 5.92.η.4.

#68. Hippias’ Threat

C—D

C—D

Conjecture: “Hippias responded to him, calling on the very same gods, that in actual fact, Corinthians above all would long for the Peisistratidae, when the appointed days should arrive for them to be grieved by the Athenians.” (Ἰππίης δὲ αὐτὸν ἀμείβετο τοὺς αὐτοὺς θεοὺς ἐπικαλέσας ἐκείνῳ, ἧ μὲν Κορινθίους μάλιστα πάντων ἐπιποθήσειν Πεισιστρατίδας, ὅταν σφι ἦκωσι ἡμέραι αἱ κύριαι ἀνιᾶσθαι ὑπ’ Ἀθηναίων.) 5.93.1. The narrator says that Hippias said this out of his extensive knowledge of oracles. 5.93.2.

Action: The allies side with Soclees’ opinion and force the Lacedaemonians to back down. 5.93.2–94.1.

(**Fulfillment**): This threat seems to point toward the Corcyrean affair that sparked the Peloponnesian War, which would certainly have been well-known to Herodotus’ audience.

#69. The Head of Onesilus

A—B—{P}—D/E

Crisis: Bees build a hive in the severed head of Onesilus and fill it with honey where it is nailed at the city gate of Amathous. 5.114.1.

Consultation: Amathousians at unknown oracle regarding the portent of bees in the head. (ἐχρέωντο γὰρ περὶ αὐτῆς οἱ Ἀμαθούσιοι) 5.114.2.

{**Indirect Pronouncement**}: The oracle tells them to bury the head, treat Onesilus like a hero with an annual festival, and that things will go better for them. (ἐμαντεύθη σφι τὴν μὲν κεφαλὴν κατελόντας θάψαι, Ὀνησίλω δὲ θύειν ὡς ἥρωι ἀνὰ πᾶν ἔτος, καὶ σφι ποιεῦσι ταῦτα ἄμεινον συνοίσεσθαι.) 5.114.2

Action/Fulfillment: Herodotus says that the Amathousians do these things still even in his own day. 5.114.2.

#70. Double Oracle 1

C1a/E1a—B—{P(Da)}—C1b/E1b(Da1)—C2/E2(Da2)

B—{P(Da)}—E1(Da1)—E2(Da2)—[C]

Conjecture/Fulfillment 1 (Sf): The city of Miletus is sacked by the Persians. Herodotus makes the connection to the oracle in a natural result clause. (ὥστε συμπεσεῖν τὸ πάθος τῷ χρηστηρίῳ τῷ ἐς Μίλητον γενομένῳ) 6.18.

Consultation: The Argives at Delphi regarding the survival of their city (Matter: Χρεωμένοισι γὰρ Ἀργεῖοισι ἐν Δελφοῖσι περὶ σωτηρίας τῆς πόλιος τῆς σφετέρης...). 6.19.1.

{Direct Pronouncement (Da)}: “What things she [the Pythia] declared to the Milesians though not present, hold thus: ‘And then, in fact, Milesian, contriver of evil deeds, you will bear a dinner and splendid gifts for many, and your wives will wash the feet of many long-haired men (1), and our temple at Didyma will be a care for others (2).’” (τὰ δὲ τοῖσι Μιλησίοισι οὐ παρεοῦσι ἔχρησε ἔχει ὧδε.

Καὶ τότε δὴ, Μίλητε, κακῶν ἐπιμήχανε ἔργων,
πολλοῖσιν δεῖπνόν τε καὶ ἀγλαὰ δῶρα γενήσῃ,
σαὶ δ’ ἄλοχοι πολλοῖσι πόδας νίψουσι κομήταις,
νηοῦ δ’ ἡμετέρου Διδύμοις ἄλλοισι μελήσει.) 6.19.2.

Conjecture/Fulfillment 1b (Da1): Men of Miletus are killed by “long-haired” Persians and their women and children become slaves. (ἄνδρες μὲν οἱ πλέονες ἐκτείνοντο ὑπὸ τῶν Περσέων ἐόντων κομητέων, γυναῖκες δὲ καὶ τέκνα ἐν ἀνδραπόδων λόγῳ ἐγίνοντο) 6.19.3.

Conjecture /Fulfillment 2 (Da2): The sanctuary of Didyma is sacked (ἰρὸν δὲ τὸ ἐν Διδύμοισι, ὁ νηὸς τε καὶ τὸ χρηστήριον, συληθέντα ἐνεπίμπρατο.) 6.19.3. This is an unusual type of “care,” but the narrator emphasizes the fulfillment of the oracle just a bit earlier.

#71. Miltiades the Tyrant 1

F1a(Sf)—A—B—{P(Da)}—D1(Dc)—D2 | E2(Da2)—D3/E3(Da1)—#70—D4/E1b (Da1)

A—B—{P(Da)}—D1(Dc)—D2—E2(Da2)—D3/E3(Da1)—#70—D4/E1(Da1)

Fulfillment 1a (Sf): Miltiades is the tyrant of the cities in the Chersonese. 6.34.1.

Crisis: A war is brewing between the Dolonci and the Apsinthians. 6.34.1.

Consultation: Kings of the Dolonci at Delphi regarding the war (Matter: ... ἐς Δελφοὺς ἔπεμψαν τοὺς βασιλέας περὶ τοῦ πολέμου χρησομένους.). 6.34.1.

{Indirect Pronouncement (Da)}: “The Pythia declared to them that they should bring as colony-founder to this land (1) that one who would first summon them into his hospitality after they have left the temple (2). (Ἡ δὲ Πυθίη σφι ἀνεῖλε οἰκιστὴν ἐπάγεσθαι ἐπὶ τὴν χώραν τοῦτον ὃς ἂν σφεας ἀπιόντας ἐκ τοῦ ἱεροῦ πρῶτος ἐπὶ ξείνια καλέσῃ.) 6.34.2.

Action 1 (Dc): The Dolonci travel down Sacred Way through Phocis and Boeotia but encounter no one. 6.34.2

Action 2: They travel toward Athens. 6.34.2.

/

Fulfillment 2 (Da2): Miltiades offers them hospitality. 6.35.2.

Action 3/Fulfillment 3 (Da1): The Dolonci reveal the oracle to Miltiades and ask him to obey the god. 6.35.2.

/#70

Action 4/Fulfillment 1b (Da1): After confirming with the oracle, Miltiades goes with the Dolonci and is installed as tyrant. 6.36.1.

[Resolution]: Under Miltiades the Dolonci are able to repel the invading Apsinthians. 6.37.1

#72. Miltiades the Tyrant 2

E1a(Sf) | B—{P}—D/E1a(Sb)—R

B—{P}—D/E1(Sb)—R

Fulfillment 1a (Sf): Miltiades is the tyrant of the cities in the Chersonese. 6.34.1.

/

Consultation: Miltiades at Delphi regarding whether he ought to accept the proposal of the Dolonci (Αὐτίκα δὲ ἐστάλη ἐς Δελφοὺς ἐπειρησόμενος τὸ χρηστήριον εἰ ποιοῖ τὰ περ αὐτοῦ οἱ Δόλογχοι προσεδέοντο.). 6.35.3.

{Indirect Pronouncement}: Pythia orders him to do it (Κελευούσης δὲ καὶ τῆς Πυθίης...). 6.36.1.

Action/Fulfillment 1a (Sb): Miltiades sails to the land of the Dolonci with other Athenians and takes possession of it, and the Dolonci install him as tyrant. 6.36.1.

#73. Spartan Crisis of Kingship 1

A—B—{P}—C1(Dd)—C2a(Dd)—D1—C2b(Se)—D2/E2(Sb)

A—B—{P}—C1(Dd)
C2(Dd)—D1—D2/E2(Sb)

Crisis: Argeia, wife of King Aristodemus, gives birth to twins, and the Spartans cannot tell which of the two is the older. Argeia also refuses to help them distinguish the two. 6.52.2–4.

Consultation: The Spartans at Delphi regarding the issue of the twins (Indirect Question: ... πέμπειν ἐς Δελφοὺς ἐπειρησομένους ὃ τι χρήσονται τῷ πρήγματι.) 6.52.4.

{Indirect Pronouncement}: “[That] the Pythia commanded them to regard both children as kings (1), but to honor the elder more (2). On the one hand, the Pythia declared those things to them...” (τὴν δὲ Πυθίην σφέας κελεύειν ἀμφοτέρω τὰ παιδιά ἡγήσασθαι βασιλέας, τιμᾶν δὲ μᾶλλον τὸν γεραίτερον. Τὴν μὲν δὴ Πυθίην ταῦτά σφι ἀνελεῖν...) 6.52.5.

Conjecture 1 (Dd): The Spartans are confused about how they could follow through with the command to honor the elder more. (... τοῖσι δὲ Λακεδαιμονίοισι ἀπορέουσι οὐδὲν ἥσσαν...) 6.52.5.

Conjecture 2a (Dd): Panites suggests observing Argeia to see whether she showed any preference between the children. (τοῖσι δὲ Λακεδαιμονίοισι ἀπορέουσι οὐδὲν ἥσσαν ὅπως ἐξεύρωσι αὐτῶν τὸν πρεσβύτερον ὑποθέσθαι ἄνδρα Μεσσήνιον τῷ οὐνομα εἶναι Πανίτην. Ὑποθέσθαι δὲ τοῦτον τὸν Πανίτην τάδε τοῖσι Λακεδαιμονίοισι, φυλάξαι τὴν γεναμένην ὁκότερον τῶν παιδίων πρότερον λούει καὶ σιτίζει· ἦν δὲ πλανᾶται καὶ ἐκείνη ἐναλλάξ ποιεῦσα, δηλὰ σφι ἔσσεσθαι ὥς οὐδὲ ἐκείνη πλέον οὐδὲν οἶδε, ἐπ’ ἄλλην τε τραπέσθαι σφέας ὁδόν.) 6.52.5–6.

Action 1: The Spartans follow the advice of Panites and determine that Argeia showed a preference for Eurysthenes. 6.52.7.

Conjecture 2b (Se): The child that Argeia honors more must be the elder. (Λαβόντας δὲ τὸ παιδίον τὸ τιμώμενον πρὸς τῆς γειναμένης ὡς ἐὸν πρότερον...) 6.52.7.

Action 2/Fulfillment 2 (Sb): The Spartans support Eurysthenes at the public expense. 6.52.7.

#74. Spartan Crisis of Kingship 2

A—B—{P}/E(Sc)—[D]

A—B—{P}/E(Sc)—[D]

Crisis: Leotychidas challenges the legitimacy of Demaratus' blood-relation to King Ariston and of his kingship. 6.63–65.

Consultation: Spartans, at the prompting of Cleomenes, at Delphi regarding whether Demaratus was the son of Ariston (Indirect Question: Τέλος δὲ ἐόντων περὶ αὐτῶν νεικέων ἔδοξε Σπαρτιήτησι ἐπειρέσθαι τὸ χρηστήριον τὸ ἐν Δελφοῖσι εἰ Ἀρίστωνος εἴη παῖς ὁ Δημάρητος.... ἐπειρωτώντων τῶν θεοπρόπων...). 6.66.1–2.

{**Indirect Pronouncement**}/**Fulfillment (Sc):** “Thus in fact the Pythia [Periallus], when the sacred delegates asked, was judging that Demaratus was not the son of Ariston.”

(Οὕτω δὲ ἡ Πυθίη ἐπειρωτώντων τῶν θεοπρόπων ἔκρινε μὴ Ἀρίστωνος εἶναι Δημάρητον παῖδα.) 6.66.2–3.

Action: Demaratus is deposed. 6.67.1.

Note: The truth about the bribery came out and the Pythia lost her position (6.66.3). This story is mentioned again at 6.75.3.

#75. Cleomenes and Argos (Argive tale)

D1a(Sf)—B—{P}—D2(Dc) | D1b—C/E(Sd)—[D3]

B—{P}—D2(Dc)—D1—C/E(Sd)—[D3]

Action 1a (Sf): Cleomenes executes Argives seeking refuge in a grove and burns down the grove itself. 6.75.3.

Consultation: Cleomenes at Delphi regarding uncertain crisis (Κλεομένει γὰρ μαντευομένῳ ἐν Δελφοῖσι...). 6.76.1.

{**Indirect Pronouncement**}: “For when Cleomenes was consulting at Delphi, it was declared to him that he would capture Argos.” (Κλεομένει γὰρ μαντευομένῳ ἐν Δελφοῖσι ἐχρήσθη Ἄργος αἰρήσειν.) 6.76.1.

Action 2 (Dc): Cleomenes launches an attack on the territory of Argos. 6.76.1.

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Action 1b: Cleomenes executes Argives seeking refuge in a grove and burns down the grove itself. 6.79–80.

Conjecture/Fulfillment (Sd): Cleomenes learns that the name of the grove is Argus, after the hero, and assumes the oracle has been fulfilled (6.80). (ἽΩ Ἀπολλων χρηστήριε, ἧ μεγάλως με ἠπάτηκας φάμενος Ἄργος αἰρήσειν. Συμβάλλομαι δ' ἐξήκειν μοι τὸ χρηστήριον.) See also his defense to the Ephors at 6.82.1.

Action 3: Eventually, Cleomenes decides to return to Sparta, later alleging unfavorable omens for continuing his campaign. 6.81–2.

Note: Cleomenes is acquitted of wrongdoing by a large margin (6.82.2).

#76. Double Oracle 2

B1a(Sf) | C(Sf)—B1b(Se)—{P(Da)}—D—E

B—{P(Da)}—C—D—E

Consultation 1a (Sf): The Argives at Delphi regarding the survival of their city (Matter: Χρεωμένοισι γὰρ Ἀργείοισι ἐν Δελφοῖσι περὶ σωτηρίας τῆς πόλιος τῆς σφετέρης...). 6.19.1.
/

Conjecture (Sf): The Argives become afraid of being conquered by a trick. 6.77.1.

Consultation 1b (Se): The Milesians at Delphi 6.77.2.

{**Direct Pronouncement (Da)**}: “For, in fact, the oracle, which the Pythia declared to them in common with the Milesians, was, in their opinion, was pertaining to this matter, saying thus, ‘But whenever the female, having conquered the male, should drive him out and be exalted in glory among the Argives, then shall there be many torn-cheeks of the Argives. This one even of man hereafter will say: ‘A terrible triple-coiled snake has been destroyed, overcome by the spear.’”

(Καὶ γὰρ δὴ σφι ἐς τοῦτο τὸ πρῆγμα εἶχε τὸ χρηστήριον, τὸ ἐπίκοινα ἔχρησε ἡ Πυθίη τοῦτοις τε καὶ Μιλησίοις λέγον ὧδε·

Ἀλλ’ ὅταν ἡ θήλεια τὸν ἄρσενά νικήσασα

ἐξελάσῃ καὶ κῦδος ἐν Ἀργείοισιν ἄρῃται,

πολλὰς Ἀργείων ἀμφιδρυφέας τότε θήσει.

Ὡς ποτέ τις ἐρέει καὶ ἐπεσσομένων ἀνθρώπων·

Δεινὸς ὄφιν τριέλικτος ἀπώλετο δοῦρι δαμασθεῖς.) 6.77.2.

Action: The Argives mirror the actions of the Lacedaemonians on the battlefield. 6.77.3.

Fulfillment: Cleomenes gives the order for the Lacedaemonians to attack when the signal for breakfast is given (6.78.1). The Lacedaemonians attack and defeat the Argives by this stratagem (6.78.2).

#77. Glaucus the Cheat 1 (Leotychidas’ tale)

A—B1a—{P}—B1b—#76—D—E

A—B1a—{P}—B1b—#76—D—E

Crisis: Glaucus wants to deny the return of a deposit to a certain Milesian most convincingly. 6.86.β.1–2.

Consultation: Glaucus at Delphi regarding whether he could take the deposited money by swearing taking back an oath. (Indirect Question: Γλαῦκος δὲ ἐπορεύετο ἐς Δελφοὺς χρησόμενος τῷ χρηστηρίῳ. Ἐπειρωτῶντα δὲ αὐτὸν τὸ χρηστήριον εἰ ὄρκῳ τὰ χρήματα λήισηται...) 6.86.γ.1,

{**Direct Pronouncement**}: “The Pythia follows with these words: ‘Glaucus, son of Epicydas, it is more profitable immediately to win by an oath and to take the money. Swear, since death, at least, stays the trustworthy man. But the child of Oath is nameless and neither does he have hands nor feet, but swiftly he pursues, until, catching them, he

destroys a whole family and a whole house. But the family of a trustworthy man is better later.”

(ἡ Πυθίη μετέρχεται τοῖσδε τοῖσι ἔπεσι·
Γλαῦκ’ Ἐπικυδεΐδῃ, τὸ μὲν αὐτίκα κέρδιον οὕτω
ὄρκῳ νικῆσαι καὶ χρήματα λήσασσθαι·
ὄμνυ, ἐπεὶ θάνατός γε καὶ εὖορκον μένει ἄνδρα.
Ἀλλ’ Ὀρκου πάϊς ἔστιν, ἀνώνυμος οὐδ’ ἐπὶ χεῖρες
οὐδὲ πόδες· κραιπνὸς δὲ μετέρχεται, εἰς ὃ κε πᾶσαν
συμμάρψας ὀλέσῃ γενεὴν καὶ οἶκον ἅπαντα·
ἄνδρὸς δ’ εὖορκου γενεὴ μετόπισθεν ἀμείνων.) 6.86.γ.2.

Consultation 1b: “When he heard these things, ...” (Ταῦτα ἀκούσας...) 6.86.γ.2.

/#76

Action: Glaucus returns the deposit to the Milesian. 6.86.δ.

Fulfillment: There are no more relatives of Glaucus. (Γλαύκου νῦν οὔτε τι ἀπόγονον ἔστι οὐδὲν οὔτ’ ἰστίη οὐδεμία νομιζομένη εἶναι Γλαύκου, ἐκτέτριπταί τε πρόρριζος ἐκ Σπάρτης.) 6.86.δ.

#78. Glaucus the Cheat 2 (Leotychidas’ tale)

A—B—{P}—D—E

A—B—{P}—D—E

Crisis: Glaucus is dismayed by the words of the first oracle. 6.86.γ.2.

Consultation: Glaucus at Delphi regarding forgiveness (Like Indirect Question: ὁ Γλαῦκος συγγνώμην τὸν θεὸν παραιτέτο αὐτῷ ἴσχειν τῶν ῥηθέντων ...). 6.86.γ.2.

{Indirect Pronouncement}: “The Pythia said that testing the god and acting are the same.” (ἡ δὲ Πυθίη ἔφη τὸ πειρηθῆναι τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ τὸ ποιῆσαι ἴσον δύνασθαι.) 6.86.γ.2

Action: Glaucus returns the deposit to the Milesian. 6.86.δ.

Fulfillment: There are no more relatives of Glaucus (6.86.δ). His intention to defraud counted as having sworn an oath dishonestly, and therefore, the lack of later offspring bears out the fulfillment.

#79. Delian Earthquake

E(Sf)—{P(Se)}

{P}—E

Fulfillment (Sf): An earthquake shakes Delos for the first and only time. 6.98.1, 3.

{Direct Pronouncement (Se)}: “Thus, it was not strange that Delos had an earthquake though it was unshaken before. About this it was also written in an oracle thus: ‘I shall move even Delos although it is unshaken.’” (Οὕτω οὐδὲν ἦν ἀεικὲς κινηθῆναι Δῆλον τὸ πρὶν ἐοῦσαν ἀκίνητον. Καὶ ἐν χρησμῷ ἦν γεγραμμένον περὶ αὐτῆς ὥδε·
κινήσω καὶ Δῆλον ἀκίνητόν περ ἐοῦσαν.) 6.98.3.

#80. Gilded Statue of Apollo

Action: The Thebans take a statue of Apollo to Delium near Thebes (ἐκ θεοπροπίου). 6.118.3.

νηὺς ἐκ τῆς ὑμετέρης ἐς τὴν ἡμετέρην, τότε παραδώσομεν. ἐπιστάμενοι τοῦτο εἶναι ἀδύνατον γενέσθαι· ἡ γὰρ Ἀττικὴ πρὸς νότον κεῖται πολλὸν τῆς Λήμνου.) 6.139.4.

Action 3/Fulfillment 1 (Db2, Sb, Da2): After the Athenians gained control of the Chersonese, Miltiades sailed from there to Lemnos in a single day. When he arrived, Miltiades announced that the fulfillment of the oracle (Μιλτιάδης ὁ Κίμωνος ἐτησιέων ἀνέμων κατεστηκότων νηὶ κατανύσας ἐξ Ἐλαιοῦντος τοῦ ἐν Χερσονήσῳ ἐς Λῆμνον προηγόρευε ἐξιέναι ἐκ τῆς νήσου τοῖσι Πελασγοῖσι, ἀναμιμνήσκων σφεας τὸ χρηστήριον, τὸ οὐδαμὰ ἥλπισαν σφίσι οἱ Πελασγοὶ ἐπιτελέεσθαι.) 6.140.1.

Conjecture 1 (Db3): The Hephaestians are persuaded. 6.140.2.

Conjecture 2 (Db4): The Myrinaeans refuse to believe that the Chersonese is Attic. 6.140.2.

Action 4/Fulfillment 2 (Da2, Db2): The Athenians besiege the Myrinaeans, and when the Myrinaeans relent, they hold control of Lemnos. 6.140.2.

#83. Onomacritus 1

{Pronouncement}: “For Onomacritus was expelled from Athens by Hipparchus the son of Peisistratus, after he caught by Lasus of Hermione in the act of inserting an oracle into the collection of Musaeus that the islands around Lemnos would disappear below the sea.”

(Ἐξηλάσθη γὰρ ὑπὸ Ἰπάρχου τοῦ Πεισιστράτου ὁ Ὀνομάκριτος ἐξ Ἀθηνέων, ἐπ’ αὐτοφώρῳ ἀλοὺς ὑπὸ Λάσου τοῦ Ἑρμιονέος ἐμποιέων ἐς τὰ Μουσαίου χρησμὸν ὡς αἱ ἐπὶ Λήμνῳ ἐπικείμεναι νῆσοι ἀφανιοῖατο κατὰ τῆς θαλάσσης.) 7.6.3.

#84. Onomacritus 2

A—B—{P(Da)}—E1a | E1b | D/E1(Da1)—E2(Da2)

A—B—{P(Da)}—E1—D/E1(Da1)—E2(Da2)

Crisis: The central question at the beginning of the reign of Xerxes is given by Mardonius at 7.5.2. This question is whether to seek revenge against the Egyptians and the Athenians, for their obstinacy and successful overthrow of Persian power.

Consultation: Xerxes consults the oraclemonger Onomacritus, a collector of the oracles of Musaeus, regarding aspects of his proposed expedition. (Τότε δὲ συναναβάς, ὅκως ἀπίκειτο ἐς ὅψιν τὴν βασιλέως, λεγόντων τῶν Πεισιστρατιδέων περὶ αὐτοῦ σεμνοῦς λόγους, κατέλεγε τῶν χρησμῶν.) 7.6.4.

{Indirect Pronouncement (Da)}: “Then, going east, whenever he would arrive in the sight of the king, since the Peisistratidae were saying grand things about him, he was relating oracles. If there should be something bearing failure for the barbarian, he was saying nothing of these, but he was telling selectively the most favorable ones, explaining both that it was necessary that the Hellespont be bridged by a Persian man (1) and that there be an expedition (2).” (Τότε δὲ συναναβάς, ὅκως ἀπίκειτο ἐς ὅψιν τὴν βασιλέως, λεγόντων τῶν Πεισιστρατιδέων περὶ αὐτοῦ σεμνοῦς λόγους, κατέλεγε τῶν χρησμῶν· εἰ μὲν τι ἐνέοι σφάλμα φέρον τῷ βαρβάρῳ, τῶν μὲν ἔλεγε οὐδέν, ὁ δὲ τὰ εὐτυχέστατα ἐκλεγόμενος ἔλεγε, τὸν τε Ἑλλήσποντον ὡς ζευχθῆναι χρεὸν εἶη ὑπ’ ἀνδρὸς Πέρσεω, τὴν τε ἔλασιν ἐξηγεόμενος.) 7.6.4.

Conjecture 1a: Xerxes is persuaded to wage war against Greece. (Ὡς δὲ ἀνεγνώσθη Ξέρξης στρατεύεσθαι ἐπὶ τὴν Ἑλλάδα). 7.7.1.

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Conjecture 1b: Xerxes proposes to build a bridge across the Hellespont. (μέλλω ζεύξας τὸν Ἑλλήσποντον ἐλᾶν στρατὸν διὰ τῆς Εὐρώπης ἐπὶ τὴν Ἑλλάδα, ἵνα Ἀθηναίους τιμωρήσωμαι ὅσα δὴ πεποιήκασι Πέρσας τε καὶ πατέρα τὸν ἐμόν.) 7.8.β.1.

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Action/Fulfillment 1 (Da1): Xerxes builds the bridge. 7.33.1–7.37.1.

Fulfillment 2 (Da2): The rest of his invasion follows, which fulfills the other part of the oracle.

#85. The Hero Artachaeas the Achaemenid Persian

Action: The Acanthians sacrifice to Artachaeas as a hero (ἐκ θεοπροπίου). 7.117.2.

#86. “Flee to the Ends of the Earth”

A—B1a—{P}—B1b—#85—D/E1(Sb, Da1)—E2(Da2)

A—B1a—{P}—B1b—D/E1(Sb, Da1)—E2(Da2)

Crisis: Xerxes’ invasion threatens Athens in particular. 7.138.

Consultation 1a: Athenians at Delphi (regarding the invasion of Xerxes) (Πέμπαντες γὰρ οἱ Ἀθηναῖοι ἐς Δελφοὺς θεοπρόπους χρηστηριάζεσθαι ἦσαν ἔτοιμοι· καὶ σφι ποιήσασι περὶ τὸ ἱρὸν τὰ νομιζόμενα, ὥς ἐς τὸ μέγαρον ἐσελθόντες ἴζοντο...) 7.140.1,

{**Direct Pronouncement**}: Spontaneously: “When they had performed the accustomed preliminaries for the temple, as they were taking their seats just after entering the megaron, the Pythia, whose name was Aristonice, declares these things to them: “Miserable men, why do you sit? Leaving, flee the homes and lofty peaks of the wheel-formed city to the ends of earth (1). For the head does not remain in place nor the body, nor feet below, nor even hands, nor anything in between is left, but they are unenviable. For both fire and sharp Ares are crashing down upon it, following a Syrian-born chariot. Many and other walled cities will it destroy (2), and not yours alone, and many temples of the immortals will it give to raging fire, who perhaps now stand pouring with sweat, shaking with fear. And black blood flows down from the tallest thatched houses, foretelling the necessity of evil. But go from the *adyton* and embrace evils.”

(καὶ σφι ποιήσασι περὶ τὸ ἱρὸν τὰ νομιζόμενα, ὥς ἐς τὸ μέγαρον ἐσελθόντες ἴζοντο, χρᾶ ἡ Πυθίη, τῇ οὖνομα ἦν Ἀριστονίκη, τάδε·

ἽΩ μέλαιοι, τί κάθησθε; Λιπὼν φύγ’ ἐς ἔσχατα γαίης

δῶματα καὶ πόλιος τροχοειδέος ἄκρα κάρηνα.

Οὔτε γὰρ ἡ κεφαλὴ μένει ἔμπεδον οὔτε τὸ σῶμα,

οὔτε πόδες νέατοι οὔτ’ ὦν χέρες, οὔτε τι μέσσης

λείπεται, ἀλλ’ ἄζηλα πέλει· κατὰ γὰρ μιν ἐρείπει

πῦρ τε καὶ ὀξύς Ἄρης, συριηγενὲς ἄρμα διώκων.

Πολλὰ δὲ κᾶλλ’ ἀπολεῖ πυργώματα, κοῦ τὸ σὸν οἶον·

πολλοὺς δ’ ἀθανάτων νηοὺς μαλερῶ πυρὶ δώσει,

οἳ πον νῦν ἰδρῶτι ῥεούμενοι ἐστήκασι,

δείματι παλλόμενοι, κατὰ δ’ ἀκροτάτοις ὀρόφοισιν

αἷμα μέλαν κέχυνται, προῖδὸν κακότητος ἀνάγκας.

Ἀλλ’ ἴτον ἐξ ἀδύτοιο, κακοῖς δ’ ἐπικίδνατε θυμόν.) 7.140.1–3.

Consultation 1b: “When they heard these things, ...” (Ταῦτα ἀκούσαντες...) 7.141.1

/#85

Action/Fulfillment 1 (Sb, Da1): The Athenians, for the most part, abandon their city and flee to the ends of their land (8.41.2).

Fulfillment 2 (Da2): Xerxes goes on to capture or receive many other cities and eventually sacks Athens 8.54.1.

#87. “Wooden Walls”

A—B1a—{P}—B1b—C1a/{P}(Dd)—C2/{P}(Dd)—C3/{P}(Dd)—C4/{P}(Dd)—C5a |
D1/E1(Sb, Da3) | D2(Dc)—E1b(Se) | E2(Sa, Da1)—E3(Da1) | C5b/{P}(De) | D3/E4(Da2, 4) |
D4/E5(Sb, Da4)

A— B1a—{P}—B1b —C1/{P}(Dd)—D2(Dc)
C2/{P}(Dd)
C3/{P}(Dd)
C4/{P}(Dd)
C5— D1/E1(Sb, Da3)—E3(Da1)—D3/E4(Da2, 4)— D4/E5(Sb, Da4)

Crisis: The Athenians are distraught by their first oracle and are persuaded by Timon the Delphian to consult a second time as suppliants. 7.141.1.

Consultation: The Athenians at Delphi regarding a better oracle (Direct: Πειθομένοισι δὲ ταῦτα τοῖσι Ἀθηναίοισι καὶ λέγουσι· «ἽΩναξ, χρῆσον ἡμῖν ἄμεινόν τι περὶ τῆς πατρίδος, αἰδεσθεὶς τὰς ἱκετηρίας τάσδε τάς τοι ἤκομεν φέροντες· ἢ οὐ τοι ἄπιμεν ἐκ τοῦ ἀδύτου, ἀλλ’ αὐτοῦ τηδε μενέομεν ἔστ’ ἂν καὶ τελευτήσωμεν») 7.141.2

{Direct Pronouncement}: “To those saying those things, the prophet declares these things second: ‘Pallas Athena is not able to propitiate Olympian Zeus, though begging with many words and cunning craft. But I will tell you this word again, fixing it with adamant. For since the others are conquered, how many the boundary of Cecrops contains and of the hollows of holy Cithaeron (1), wide-seeing Zeus gives you a wooden wall alone to be unsacked, which will profit you and your children (2). Do not endure quietly the cavalry and foot-soldiery, a great army coming from the continent, but withdraw, turning your back (3). Still someday truly you will face them (4). Salamis divine, you will destroy sons of women either when Demeter is scattered or gathered (5).’ (ταῦτα δὴ λέγουσι ἢ πρόμαντις χρᾶ δεῦτερα τάδε·

Οὐ δύναται Παλλὰς Δί’ Ὀλύμπιον ἐξυλάσασθαι,
λίσσομένη πολλοῖσι λόγοις καὶ μήτιδι πυκνῇ·
σοὶ δὲ τόδ’ αὖτις ἔπος ἐρέω, ἀδάμαντι πελάσσας.
Τῶν ἄλλων γὰρ ἀλίσκομένων ὅσα Κέκροπος οὖρος
ἐντὸς ἔχει κευθμῶν τε Κιθαιρῶνος ζαθέοιο,
τεῖχος Τριτογενεῖ ξύλινον διδοῖ εὐρύοπα Ζεὺς
μοῦνον ἀπόρθητον τελέθειν, τὸ σὲ τέκνα τ’ ὀνήσει.
Μηδὲ σύ γ’ ἵπποσύνην τε μένειν καὶ πεζὸν ἰόντα
πολλὸν ἀπ’ ἠπείρου στρατὸν ἥσυχος, ἀλλ’ ὑποχωρεῖν
νῶτον ἐπιστρέψας· ἔτι τοί ποτε κἀντίος ἔσση.
ἽΩ θεῖη Σαλαμῖς, ἀπολεῖς δὲ σὺ τέκνα γυναικῶν
ἢ που σκιδναμένης Δημήτερος ἢ συνιούσης.) 7.141.2–4.

Consultation 1b: “Since these things both were and seemed to be milder than the earlier things, after writing them down, they went back to Athens. And after returning, when they were

reporting to the *demos*...” (Ταῦτά σφι ἡπιώτερα γὰρ τῶν προτέρων καὶ ἦν καὶ ἐδόκεε εἶναι, συγγραψάμενοι ἀπαλλάσσοντο ἐς τὰς Ἀθήνας. Ὡς δὲ ἀπελθόντες οἱ θεοπρόποι ἀπήγγελλον ἐς τὸν δῆμον...). 7.142.1.

Conjecture 1a/{Pronouncement} (Dd): Elders think that the wooden wall is the old hedge that once surround Acropolis. (τῶν πρεσβυτέρων ἔλεγον μετεξέτεροι δοκέειν σφι τὸν θεὸν τὴν ἀκρόπολιν χρῆσαι περιέσεσθαι· ἡ γὰρ ἀκρόπολις τὸ πάλαι τῶν Ἀθηναίων ῥηγῶ ἐπέφρακτο. Οἱ μὲν δὴ [κατὰ τὸν φραγμὸν] συνεβάλλοντο τοῦτο τὸ ξύλινον τεῖχος εἶναι) 7.142.1–2.

Conjecture 2/{Pronouncement} (Dd): Others think that the wooden wall is the fleet but were confounded by the last two lines. (οἱ δ’ αὖ ἔλεγον τὰς νέας σημαίνειν τὸν θεόν, καὶ ταύτας παραρτέεσθαι ἐκέλευον τὰ ἄλλα ἀπέντας. Τοὺς ὧν δὴ τὰς νέας λέγοντας εἶναι τὸ ξύλινον τεῖχος ἔσφαλλε τὰ δύο τὰ τελευταῖα ῥηθέντα) 7.142.2.

Conjecture 3/{Pronouncement} (Dd): The oraclemongers think that the Athenians were destined to lose a sea battle at Salamis (οἱ γὰρ χρησμολόγοι ταύτη ταῦτα ἐλάμβανον, ὡς ἀμφὶ Σαλαμίνα δεῖ σφας ἐσσωθῆναι ναυμαχίην παρασκευασαμένους.) 7.142.3. The oraclemongers must have thought that the “O Salamis, you will destroy the sons of women” part of the oracle pertained to the Athenians, as Themistocles argues against later (7.143.2). They go on to say that the Athenians should leave Athens and settle some other land. 7.143.3

Conjecture 4/{Pronouncement} (Dd): Themistocles thinks that the Athenians will win a sea battle at Salamis because the lines pertained to the Persians and not the Athenians. The Pythia, he says, would not have called Salamis divine, but wretched, if they were destined to die there. (Οὗτος ὦνῆρ οὐκ ἔφη πᾶν ὀρθῶς τοὺς χρησμολόγους συμβάλλεσθαι, λέγων τοιαῦδε, εἰ ἐς Ἀθηναίους εἶχε τὸ ἔπος εἰρημένον ἐόντως, οὐκ ἂν οὕτω μιν δοκέειν ἡπίως χρησθῆναι, ἀλλὰ ὧδε «Ἦ σχετλίη Σαλαμίς» ἀντὶ τοῦ «Ἦ θείη Σαλαμίς», εἰ πέρ γε ἔμελλον οἱ οἰκήτορες ἀμφ’ αὐτῇ τελευτήσιν· ἀλλὰ γὰρ ἐς τοὺς πολέμιους τῷ θεῷ εἰρήσθαι τὸ χρηστήριον συλλαμβάνοντι κατὰ τὸ ὀρθόν, ἀλλ’ οὐκ ἐς Ἀθηναίους. Παρασκευάζεσθαι ὧν αὐτοὺς ὡς ναυμαχίσοντας συνεβούλευε, ὡς τούτου ἐόντος τοῦ ξυλίνου τεύχεος.) 7.143.2.

Conjecture 5a: The Athenians generally prefer the interpretation of Conjecture 2 and Themistocles and plan to take to sea. (Ταύτη Θεμιστοκλέος ἀποφαινομένου, Ἀθηναῖοι ταῦτά σφι ἔγνωσαν αἰρετώτερα εἶναι μᾶλλον ἢ τὰ τῶν χρησμολόγων, οἱ οὐκ ἔων ναυμαχίην ἀρτέεσθαι, τὸ δὲ σύμπαν εἶπαι οὐδὲ χεῖρας ἀνταείρεσθαι, ἀλλὰ ἐκλιπόντας χώραν τὴν Ἀττικὴν ἄλλην τινὰ οἰκίσειν.) 7.143.3.

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Action 1/Fulfillment 1 (Sb, Da3): The Athenians, for the most part, abandon their city and flee to the ends of their land (8.41.2).

/

Action 2 (Dc): Some of the Athenians fortify the acropolis with planks of wood and doors. (οἱ φραζάμενοι τὴν ἀκρόπολιν θύρησί τε καὶ ξύλοισι ἡμύνοντο τοὺς ἐπιόντας) 8.51.2.

Conjecture 1b/{Pronouncement} (Se): These Athenians believed they had discovered the true significance of the oracle. The acropolis fortified with wood would be impregnable. (πρὸς δὲ καὶ αὐτοὶ δοκέοντες ἐξευρηκέναι τὸ μαντήιον τὸ ἢ Πυθίῃ σφι ἔχρησε, «τὸ ξύλινον τεῖχος ἀνάλωτον ἔσεσθαι»· αὐτὸ δὴ τοῦτο εἶναι τὸ κρησφύγετον κατὰ τὸ μαντήιον καὶ οὐ τὰς νέας.) 8.51.2.

/

Fulfillment 2 (Sa, Da1): The narrator foreshadows the Persian capture of Attica. (ἔδεε γὰρ κατὰ τὸ θεοπρόπιον πᾶσαν τὴν Ἀττικὴν τὴν ἐν τῇ ἡπείρῳ γενέσθαι ὑπὸ Πέρσῃσι.) 8.53.1

Fulfillment 3 (Da1): The Persians gain control of Athens. 8.54.1.

/

Conjecture 5b (De): Themistocles asserts that the oracle declared that the Greeks will defeat the Persians at Salamis. (Σαλαμῖνι, ἐν τῇ ἡμῖν καὶ λόγιόν ἐστι τῶν ἐχθρῶν κατόπερθε γενέσθαι.) 8.60.γ

/

Action 3/Fulfillment 4(Sb, Da2, 5): The Athenians and Greek allied navy defeat the Persian fleet at the Battle of Salamis. 8.83.1–96.2.

/

Action 4/Fulfillment 5 (Sb, Da4): The Athenians face off against the Persian ground forces at Platea. 9.28

#88. Argive Excuse (Argive tale)

A1a—B1a—A1b(Se)—B1b—{P}—D1(Dc)—C(Se)—D2/E(Sb)

A1—B1—{P}—C—D1(Dc)—D2/E(Sb)

Crisis 1a: The Argives receive word of Xerxes' invasion and were being recruited by the other Greeks to resist them. 7.148.2.

Consultation 1a: The Argives at Delphi regarding what was the best thing to do (Indirect Question: πέμψαι θεοπρόπους ἐς Δελφοὺς τὸν θεὸν ἐπειρησόμενους, ὥς σφι μέλλει ἄριστον ποιεῦσι γίνεσθαι.) 7.148.2.

Crisis 1b (Se): 6000 Argives died in the war against the Lacedaemonians and Cleomenes. 7.148.2.

Consultation 1b: The Argives at Delphi continued

{**Direct Pronouncement**}: “[that] the Pythia declared these things to them when they were asking: ‘You enemy to your neighbors, dear to the immortal gods, sit on guard holding at rest and protect your head: the head will save the body.’”

(Τὴν δὲ Πυθίην ἐπειρωτῶσι αὐτοῖσι ἀνελεῖν τάδε·

Ἐχθρὲ περικτιόνεσσι, φίλ' ἀθανάτοισι θεοῖσι,

εἴσω τὸν προβόλαιον ἔχων πεφυλαγμένος ἦσο

καὶ κεφαλὴν πεφύλαξο· κάρη δὲ τὸ σῶμα σαώσει.) 7.148.3.

Action 1 (Dc): In reply to the request to join the league against the Persians, the Argives demand a thirty-year truce with the Lacedaemonians and leadership of half of the army. 7.148.4.

Conjecture (Se): The Argives feared the oracle but were more anxious about gaining peace with the Lacedaemonians (καίπερ τὸ χρηστήριον φοβεόμενοι). If they were defeated by the Persians in battle, the Lacedaemonians would be able to conquer them. 7.149.1.

Action 2/Fulfillment (Sb): The Argives reject the Spartan offer of equal vote for the Argive king with the two Spartan kings and choose to remain out of the league. 7.149.3.

Note: There are conflicting versions of how the Argives came to be more inclined toward the Persians than the Greeks. 7.150–2.

#89. Cretan Excuse

A—B1a—{P}—B1b—D/E(Sb)—C(Se)

A—B1a—{P}—B1b—C—D/E(Sb)

Crisis: The Cretans are asked to join the Hellenic League. 7.169.1.

Consultation 1a: The Cretans at Delphi regarding whether it would be better for them to help defend Greece (Indirect Question: ...πέμψαντες κοινῇ θεοπρόπους ἐς Δελφοὺς τὸν θεὸν ἐπειρώτων εἴ σοι ἄμεινον τιμωρέουσι γίνεται τῇ Ἑλλάδι...) 7.169.1.

{Direct Pronouncement}: “The Pythia replied, ‘Fools, do you blame how many tears of wrath Minos sent from the revenge of Menelaos? But when they did not help avenge his death in Camicus, and you did avenge the woman taken from Sparta by the barbarian man.’” (Ἡ δὲ Πυθίη ὑπεκρίνατο· ὦ νήπιοι, ἐπιμέμφεσθε ὅσα ὑμῖν ἐκ τῶν Μενέλεω τιμωρημάτων Μίνως ἔπεμψε μηνίων δακρύματα; ὅτε οἱ μὲν οὐ συνεξεπρήξαντο αὐτῷ τὸν ἐν Καμικῷ θάνατον γενόμενον, ὑμεῖς δὲ ἐκείνοισι τὴν ἐκ Σπάρτης ἀρπασθεῖσαν ὑπ’ ἀνδρὸς βαρβάρου γυναῖκα.) 7.169.2.

Consultation 1b: “When the Cretans heard the things that were brought back...” (Ταῦτα οἱ Κρήτες ὡς ἀπενειχθέντα ἤκουσαν). 7.169.2.

Action/Fulfillment (Sb): The Cretans did not help the Greeks. 7.169.2.

Conjecture (Se): Herodotus recalls the history involving the death of Minos, which helps explain some of the thought process involved on the part of the Cretans in understanding the oracle’s meaning. 7.170–1.

#90. “Pray to the Winds”

B1a—A(Se)—B1b—{P(Da)}—B1c—D1(Sf)—D2/E1(Sb, Da1)—E2(Da2)—D3/E3(Sb, Db, Da1)

A—B1a,b—{P(Da)}—B1c—D1(Sf)—D2/E1(Sb, Da1)—E2(Da2)
D3/E3(Sb, Db, Da1)—#88

Consultation 1a: The Delphians at Delphi on behalf of themselves and Greece (Δελφοὶ δ’ ἐν τούτῳ τῷ χρόνῳ ἐχρηστηριάζοντο τῷ θεῷ ὑπὲρ ἑωυτῶν καὶ τῆς Ἑλλάδος καταρρωδηκότες...) 7.178.1.

Crisis (Se): The Delphians are afraid of Xerxes’ invasion. 7.178.1

Consultation 1b: The Delphians at Delphi continued.

{Indirect Pronouncement (Da)}: “And it was declared to them to pray to the winds (1), for these will be great allies for Greece (2).” (καὶ σοι ἐχρήσθη ἀνέμοισι εὐχεσθαι· μεγάλους γὰρ τούτους ἔσεσθαι τῇ Ἑλλάδι συμμάχους.) 7.178.1.

Consultation 1c: “When they received the oracle, ...” (Δελφοὶ δὲ δεξάμενοι τὸ μαντήιον...) 7.178.2.

Action 1 (Sf): The Delphians report the oracle to the Greeks “who wanted to be free.” 7.178.2.

Action 2/Fulfillment 1 (Sb, Da1): The Delphians raise an altar to the winds in precinct of Thyia and perform sacrifices there. 7.178.2.

Fulfillment 2 (Da2): The tale immediately shifts to Xerxes fleet (7.179), and a violent storm wrecks that fleet at 7.188.2–3.

Action 3/Fulfillment 3 (Sb, Db, Da1): The Athenians call on Boreas (7.189.1). #88.

#91. “Summon Your Son-in-Law” (Athenian tale)

D1a(Sf)—B—{P(Se)}—C(Se)—D1b/E(Sb)

B—{P}—#87—C—D1/E(Sb)

Action 1a (Sf): The Athenians pray to Boreas “according to a prophecy” (ἐκ θεοπροπίου) 7.189.1.

Consultation: Another oracle came to the Athenians earlier. (ἐλθόντος σφι ἄλλου χρηστηρίου) 7.189.1

{**Indirect Pronouncement (Se)**}: “... when another oracle came to them that they should call upon their son-in-law as an ally.” (ἐλθόντος σφι ἄλλου χρηστηρίου τὸν γαμβρὸν ἐπίκουρον καλέσασθαι) 7.189.1.

Conjecture (Se): The narrator indicates that this oracle was used in conjunction with #90. The narrator explains a story that Boreas married Oreithyia the daughter of Erechtheus, who was once king of Athens, and that for this reason, the Athenians concluded that Boreas was their son-in-law (Βορέης δὲ κατὰ τὸν Ἑλλήνων λόγον ἔχει γυναικα Ἀττικὴν, Ὠρείθυιαν τὴν Ἐρεχθέος· κατὰ δὴ τὸ κῆδος τοῦτο οἱ Ἀθηναῖοι, ὥς φάτις ὄρμηται, συμβαλλόμενοι σφι τὸν Βορέην γαμβρὸν εἶναι. ναυλοχέοντες τῆς Εὐβοίης ἐν Χαλκίδι ὥς ἔμαθον ἀνξόμενον τὸν χειμῶνα ἢ καὶ πρὸ τούτου.) 7.189.1–2.

Action 1b/Fulfillment (Sb): The Athenians sacrifice and pray to Boreas and Oreithyia. 7.189.2.

[**Resolution**]: The ships of Xerxes are destroyed by Boreas around Mt. Athos (referred to here, but the full story is told at 6.44.2–3) and later at Magnesia (7.189.3).

#92. Athamas the Scapegoat

D1—D2(Dc)

D2—D1

Action 1: The Achaeans assign certain trails to the descendants of Athamas “according to an oracle” (ἐκ θεοπροπίου). 7.197.1.

Action 2 (Dc): The Achaeans were about to make Athamas a scapegoat and sacrifice him “according to an oracle (ἐκ θεοπροπίου, 7.197.3). However, Athamas was saved by his grandson Cytissorus.

#93. The King or the City

B1a—{P(Da)}—C—D—E(Da1, 2) | A1a(Se)—B1b(De)—A1b(Se)

A—B—{P(Da)}—C—D—E(Da1, 2)

Consultation 1a: The Spartans at Delphi regarding the war (Matter: ...τοῖσι Σπαρτιήτησι χρεωμένοισι περὶ τοῦ πολέμου τούτου αὐτίκα κατ’ ἀρχὰς ἐγειρομένου...). 7.220.3.

{**Indirect and Direct Pronouncement (Da)**}: “For it had been declared by the Pythia to the Spartiates, when they were consulting the oracle about this rising war immediately at its beginning that (1) either Lacedaemon will be laid waste by the barbarians, (2) or their king will die. And she declares those things in hexameters, speaking thus: ‘But to you, dwellers of broad-fielded Sparta, (1) either your great, famous city will be sacked by the Perseidae, or not this, (2) but the boundary of Lacedaemon will mourn a dead king from the clan of Heracles. For the might of neither bulls nor lions will hold against him, for he holds the might of Zeus. And I say that he will not be held until the one or the other is torn on behalf of all things.’” (Ἐκέχρητο γὰρ ὑπὸ τῆς Πυθίης τοῖσι Σπαρτιήτησι

χρεωμένοισι περὶ τοῦ πολέμου τούτου αὐτίκα κατ' ἀρχὰς ἐγειρομένου, ἢ Λακεδαίμονα ἀνάστατον γενέσθαι ὑπὸ τῶν βαρβάρων, ἢ τὸν βασιλέα σφέων ἀπολέσθαι. Ταῦτα δέ σφι ἐν ἔπεσι ἐξαμέτροισι χρᾶ λέγοντα ᾤδε·

Ὑμῖν δ', ὦ Σπάρτης οἰκήτορες εὐρυχόριοι,
ἢ μέγα ἄστρ' ἐρικυδέες ὑπ' ἀνδράσι Περσεΐδῃσι
πέρθεται, ἢ τὸ μὲν οὐχί, ἀφ' Ἡρακλέους δὲ γενέθλης
πενθήσει βασιλῆ' φθίμενον Λακεδαίμονος οὔρος·
οὐ γὰρ τὸν ταύρων σήσει μένος οὐδὲ λεόντων
ἀντιβίην· Ζηνὸς γὰρ ἔχει μένος· οὐδέ ἔφημι
σχήσεσθαι, πρὶν τῶνδ' ἕτερον διὰ πάντα δάσσηται.) 7.220.3–4.

Conjecture: Leonidas wants to stay at Thermopylae, keeping the words of the oracle in mind and wishing for glory (Ταῦτά τε δὴ ἐπιλεγόμενον Λεωνίδην καὶ βουλόμενον κλέος καταθέσθαι μούνων Σπαρτηγέων). 7.220.4.

Action: Leonidas stays at Thermopylae to be killed (7.220.4). Note that Leonidas leads his men out into the open looking for death (7.223.2).

Fulfillment (Da1, 2): Leonidas is killed (7.224.1). Herodotus' audience could be sure that the alternative did not happen.

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Crisis 1a (Se): The Spartans learned about Xerxes' expedition against Greece. 7.239.1.

Consultation (De): The Spartans go to inquire at Delphi. 7.239.1.

{Pronouncement}: Simple reference to the words that came before. 7.239.1.

Crisis 1b (Se): Former Spartan King Demaratus supposedly sent a hidden message to the Spartans informing them of the Persian invasion. 7.239.1–3.

#94. Euboean Sheep

E1(Sf, Da1) | E2(Sf, Da2)—D1a(Se, Dc)—C(Se)—D1b(Se)—{P(Se, Da)}—D1c(De, Dc)

{P(Da)}—C—D1(Dc)—E1(Da1)—E2(Da2)

Fulfillment 1 (Sf, Da1): Xerxes builds the bridge. 7.33.1–7.37.1.

/

Fulfillment 2 (Da2): Themistocles convinces the Greeks to kill Euboean sheep so that Xerxes' men could not have them. 8.19.1–2.

Action 1a (Se, Dc): The Euboeans ignore an oracle of Bakis. (παραχρησάμενοι τὸν Βάκιδος χρησμόν) 8.20.1.

Conjecture (Se): The Euboeans thought the oracle had no significance. (ὥς οὐδὲν λέγοντα) 8.20.1.

Action 1b (Se): The Euboeans do not safeguard their possessions. 8.20.1.

{Direct Pronouncement (Se)}: “For the oracle of Bacis about these things goes like this: ‘Be careful, whenever the barbarian-tongued should throw a papyrus yoke into the sea, to keep the much bleating goats away from Euboea.’” (Βάκιδι γὰρ ᾧδε ἔχει περὶ τούτων ὁ χρησμός·

Φράζεο, βαρβαρόφωνος ὅταν ζυγὸν εἰς ἄλλα βάλλῃ
βύβλινον, Εὐβοίης ἀπέχειν πολυμηκάδας αἴγας.) 8.20.2.

Action 1c (De, Dc): The Euboeans ignored the oracle at the time and later. 8.20.2.

#95. A Delphic Miracle

A—B1a—{P}—B1b—C—D—E

A—B1a—{P}—B1b—C—D—E

Crisis: The Delphians are terrified by news of the approach of Xerxes' army. 8.36.1.

Consultation 1a: The Delphians at Delphi regarding whether they ought to bury the treasures of the sanctuary or transport them somewhere else (Matter/Indirect Question: ...ἐμαντεύοντο περὶ τῶν ἱρῶν χρημάτων, εἴτε σφέα κατὰ γῆς κατορύξωσι εἴτε ἐκκομίσωσι ἐς ἄλλην χώραν...) 8.36.1.

{**Indirect Pronouncement (Da)**}: “And the god was not allowing them [Delphians] to move them [the treasures] (1), saying (φᾶς) that he himself is sufficient to safeguard his own things (2).” 8.36.1.

Consultation 1b: “But when the Delphians heard these things, ...” (Δελφοὶ δὲ ταῦτα ἀκούσαντες...). 8.36.2.

Conjecture: The Delphians reflect about their own things. (Δελφοὶ δὲ ταῦτα ἀκούσαντες σφέων αὐτῶν πέρι ἐφρόντιζον.). 8.36.2.

Action/Fulfillment 1 (Da1): The Delphians see to protecting their children instead. 8.36.2.

Fulfillment 2 (Da2): Weapons array in front of the temple of their own accord, lightning strikes Parnassus and sends down rocks on the approaching army, a battle cry was heard from the sanctuary of Athena Pronaia, and the Persian army flees. Survivors of the army reported later that two giant hoplites pursued them and killed a number. 8.37–8.

#96. Themistocles' Threat

C—{P(Se)}

{P}—C

Conjecture: Themistocles threatens to take the Athenians away from Salamis and colonize Siris in Italy. 8.62.2.

{**Indirect Pronouncement (Se)**}: “... which is still very much ours from long ago, and the prophecies say that it is necessary that it be founded by us.” (ἥ περ ἡμετέρη τέ ἐστι ἐκ παλαιοῦ ἔτι, καὶ τὰ λόγια λέγει ὑπ' ἡμέων αὐτὴν δεῖν κτισθῆναι.) 8.62.2.

#97. Salamis 1

E1(Sf, Da2) | E2(Da1)—{P(Sf, Da)}—E3(Da3)

{P(Da)}—E1(Da2)—E2(Da1)—E3(Da3)

Fulfillment 1 (Sf, Da2): Xerxes sacks Athens. 8.54.1.

/

Fulfillment 2 (Da1): The Persian ships occupy the whole strait from Cynosoura on Salamis to Mounychia. 8.76.1.

{**Direct Pronouncement (Sf, Da)**}: Oracle of Bacis: “But whenever they throw a bridge across the holy promontory of golden-sword Artemis and Cynosoura by the sea with their ships (1), after sacking rich Athens with raging expectation (2), divine Justice will snuff

out mighty Satiety, the terrible, raging son of Hybris, minded to gulp up all at once. For bronze will mix with bronze, and Ares will turn the sea red with blood. Then does the wide-seeing son of Cronos and mistress Victory bring on the day of freedom for Greece (3).”

(Ἀλλ’ ὅταν Ἀρτέμιδος χρυσαόρου ἱερὸν ἀκτὴν
νηυσὶ γεφυρώσωσι καὶ εἰναλίην Κυνόσουραν,
ἐλπίδι μαινομένη λιπαρὰς πέρσαντες Ἀθήνας,
δῖα Δίκη σβέσσει κρατερὸν Κόρον, ὕβριος υἱόν,
δεινὸν μαιμώντα, δοκεῦντ’ ἅμα πάντα πίεσθαι.
Χαλκὸς γὰρ χαλκῷ συμμίζεται, αἷματι δ’ Ἄρης
πόντον φοινίζει. Τότ’ ἐλεύθερον Ἑλλάδος ἦμαρ
εὐρύοπα Κρονίδης ἐπάγει καὶ πότνια Νίκη.) 8.77.

/

Fulfillment 3 (Da3): The battle begins at 8.84. The narrator emphasizes the fulfillment of the oracle at 8.96.2 (ὥστε ἀποπεπλησθαι τὸν χρησμὸν τὸν τε ἄλλον πάντα τὸν περὶ τῆς ναυμαχίης ταύτης εἰρημένον Βάκιδι καὶ Μουσαίῳ...).

Note: Herodotus thinks that this oracle is a convincing proof of the prophetic power of oracles (8.77). An oracle of Musaeus is supposed to have predicted the battle as well, but there are no details (8.96.2).

#98. Salamis 2

E1a(Sf)—{P(Se)}—E1b

{P}—E1

Fulfillment 1a (Sf): The wreckage from Salamis drifts to Colias. The narrator emphasizes the fulfillment. (ὥστε ἀποπεπλησθαι τὸν χρησμὸν τὸν τε ἄλλον πάντα τὸν περὶ τῆς ναυμαχίης ταύτης εἰρημένον Βάκιδι καὶ Μουσαίῳ καὶ δὴ καὶ κατὰ τὰ ναυήγια τὰ ταύτη ἐξενειχθέντα τὸ εἰρημένον πολλοῖσι ἔτεσι πρότερον τούτων ἐν χρησμῷ Λυσιστράτῳ Ἀθηναίῳ ἀνδρὶ χρησμολόγῳ, τὸ ἐλελήθεε πάντας τοὺς Ἕλληνας.) 8.96.2.

{Direct Pronouncement (Se)}: Oraclemonger Lysistratus of Athens: “... and especially the one about the wrecks being brought there that was said many years before these events in an oracle by Lysistratus the Athenian oraclemonger, which had escaped the notice of all the Greeks: “But Colian women will cook with oars.” (...καὶ δὴ καὶ κατὰ τὰ ναυήγια τὰ ταύτη ἐξενειχθέντα τὸ εἰρημένον πολλοῖσι ἔτεσι πρότερον τούτων ἐν χρησμῷ Λυσιστράτῳ Ἀθηναίῳ ἀνδρὶ χρησμολόγῳ, τὸ ἐλελήθεε πάντας τοὺς Ἕλληνας· Κωλιάδες δὲ γυναῖκες ἐρετμοῖσι φρύξουσιν.) 8.96.2.

Fulfillment 1b (Sa): The narrator emphasizes the fulfillment again. (ὥστε ἀποπεπλησθαι τὸν χρησμὸν τὸν τε ἄλλον πάντα τὸν περὶ τῆς ναυμαχίης ταύτης εἰρημένον Βάκιδι καὶ Μουσαίῳ καὶ δὴ καὶ κατὰ τὰ ναυήγια τὰ ταύτη ἐξενειχθέντα τὸ εἰρημένον πολλοῖσι ἔτεσι πρότερον τούτων ἐν χρησμῷ Λυσιστράτῳ Ἀθηναίῳ ἀνδρὶ χρησμολόγῳ, τὸ ἐλελήθεε πάντας τοὺς Ἕλληνας... Τοῦτο δὲ ἔμελλε ἀπελάσαντος βασιλέος ἔσεσθαι.) 8.96.2.

#99. Pay Back for Leonidas

B—{P1(Da)}—D1/E1(Sb, Da1)—{P2(Da3)}—D2/E2(Sb, Da2) | E3(Da3)

B—{P1(Da)}—D1/E1(Sb, Da1)—{P2(Da3)}—D2/E2(Sb, Da2)—E3(Da3)

Consultation: An oracle came to the Lacedaemonians. (χρηστήριον ἐληλύθεε ἐκ Δελφῶν Λακεδαιμονίοισι...) 8.114.1.

{**Indirect Pronouncement 1 (Da)**}: “An oracle had come from Delphi to the Lacedaemonians to ask justice from Xerxes for the murder of Leonidas (1) and to accept what was offered (2).” (χρηστήριον ἐληλύθεε ἐκ Δελφῶν Λακεδαιμονίοισι, Ξέρξην αἰτέειν δίκας τοῦ Λεωνίδεω φόνου καὶ τὸ διδόμενον ἐξ ἐκείνου δέκεσθαι.) 8.114.1

Action 1/Fulfillment 1 (Sb, Da1): The Lacedaemonians send delegates to Xerxes and demand recompense for Leonidas. 8.114.1–2

{**Direct Pronouncement 2 (Da3)**}: “And having both laughed and held back for a long time, he spoke pointing at Mardonius, since he happened to be standing next to him, ‘Well then, Mardonius here will give them the recompense that is fitting for them.’” (Ὁ δὲ γελάσας τε καὶ κατασχὼν πολλὸν χρόνον, ὥς οἱ ἐτύγχανε παρεστὼς Μαρδόνιος, δεικνὺς ἐς τοῦτον εἶπε· Τοιγάρ σφι Μαρδόνιος ὅδε δίκας δώσει τοιαύτας οἷας ἐκείνοισι πρέπει.) 8.114.2.

Action 2/Fulfillment 2 (Sb, Da2): After he [the messenger] accepted what was said, the messenger returned.” (Ὁ μὲν δὴ δεξάμενος τὸ ῥηθὲν ἀπαλλάσσετο.)

/

Fulfillment 3 (Da3): Mardonius loses the battle of Platea and the Lacedaemonians exact their payment. (Ἐνθαῦτα ἥ τε δίκη τοῦ φόνου τοῦ Λεωνίδεω κατὰ τὸ χρηστήριον τὸ τοῖσι Σπαρτιήτησι (γενόμενον) ἐκ Μαρδονίου ἐπετελέετο καὶ νίκην ἀναιρέεται καλλίστην ἀπασέων τῶν ἡμεῖς ἴδμεν Πανσάνης ὁ Κλεομβρότου τοῦ Ἀναξανδρίδεω.) 9.64.1.

#100. Offerings to Delphi

B1a—{P}—B1b—E/F(Sb)

B1a—{P}—B1b—E/F(Sb)

Consultation 1a: The Greeks jointly at Delphi regarding whether their offerings are sufficient (Indirect Question: Πέμπαντες δὲ ἀκροθίνια οἱ Ἕλληνες ἐς Δελφοὺς ἐπειρώτων τὸν θεὸν κοινῇ εἰ λελάβηκε πλήρεα καὶ ἀρεστὰ [τὰ ἀκροθίνια.]...

{**Indirect Pronouncement**}: “The god said that he had [received sufficient offerings] from the other Greeks, but not from the Aeginetans, but he was asking them for the *aresteia* of the sea-battle in Salamis.” (Ὁ δὲ παρ’ Ἑλλήνων μὲν τῶν ἄλλων ἔφησε ἔχειν, παρὰ Αἰγινητέων δὲ οὐ, ἀλλὰ ἀπαίτεε αὐτοὺς τὰ ἀριστήια τῆς ἐν Σαλαμῖνι ναυμαχίης.) 8.122.

Consultation 1b: “But when the Aeginetans learned, ...” (Αἰγινῆται δὲ πυθόμενοι...) 8.122.

Action/Fulfillment (Sb): The Aeginetans hang up three golden stars on a mast of bronze and put it up in the sanctuary next to Croesus’ bowl. 8.122.

#101. Mardonius 1 (Theban tale)

B1a—{P1a}—B1b—D1a—C1a(Se)—{P1b(Se)}—C1b(Se)—D1b(Se)

B1a—{P1a}—B1b—D1a—E1

^ ^
 {P1b} D1b

Consultation 1a: Mus on behalf of Mardonius at Trophonius, Abae, Ismenus, Amphiaraus, and Ptoeus regarding uncertain matter. (Matter: ἔπεμπε κατὰ τὰ χρηστήρια ἄνδρα Εὐρωμέα γένος, τῷ οὐνομα ἦν Μῦς, ἐντειλάμενος πανταχῇ μιν χρησόμενον ἐλθεῖν τῶν οἷά τε ἦν σφι ἀποπειρήσασθαι. Ὅτι μὲν βουλόμενος ἐκμαθεῖν πρὸς τῶν χρηστηρίων ταῦτα ἐνετέλλετο, οὐκ ἔχω φράσαι· οὐ γὰρ ὧν λέγεται· δοκέω δ' ἔγωγε περὶ τῶν παρεόντων πρηγμάτων καὶ οὐκ ἄλλων πέρι πέμψαι... Ἐς τοῦτο τὸ ἱρὸν ἐπεῖτε παρελθεῖν τὸν καλεόμενον τοῦτον Μῦν, ἔπεσθαι δέ οἱ τῶν ἀστῶν αἵρετοὺς ἄνδρας τρεῖς ἀπὸ τοῦ κοινοῦ ὡς ἀπογραφομένους τὰ θεσπιεῖν ἔμελλε,...) 8.133–135.2.

{Pronouncement 1a}: Spontaneously, the prophet at Ptoeus speaks in Carian. Mus takes down the words on a tablet. (καὶ πρόκατε τὸν πρόμαντιν βαρβάρῳ γλώσση χρᾶν. Καὶ τοὺς μὲν ἐπομένους τῶν Θηβαίων ἐν θώματι ἔχεσθαι ἀκούοντας βαρβάρου γλώσσης ἀντὶ Ἑλλάδος, οὐδὲ ἔχειν ὃ τι χρήσονται τῷ παρεόντι πρήγματι· τὸν δὲ Εὐρωμέα Μῦν, ἐξαρπάσαντα παρ' αὐτῶν τὴν ἐφέροντο δέλτον, τὰ λεγόμενα ὑπὸ τοῦ προφήτεω γράφειν ἐς αὐτήν, φάναι δὲ Καρίη μιν γλώσση χρᾶν· συγγραψάμενον δὲ οἷχεσθαι ἀπίοντα ἐς Θεσσαλίην.) 8.135.2.

Consultation 1b: Mus writes down the oracle himself, and carries it back to Mardonius, who read over it and the other oracles. (... τὸν δὲ Εὐρωμέα Μῦν, ἐξαρπάσαντα παρ' αὐτῶν τὴν ἐφέροντο δέλτον, τὰ λεγόμενα ὑπὸ τοῦ προφήτεω γράφειν ἐς αὐτήν, φάναι δὲ Καρίη μιν γλώσση χρᾶν· συγγραψάμενον δὲ οἷχεσθαι ἀπίοντα ἐς Θεσσαλίην... Μαρδόνιος δὲ ἐπιλεξάμενος ὃ τι δὴ λέγοντα ἦν τὰ χρηστήρια, ...). 8.136.1.

Action 1a: Mardonius sends Alexander of Macedon to Athens with an offer of alliance. 8.136.1–2.

Conjecture 1a (Se): Mardonius reasons that an alliance with the Athenians would give him control of the sea and thinks that he would be conquer the Greeks, if he had them on his side. (Τοὺς γὰρ Ἀθηναίους οὕτω ἐδόκεε μάλιστα προσκτήσεσθαι, λεῶν τε πολλὸν ἄρα ἀκούων εἶναι καὶ ἄλκιμον, τὰ τε κατὰ τὴν θάλασσαν συντυχόντα σφι παθήματα κατεργασαμένους μάλιστα Ἀθηναίους ἐπίστατο. Τούτων δὲ προσγενομένων κατήλιπε εὐπετέως τῆς θαλάσσης κρατήσιν, τὰ περ ἂν καὶ ἦν, πεζῇ τε ἐδόκεε πολλῶ εἶναι κρέσσων· οὕτω τε ἐλογίζετο κατύπερθε οἱ τὰ πρήγματα ἔσεσθαι τῶν Ἑλληνικῶν.) 8.136.2.

Pronouncement 1b (Se): The narrator supposes that the oracles told him that those things would happen if he made an alliance (Τάχα δ' ἂν καὶ τὰ χρηστήρια ταῦτά οἱ προλέγοι, συμβουλευόντα σύμμαχον τὸν Ἀθηναῖον ποιέεσθαι.) 8.136.3.

Conjecture 1b (Se): "... being persuaded by these..." (τοῖσι δὴ πειθόμενος...)

Action 1b (Se): Mardonius sends Alexander.

Note: The Athenians refuse the alliance (8.143). This oracle is fascinating because the narrator, in his total ignorance of the content of the oracles and the reason for consultation, fills in some of the blanks with his own suppositions.

#102. No Thebans for Amphiaraus

F1(Sf)—C(Da)—E/F1b(Da1, 2)

C(Da)—E/F1b(Da1, 2)

Fulfillment 1a (Sf): No Thebans are allowed to consult Amphiaraus. 8.134.2.

Consultation: Thebans at Amphiaraus regarding uncertain issue.

{Indirect Pronouncement (Da)}: “Amphiaraus commanded them through oracles that they choose which of these two they wish, either to use him as a mantis or as an ally (1), keeping away from the other (2).” (ἐκέλευσέ σφεας ὁ Ἀμφιάρεως διὰ χρηστηρίων ποιεύμενος ὁκότερα βούλονται ἐλέσθαι τούτων, ἐωυτῷ ἢ ἅτε μάντι χρᾶσθαι ἢ ἅτε συμμάχῳ, τοῦ ἐτέρου ἀπεχομένους.) 8.134.2.

Action/Fulfillment 1b (Sb, Da1, 2): The Thebans choose to have Amphiaraus as an ally and so do not consult the oracle. 8.134.2.

#103. Athenian and Median Threat

A—B(Sd)—C—D—E

C—A—B(Sd)—D—E

Crisis: The Lacedaemonians hear that Alexander was sent by Mardonius to Athens to secure an alliance. 8.141.1.

Consultation (Sd): The Lacedaemonians remember old oracles (ἀναμνησθέντες τῶν λογίων). 8.141.1.

{Indirect Pronouncement}: “... remembering the oracles [saying] that it is necessary that they along with the other Dorians be put to flight from the Peloponnesus by the Medes and Athenians.” (...ἀναμνησθέντες τῶν λογίων ὥς σφεας χρεόν ἐστι ἅμα τοῖσι ἄλλοισι Δωριεῦσι ἐκπίπτειν ἐκ Πελοποννήσου ὑπὸ Μήδων τε καὶ Ἀθηναίων.) 8.141.1.

Conjecture: The Lacedaemonians are scared that Athens and the Persians might join in an alliance. (κάρτα τε ἔδεισαν μὴ ὁμολογήσωσι τῷ Πέρσῃ Ἀθηναῖοι) 8.141.1.

Action: The Lacedaemonians send a delegation to Athens in order to persuade the citizens not to join an alliance with the Persians. 8.141.2.

Note: There does not seem to be a fulfillment of this oracle in sight. We might say that the oracle is still very active, and that Herodotus tells this story because it provides more context for the Lacedaemonians decision to pressure the Athenians. The focus is on Lacedaemonian motivation and the Athenian attitude of panhellenism.

#104. “Five Contests”

B—{P}—D1a(Db1, Dc)—C1(Se, Db1)—D1b(Db1, Dc)—C2(Db2)—D2(Db2)—D3 | E1(Sa) | E2

B—{P}—C1(Db1)—D1(Db1, Dc)\
D3—E2—E1
C2(Db2)—D2(Db2)/

Consultation: Teisamenus at Delphi regarding offspring (Τεισαμενῶ γὰρ μαντευομένῳ ἐν Δελφοῖσι περὶ γόνου...). 9.33.2

{Indirect Pronouncement}: “The Pythia declared that he will win five of the greatest contests.” (ἀνεῖλε ἡ Πυθίη ἀγῶνας τοὺς μεγίστους ἀναιρήσεσθαι πέντε.) 9.33.2.

Action 1a (Db1, Dc): Teisamenus begins training for the pentathlon. 9.33.2.

Conjecture 1 (Se, Db1): He thinks that the “contests” are athletic (Ὁ μὲν δὴ ἀμαρτῶν τοῦ χρηστηρίου προσεῖχε γυμνασίοισι ὡς ἀναιρησόμενος γυμνικοῦς ἀγῶνας. 9.33.2). Narrator says explicitly that he missed the meaning of the oracle.

Action 1b (Db1, Dc): He competes in the pentathlon at the Olympics, but narrowly lost in wrestling. 9.33.2.

Conjecture 2 (Db2): The Lacedaemonians think that the “contests” are battles not athletic competitions (Λακεδαιμόνιοι δὲ μαθόντες οὐκ ἐς γυμνικοῦς ἀλλ’ ἐς ἀρηίους ἀγῶνας φέρον τὸ Τεισαμενοῦ μαντήιον...). 9.33.3.

Action 2 (Db2): The Lacedaemonians try to bribe Teisamenus to lead them in war along with the Heraclid kings. 9.33.3.

Action 3: After a negotiation, the Spartans agree to make Teisamenus and his brother citizens of Sparta, and Teisamenus agrees to lead them as their seer. 9.33.5, 35.1.

/

Fulfillment 1(Sa): The five battles that he won are Platea, Tegea, Dipaea, Ithome, and Tanagra. 9.35.2.

/

Fulfillment 2: Greeks defeat the Persians at Platea. 9.64.1.

#105. Mardonius 2

B—{P}—C—D—E(Se)

{P}—E—B—C—D

Consultation: Mardonius asks his commanders whether they know of any oracles foretelling ruin for the Persians (Indirect Question: Μεταπεμψάμενος ὢν τοὺς ταξiάρχους τῶν τελέων καὶ τῶν μετ’ ἐωυτοῦ ἐόντων Ἑλλήνων τοὺς στρατηγούς εἰρώτα εἴ τι εἶδεῖεν λόγιον περὶ Περσέων ὡς διαφθερέονται ἐν τῇ Ἑλλάδι.). 9.42.1.

{**Indirect Pronouncement**}: All are silent, but Mardonius recites one that he knows of: “There is an oracle that it is necessary that the Persians sack the sanctuary at Delphi when they have arrived in Greece, and after the sack, to be destroyed one and all.” (Ἔστι λόγιον ὡς χρέον ἐστι Πέρσας ἀπικομένους ἐς τὴν Ἑλλάδα διαρπάσαι τὸ ἱρὸν τὸ ἐν Δελφοῖσι, μετὰ δὲ τὴν διαρπαγὴν ἀπολέσθαι πάντα.) 9.42.2–3.

Conjecture: If we do not go to Delphi or plunder it, then we will not die. (Ἡμεῖς τοῖνον αὐτὸ τοῦτο ἐπιστάμενοι οὔτε ἵμεν ἐπὶ τὸ ἱρὸν τοῦτο οὔτε ἐπιχειρήσομεν διαρπάζειν, ταύτης τε εἵνεκα τῆς αἰτίας οὐκ ἀπολεόμεθα.) 9.42.4.

Action: Mardonius prepares for battle at Platea. 9.42.4.

Fulfillment (Se): The narrator claims that the oracle had already been fulfilled, and that it pertained to the Illyrians and the Encheleans. 9.43.1.

#106. Platea

E1(Sf, Da1) | {P(Da)} | E2(Da2)

{P(Da)}—E1(Da1)—E2(Da2)

Fulfillment 1 (Sf, Da1): The Greeks and Persian have already prepared for battle in Boeotia.

/

{Direct Pronouncement (Da)}: “But these lines of Bacis were composed pertaining to that battle: ‘At the Thermodon and grassy Asopus will be the assembly of the Greeks and the barbarian-tongued shriek (1), where many of the bow-carrying Medes will fall by lot and fate whenever the fateful day should come (2).’ (Ἀλλὰ τὰ μὲν Βάκιδι ἐξ ταύτην τὴν μάχην ἐστὶ πεποιημένα, τὴν δ’ ἐπὶ Θερμώδοντι καὶ Ἀσωπῷ λεχεποίῃ Ἑλλήνων σύνοδον καὶ βαρβαρόφωνον ἰυγὴν, τῇ πολλοὶ πεσέονται ὑπὲρ λάχεσιν τε μόρον τε τοξοφόρων Μήδων, ὅταν αἴσιμον ἡμαρ ἐπέλθῃ) 9.43.2.

/

Fulfillment 2 (Da2): Persian casualties are staggering: supposedly only one percent of 300,000 soldiers survived. 9.70.5.

Note: The narrator indicates that the Thermodon River flows between Tenagra and Glisas (9.43.2). The location near the Thermodon is a bit of a stretch to claim fulfillment so emphatically, but Herodotus believed it (9.43.1). Also βαρβαρόφωνος is also found in 8.20.2 above.

#107. Apollonian Sacred Flocks

Action (Sb): There are flocks sacred to Helios in Apollonia according to an oracle (ἐκ θεοπροπίου τινός), and they are guarded by a special office of watchman dedicated to it. 9.93.1.

#108. Apollonian Misfortunes

A—B—{P1}/E1(Sc, Da, Da1)—D1—B—{P2(Da4)}—D2/E2(Da2, 4)—E3(Da3)

A—B—{P1}/E1(Sc, Da, Da1)—D1—B—{P2(Da4)}—D2/E2(Da2, 4)—E3(Da3)

Crisis: The Apollonians are afflicted by famine and their livestock do not produce offspring. 9.93.3.

Consultation: The Apollonians at Dodona and Delphi regarding the cause of their misfortune (Matter: Πρόφαντα δέ σφι ἐν τε Δωδώνῃ καὶ ἐν Δελφοῖσι ἐγένετο, ἐπεῖτε ἐπειρώτων τοὺς προφήτας τὸ αἴτιον τοῦ παρεόντος κακοῦ.). 9.93.4

{Indirect Pronouncement 1}/Fulfillment 1 (Sc, Da): “Prophecies came about for them in Dodona and Delphi, when they were asking the prophets about the cause of the present evil. They were indicating to them that they unjustly deprived the sight from Euenius, the guard of the sacred sheep (1). For they themselves sent the wolves, and they were not going to stop avenging that man before they would give recompense for what they had done, that which he himself [Euenius] would choose and deem just (2). And when these things are accomplished, they will give Euenius such a gift that many people will deem him blessed (3). The oracles declared those things to them...” (Πρόφαντα δέ σφι ἐν τε Δωδώνῃ καὶ ἐν Δελφοῖσι ἐγένετο, ἐπεῖτε ἐπειρώτων τοὺς προφήτας τὸ αἴτιον τοῦ παρεόντος κακοῦ, οἱ δὲ αὐτοῖσι ἔφραζον ὅτι ἀδίκως τὸν φύλακον τῶν ἱρῶν προβάτων Εὐήνιον τῆς ὄψιος ἐστέρησαν· αὐτοὶ γὰρ ἐπορμῆσαι τοὺς λύκους, οὐ πρότερόν τε παύσεσθαι τιμωρόντες ἐκεῖνον πρὶν ἢ δίκας δῶσι τῶν ἐποίησαν ταύτας τὰς ἂν αὐτὸς ἔλῃται καὶ δικαιοῖ· τούτων δὲ τελεομένων αὐτοὶ δώσειν Εὐηνίῳ δόσιν τοιαύτην τὴν

πολλούς μιν μακαριεῖν ἀνθρώπων ἔχοντα. Τὰ μὲν χρηστήρια ταῦτά σφι ἐχρήσθη...) 9.93.4–94.1.

Action 1: The Apollonians send a delegation to ask Euenius what he would want in recompense. 9.94.1.

-Consultation: Euenius did not hear of the oracle (Ὁ δέ, οὐκ ἀκηκοὼς τὸ θεοπρόπιον,...) 9.94.2
{Pronouncement 2 (Da4)}: Euenius says that he would demand two of the finest estates and the finest house in Apollonia. 9.94.2.

Action 2/Fulfillment 2 (Da2): The Apollonians agree to the terms and hand over the property to Euenius. 9.94.3.

Fulfillment 3 (Da3): Euenios receives the power of innate divination (ἔμφυτον αὐτίκα μαντικὴν εἶχε. 9.95).

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