

ORACULAR PROPHECY AND PSYCHOLOGY IN ANCIENT GREEK WARFARE

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## Abstract

This thesis examines the role of oracular divination in warfare in Archaic, Classical, and Hellenistic Greece, and assesses the extent to which it affected the psychology and military decision-making of ancient Greek *poleis*.

By using a wide range of ancient literary, epigraphical, archaeological, and iconographical evidence and relevant modern scholarship, this thesis will fully explore the role of the Oracle in warfare, especially the influence of the major Oracles at Delphi, Dodona, Olympia, Didyma, and Ammon on the foreign policies and military strategies of *poleis* and their psychological preparation for war; as well as the effect of oracular prophecies on a commander's decision-making and tactics on the battlefield, and on the psychology and reactions of soldiers before and during battle.

This thesis contends that oracular prophecy played a fundamental and integral part in ancient Greek warfare, and that the act of consulting the Oracles, and the subsequent prognostications issued by the Oracles, had powerful psychological effects on both the *polis* citizenry and soldiery, which in turn had a major influence and impact upon military strategy and tactics, and ultimately on the outcome of conflicts in the ancient Greek world.

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## **Notes on Abbreviation and Spelling**

Names of ancient authors and titles, and other standard reference works, where possible, have been abbreviated according to the system used by the *Oxford Classical Dictionary*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. With regards to the spelling of Greek words, I have for the most part preferred direct transliteration rather than Latinisation. However, for well-known proper names I have stayed with the familiar anglicised form (thus Thucydides not Thoukydides, Syracuse not Syrakousai). Although I have tried to be as consistent as possible in this approach, perfect consistency in the transliteration of Greek words is virtually impossible to attain.

# Oracular Prophecy and Psychology in Ancient Greek Warfare

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## INTRODUCTION

Divination was a widespread practice in the ancient world. In a world of uncertainty and danger from many different quarters there was an intense desire from both private individuals and cities as a whole to know the future, in the hope of being able to exert some control over it. Cicero, when discussing the use of divination in ancient Greece, states without reserve that it was a universal practice amongst all kings and peoples to consult *manteis* and Oracles in matters of grave concern, not only in times of peace, but even more so in times of war ‘when the strife and struggle for safety is hardest.’<sup>1</sup> Cicero avers that in this regard the Spartans frequently consulted the Oracles at Delphi, Ammon, and Dodona,<sup>2</sup> and there is plentiful evidence elsewhere to show that these Oracles were widely used during wartime by many other Greek *poleis*.<sup>3</sup> Pausanias also states that the Spartans consulted the Oracle of Ammon more than any other Greeks,<sup>4</sup> though it appears that the Athenians consulted the shrine at Ammon regularly on military matters as well.<sup>5</sup> Indeed, according to Curnow there were around 124 oracular sanctuaries and sites in operation in ancient Greece and approximately 155 other oracular sites spread across various neighbouring lands, which is testament to how commonplace Oracles and oracular consultations were in the ancient Mediterranean world.<sup>6</sup>

Cicero’s statement above is supported vigorously from the extant evidence, which shows clearly that Oracles were consulted regularly on critical issues of war. In fact, the picture we

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<sup>1</sup> Cic. *Div.* 1.43.95. Cicero goes on to say (1.43.97) that the Senate, in his own day, habitually consulted the Sibylline books in important matters of state and frequently obeyed the counsel of the soothsayers.

<sup>2</sup> Cic. *Div.* 1.43.95. For purposes of clarity, I shall observe the distinction made by Fontenrose, J. E., *The Delphic Oracle: Its Responses and Operations, with a Catalogue of Responses* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978) 1 n. 1, between ‘Oracle’ and ‘oracle’, whereby the capitalised ‘Oracle’ will be used when it refers to an oracular establishment or institution, such as the Delphic Oracle, and the lower case ‘oracle’ when it refers to an oracular response.

<sup>3</sup> For example, Thebes consulting both Dodona and Delphi: see Paus. 9.25.5-26.2. In the index of war oracles below (Appendix I), the ninety-one oracular consultations recorded are made by thirty-two different *poleis* or kingdoms (N.B. this figure excludes individuals’ consultations if they hail from one of the states already counted; for example, Aristodemos of Messenia does not count as separate from Messenia).

<sup>4</sup> Paus. 3.18.3.

<sup>5</sup> This is demonstrated by the participation of the Athenian *strategoi* at the dedication ceremony in 333 B.C. of the state trireme, the *Ammonis*, which was used to carry embassies to the Oracle at Ammon. The fact that a ship was dedicated to this task suggests that it was a regular occurrence: see Pritchett, W. K., *The Greek State at War: Part III* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979) 301. For more on the Athenian connections with the Oracle at Ammon, see Dow, S., ‘The Egyptian Cults in Athens’, *The Harvard Theological Review* 30, 4 (1937) 187 ff.; and Woodward, A. M., ‘Athens and the Oracle of Ammon’, *The Annual of the British School at Athens* 57 (1962) 5-13. Cf. Arist. *Ath. Pol.* 61.7.

<sup>6</sup> Curnow, T., *The Oracles of the Ancient World: A Comprehensive Guide* (London: Duckworth, 2004) xvii-xxvii, 1-10. Curnow asserts that there were 54 oracle sites in western Turkey and the Dodecanese; 26 in Italy; 29 in northern Egypt; 10 in Algeria, Tunisia, and Libya; five in Albania, Bulgaria, and Romania; and 31 in Syria, Lebanon, Israel, Cyprus, and Ukraine. (N.B. these figures include a significant number of *Asklepieia*).

obtain from the sources is frequently one where oracles form a crucial part of assembly debate, and where city-states appear to be teeming with professional prophets and ‘oracle-collectors’ or ‘oracle-mongers’ ever eager to impart their knowledge, advice, and interpretation of the oracles. Thucydides’ account of Archidamos’ invasion of Attica in 431 B.C. and the Sicilian expedition of 415 B.C., for example, shows us that oracles and their professional interpreters played a key role in political decisions of the *polis*.<sup>7</sup> Furthermore, Thucydides’ perfunctory mention of these incidents suggests that it was merely a fact of daily life. Likewise, we see the same state of affairs when the Athenian Assembly debated the ‘wooden wall’ oracle in 480 B.C. during the Persian invasion.<sup>8</sup> Similarly, Aristophanes’ lampooning of mantic figures hurling oracles at each other in *Peace* suggests once more that oracles and their interpretation by professional specialists were a common feature of assembly debates.<sup>9</sup>

Although Oracles clearly played a key role in the custom and practice of *poleis* and *stratego*i in all matters of war, and a genuine belief in the divine and an earnest desire to execute the will of the gods could have a significant influence upon the decision-making process of both foreign policy and the actual conduct of the war itself, perhaps where the Oracles’ influence was most potent, and a theme which effectively pervades all of the war oracles in this study, is that of the effect oracular prognostications had on the psychology of the soldiers and the general populace. In the vast majority of the war oracles considered, one can argue that the Oracles’ pronouncements must have had, in some form or other, profound psychological effects, particularly on the hearts and minds of the superstitious and devout believers.

The corpus of war oracles surveyed in this thesis is full of examples of where a *polis*, or *strategos*, asks simply for its, or his, chances of success, either before going to war, during a campaign, or before a particular battle, to which the Oracle responds by giving a positive and optimistic prophecy, which provides reassurance, boosts morale, and emboldens the consultant, which consequently helps them to victory. However, the inverse also applies when the Oracle provides a negative prophecy, which has the exact opposite effect of spreading fear and doubt

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<sup>7</sup> Thuc. 2.21.3; 8.1.1. See Oracle no. 42, *infra*, p. 281ff.; Oracle no. 43, *infra*, p. 246ff.

<sup>8</sup> Hdt. 7.140-3. See Oracle no. 31, *infra*, p. 275ff.

<sup>9</sup> Ar. *Pax* 1043-1126. See also Ar. *Av.* 967-8. For further discussion of the role of the Delphic Oracle in the decision-making processes of Classical Athens, see Bowden, H., *Classical Athens and the Delphic Oracle: Divination and Democracy* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005) esp. 134-159.



in the *polis* and army, weakening resolve, and damaging the conviction and courage of the soldiers.

The orthodox and generally dismissive view held by many modern historians, such as Fontenrose, Delcourt, and Crahay, is that the Oracles were merely used out of superstitious habit and therefore held no real power.<sup>10</sup> They argue that the vast majority of oracles recorded in our sources are either fabricated or *post-eventum* inventions, and as a consequence the Oracles had virtually no significant impact on the affairs of Greek city-states, other than acting as a rubber stamp for their enterprises and laws, in particular their cult laws and institutions.<sup>11</sup> Indeed, Fontenrose goes so far as to reject as non-genuine almost all of the responses reputed to have been spoken by the Delphic Oracle in the first three centuries of its existence, roughly from 750-450 B.C., whilst Delcourt and Crahay argue, too, that the majority of the oracles that Herodotus quotes or reports are not authentic.<sup>12</sup> Moreover, Fontenrose goes on to conclude that those Delphic responses, which were in fact genuine, had no direct and active influence upon Greek states, and that the Delphic Oracle took no initiatives in Greek affairs and made little attempt to affect the policies of Greek *poleis*.<sup>13</sup> However, this rather depreciatory view that the ancients' belief in Oracles was mere superstition and that the Oracles wielded very little influence in the affairs of Greek *poleis* is fundamentally wrong and not particularly helpful for our understanding of ancient Greek warfare, as this thesis argues. On the contrary, as I hope to demonstrate, this view could not be further from the truth: the psychological impact of oracles in war was manifest and very real. As Pritchett quite correctly argues: 'Portents, dreams, and oracles are features in the accounts of Greek historians, because such elements were factors in Greek life. These features, with their interpretation, counted for something, and that not insignificant, in the actions of men and in the policy of states.'<sup>14</sup>

### **Review of scholarship on Oracles and divination in ancient Greek warfare**

As Robert Parker states in his book *On Greek Religion*: 'There has been a remarkable and ever-increasing growth of interest in ancient Greek religion in the last half-century.'<sup>15</sup> The masterly

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<sup>10</sup> See Fontenrose, 1978; Crahay, R., *La littérature oraculaire chez Herodote*, *Bibliothèque de la Faculté de philosophie et lettres de l'Université de Liège*; fasc.138 (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1956); Delcourt, M., *L'Oracle de Delphes* (Paris: Payot, 1955).

<sup>11</sup> Fontenrose, 1978: 239; Parker, R., 'Greek States and Greek Oracles', in Buxton, R. G. A. ed., *Oxford Readings in Greek Religion* (Oxford, 2000) 76-108.

<sup>12</sup> See Fontenrose, 1978: 233; Crahay, 1956; Delcourt, 1955.

<sup>13</sup> Fontenrose, 1978: 239.

<sup>14</sup> Pritchett, 1979: 3.

<sup>15</sup> Parker, R., *On Greek Religion* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2011) *Preface* vii.

works of great scholars of the latter half of the twentieth century, such as those by Dodds, Nilsson, Vernant, and Burkert, successfully deposed the traditionally-held view of earlier classicists, which had relegated Greek religion to the sidelines as a quaint but inconsequential idiosyncrasy of the ancient Greeks, and instead firmly established the vital importance of Greek religion to our understanding of ancient Greek history and society.<sup>16</sup> Since then there has been a profusion of research into all aspects of Greek religion and the resultant body of scholarship in the field is mammoth in scale.<sup>17</sup> Alongside these more general studies into Greek religion, there has been a great deal of attention paid to Greek Oracles and ancient divination, and, once again, the production of scholarship dedicated to this particular area of Greek religion has been prolific.<sup>18</sup> Although the realm of Oracles and divination is extremely well-trodden ground, much of the scholarship is concerned more with the Oracles' histories, their personnel, and the various methods of consultation. Therefore, there is still a distinct lack of research and investigation into the role of Oracles specifically in regard to war, and in particular concerning the psychological impact of Oracles and divination on the *polis* and army in times of war. That being said, there are several historians who, although they have not afforded it enough scrutiny or dealt with it in sufficient depth, have touched on the role and impact of Oracles and divination in war in their works on Greek religion.

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<sup>16</sup> Dodds, E. R., *The Greeks and the Irrational* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1951); Nilsson, M. P., *Geschichte der griechischen Religion*, 3rd ed., 2 vols. (Munich: C.H. Beck, 1967-74); Nilsson, M. P., *Greek Popular Religion* (New York: 1940); Vernant, J.-P., *Myth and Society in Ancient Greece* (Brighton: Harvester Press, 1980); Vernant, J.-P., *Myth and Thought among the Greeks* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1983); Vernant, J.-P., *Mortals and Immortal: Collected Essays* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991); Burkert, W., *Greek Religion: Archaic and Classical*, trans. Raffan, J. (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1985; reprint, 2004).

<sup>17</sup> The field of Greek religion is far too vast a topic to even begin to deal with here. However, recent scholarship on the subject continues to challenge existing conceptions about ancient Greek religion and examine new areas. For further discussion and up-to-date detailed bibliographies on the subject of Greek religion, see: Parker, 2011; Mikalson, J. D., *Ancient Greek Religion*, 2nd ed., *Blackwell Ancient Religions* (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010); Kindt, J., *Rethinking Greek Religion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012); Ogden, D., ed., *A Companion to Greek Religion* (Malden, Mass.; Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2007).

<sup>18</sup> Once more, the topic is far too extensive to begin to summarise satisfactorily here; however, for some of the most authoritative works on the Delphic Oracle, see Amandry, P., *La Mantique Apollinienne à Delphes: Essai sur le fonctionnement de l'oracle* (Paris: Boccard, 1950); Parke, H. W. and Wormell, D. E. W., *The Delphic Oracle*, 2 vols. (Oxford: Blackwell, 1956a); Fontenrose, 1978; for Oracles other than Delphi: Parke, H. W., *The Oracles of Zeus: Dodona, Olympia, Ammon* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1967); Fontenrose, J. E., *Didyma: Apollo's Oracle, Cult, and Companions* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988); Eidinow, E., *Oracles, Curses, and Risk Among the Ancient Greeks* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007). For more recent analysis and up-to-date bibliographies, see: Scott, M., *Delphi: A History of the Center of the Ancient World* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014b); Stoneman, R., *The Ancient Oracles: Making the Gods Speak* (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2011); Curnow, 2004; Vandenberg, P., *Mysteries of the Oracles: The Last Secrets of Antiquity* (London: Tauris Parke Paperbacks, 2007). On divination and seers, see: Johnston, S. I., *Ancient Greek Divination* (Malden, Mass.; Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2008); Johnston, S. I. and Struck, P. T., eds., *Mantikê: Studies in Ancient Divination* (Leiden: Brill, 2005); Flower, M. A., *The Seer in Ancient Greece* (Berkeley; California; London: University of California Press, 2008); Dickie, M. W., *Magic and Magicians in the Greco-Roman World* (London: Routledge, 2001).

Fontenrose, for instance, when categorising the occasions or problems which caused the consultants to go to Delphi for a response, identifies 79 instances that were directly related to war (20 legendary, 6 historical, 53 quasi-historical).<sup>19</sup> However, he does not consider many of them to be authentic, let alone analyse their potential psychological impact upon *poleis* and armies in times of war; even in the case of those which he deems to be authentic he does not delve too deeply into their influence on *polis* and army morale and decision-making. That being said, he does acknowledge that such wartime consultations usually resulted in the Oracle responding typically in three ways: issuing commands to make war, directions on means of victory, and predictions of victory or defeat, or time of victory.<sup>20</sup>

Parke and Wormell, on the other hand, are significantly less cynical than Fontenrose and argue the case for a greater number of the Delphic oracles to be considered authentic. Although Parke and Wormell's work is principally a history of the Delphic Oracle's functions and its responses from its mythological origins through to its usage under the Roman emperors, and to that end is primarily concerned with evaluating the historicity of the oracular responses, they do nevertheless throughout their study make numerous observations touching upon the psychological import of the prophecies issued by Delphic Apollo.<sup>21</sup> Unfortunately, yet again, the psychological motivations behind the consultations in the first place and the psychological impact of the Pythia's responses are inadequately developed.

Perhaps the closest any historian has come to directly addressing the question of the psychological role and impact of Oracles and divination in ancient Greek warfare is Pritchett. In his authoritative work on *The Greek State at War, Part III: Religion*, Pritchett dedicates a considerable amount of time to analysing both the Oracles and *manteis*' role in warfare, devoting a separate chapter to each.<sup>22</sup> Pritchett's analysis of military oracles, for the most part, consists of a collection of *testimonia* on military matters (35 war oracles) from epigraphical and literary sources, in which he highlights *in passim* the psychological impact of several oracular prognostications on *polis* and army morale.<sup>23</sup> Furthermore, in the course of his analysis of the seer's role in war, Pritchett devotes several pages to the use of divination as a means of

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<sup>19</sup> Fontenrose, 1978: 41, 54.

<sup>20</sup> Fontenrose, 1978: 25.

<sup>21</sup> For example, see Parke, H. W. and Wormell, D. E. W., *The Delphic Oracle, Vol. 1: The History* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1956b) 96, 150, 169, 268, 416.

<sup>22</sup> Pritchett, 1979: 47-90; 296-321.

<sup>23</sup> For example, see Pritchett, 1979: 304, 309, 311, 314, 315, 318, 319, 321.

building army morale.<sup>24</sup> In addition, he devotes several pages of cursory analysis to the use of religion for army discipline, but even he admits that there is a need for further investigation into the concept.<sup>25</sup> It is abundantly clear from Pritchett's observations that he clearly believes that the majority of the oracles are authentic, or if not, that they still reveal what the ancient Greeks believed about them, and that their influence in war was very real and significant. Yet, despite Pritchett probing considerably further into this sphere of ancient warfare than any other historian to date, the soil of debate on the topic still remains relatively unturned.

More recently, Hugh Bowden's *Classical Athens and the Delphic Oracle*, which focuses on how belief in the Delphic Oracle and the desire to execute the will of the gods affected Athenian politics, and therefore convincingly challenges the established notion that Athenian democracy may be seen as a model for modern secular democratic institutions, comes closer to addressing the powerful psychological impact of Oracles on the ancient Greek *polis*. In the course of his survey of Athens' relationship with Delphi, Bowden examines the Oracle's key role in the *polis*' foreign policy decision-making and the religious motivations, which alongside other secular considerations, played a significant part behind city-states going to war.<sup>26</sup> However, although Bowden successfully begins to tackle the hitherto relatively unacknowledged role of the Oracle in ancient Greek warfare, his study does not go beyond the influence of Oracles in decision-making at the very beginning of conflicts and thus neglects to examine their psychological role during the wars themselves.

Most recently, Jason Crowley has very usefully analysed the psychological forces which drove the ancient Athenian hoplite to engage in virtually perpetual warfare throughout his lifetime, but although he acknowledges the role that Greek religion played in reinforcing the socio-political pressures at work on the ancient Greek hoplite, he overlooks the psychological importance of oracular consultations and divination on foreign policy decision-making, military command, and on the execution of the war itself.<sup>27</sup>

Therefore, although the role of Oracles and divination in times of war has been touched upon cursorily now and again in the course of the more general treatises on Greek religion, and

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<sup>24</sup> Pritchett, 1979: 58-60.

<sup>25</sup> Pritchett, 1979: 330.

<sup>26</sup> Bowden, 2005: 10-11; 100-108; 114-117; 134-151.

<sup>27</sup> Crowley, J., *The Psychology of the Athenian Hoplite: The Culture of Combat in Classical Athens* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

occasionally in slightly more depth in the more specific scholarship on Oracles and ancient divination, the question of the psychological role and impact of Oracles and divination in ancient Greek warfare remains unsatisfactorily explored thus far. Consequently, it is the intention of this study to attempt to address the existing dearth of research in this area.

## **Aims and methodology**

This thesis will demonstrate how the habitual consultation of oracular shrines before a war, during a campaign, and before battles was far more than mere religious protocol on the part of the ancient Greeks, and was in fact a fundamental part of ancient Greek warfare, which had significant psychological ramifications for the protagonists involved, and, as a consequence, had an important influence on the outcome of wars in the ancient Greek world. The extant evidence suggests that the psychological reasons for consulting the Oracles on matters of war were multilayered and interrelated, and that obtaining divine sanction and affirmation were vital for the morale of the *polis*, the army as a whole, and for the individual soldier. Furthermore, the advice or commands of the god, and the mood of the prognostication delivered by the Oracle at the beginning of a war, could have a major impact on troop psychology and military decision-making later on during the conflict. The sincere belief in the divine and its tangible influence in war is perhaps most strikingly demonstrated by the use of oracles as tools of psychological warfare by *poleis* themselves.

The thesis will, to begin with, analyse the multifarious reasons why ancient Greek *poleis*, *strategoï*, and ordinary individuals sought the counsel of the Oracles regarding matters of war, and the psychological repercussions of the oracular responses to those queries on the consultant city-states and their armies. In addition, because of the unique perspective that Xenophon gives us, particularly in the *Anabasis* and *Hellenica*, on the role and influence of the divine and divination in ancient Greek warfare, I shall examine Xenophon's religious beliefs and practices in war and assess the extent to which he can be used as a paradigm for the rest of the Greek world. I shall also examine in considerable depth those oracular consultations which concerned more specific military questions, such as bones transferrals, military alliances, and military command. Before moving on to examine at length the impact of the Oracles' responses on *polis* and army psychology and decision-making, it will be necessary to first consider the ancient Greeks' belief in the role of the divine and the supernatural in warfare, for to fully appreciate the psychological impact of oracular prognostications on the mindset of the ancient Greek civilian and soldier we must, to begin with, have a thorough understanding of their convictions and expectations regarding the part played by gods and heroes in the wars of humans. Finally, after examining the psychological effects of oracular prophecies on both combatants and non-combatants, this thesis will then look in more depth specifically at those examples where

ancient Greek *poleis* and *strategoi* deliberately used oracular prophecies as stratagems and psychological weapons in war.

In order to assess and evaluate the psychological impact of oracular consultations and prophecies on ancient Greek warfare, a corpus of 91 war oracles, taken from a wide variety of literary, epigraphical, and archaeological sources, will be used to demonstrate the powerful influence that Oracles wielded in the realm of ancient warfare.<sup>28</sup> The oracles which I have classified as ‘war oracles’ are those prognostications recorded by ancient authors and public inscriptions that concern all questions of warfare put to the Oracles before, during, and after a military conflict. The vast majority of the war oracles deal with requests for divine sanction of a military venture; counsel on how to obtain victory or to ascertain chances of success; requests for guidance during a war or campaign; advice on military alliances, military command, and bones transferrals; and requests for divine protection and aid. Many of the 91 war oracles have been assembled from Parke and Wormell’s and Fontenrose’s catalogues of the consultations and responses of the Delphic Oracle,<sup>29</sup> while the war oracles from other oracular sites such as Didyma, Dodona, Olympia, Ammon, and Trophonios, etc., have been gathered to a large extent from Pritchett’s work on *The Greek State at War*,<sup>30</sup> Fontenrose’s work on Didyma,<sup>31</sup> and Eidinow’s catalogue of queries and responses from Dodona.<sup>32</sup> The remainder come directly from the accounts of several of our ancient sources.

Although this study will try to include evidence from as many as possible of the oracular sites of Archaic and Classical Greece and Asia Minor, due to the limitations of the surviving literary, archaeological, and epigraphical evidence that we possess, there will be an unavoidable focus mainly on the most-documented and well-known sites of Delphi, Dodona, Olympia, Didyma,

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<sup>28</sup> The 91 war oracles have been numbered, for the purposes of this study, in chronological order and are listed in Appendix I, *infra*, p. 347. I have also separated the oracles into historical and non-historical consultations and responses. Non-historical war oracles in this thesis will be prefixed with ‘N’. Where possible, I have also cross-referenced the Delphic war oracles with the corresponding catalogue entries that appear in Parke and Wormell’s *The Delphic Oracle* (the references by number refer to Volume 2 of the work), and Fontenrose’s *The Delphic Oracle*. When referring to Fontenrose’s catalogue of oracular responses, I have used his classification of Historical, Quasi-Historical, Legendary, and Fictional responses. The alphanumerical references correspond to those entries found in pp. 243-429 of his catalogue (i.e. H1-75, Q1-268, L1-176, F1-16). The references to the Didymaeian responses correspond to the numerical entries found in pp. 177-244 of Fontenrose’s *Didyma: Apollo’s Oracle, Cult, and Companions*. However, in the footnotes I have prefixed Fontenrose’s numerical references from that catalogue with a ‘D’ in order to avoid confusion with those from *The Delphic Oracle* (e.g. D40 = no. 40, p. 214 of Fontenrose’s *Didyma*).

<sup>29</sup> Parke, H. W. and Wormell, D. E. W., *The Delphic Oracle, Vol. 2: The Oracular Responses* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1956c); Fontenrose, 1978: 244-416.

<sup>30</sup> Pritchett, 1979: 296-321.

<sup>31</sup> Fontenrose, 1988: 177-244.

<sup>32</sup> Eidinow, 2007: 72-128.

and Ammon. Furthermore, although I shall be concentrating on the major oracular sites of Greece and Asia Minor, I shall also refer to contemporaneous Biblical, Near Eastern, and Egyptian evidence, as well as later Hellenistic and Roman examples when it may help illuminate a particular subject further, or where it may show an adoption, continuation, or development of earlier Greek customs and practices.

The scarcity on many occasions of direct and explicit evidence regarding the psychological impact of oracles in ancient Greek warfare is a problem, but not necessarily an insuperable one. Indeed, there are three main ways in which the psychological impact of Oracles in ancient Greek warfare is revealed to us: first and foremost, of course, is when the psychological impact of the oracular prophecy is directly discussed by the sources; the second is when the psychological impact is implied by the victory, which is mentioned directly after the explanation of the oracle by the historian; and, thirdly, when the god responsible for the oracle is given credit for the victory, which infers that the oracular prognostication had the desired psychological effect. In other words, particularly for the latter two methods of measurement, the fulfilment of the oracle precipitates victory. However, in some cases it is actually what is *not* said by the sources, as in the case of Thucydides' account of Sparta's consultation of Delphic Apollo before the outbreak of the Peloponnesian War,<sup>33</sup> which reveals the impact of the oracular consultations on the psyche of the ancient Greek. In such instances the inferred psychological impact of the oracles will be discussed individually.

### **The Sources**

Although, of course, issues of historiography, and the historicity and authenticity of the war oracles will be addressed in relation to individual oracles, for the purposes of this study it does not, to a certain degree, really matter if the oracular episodes recorded by our sources are indeed genuine or whether they are contemporaneous propagandistic creations, *post-eventum* inventions, or even entirely fabricated for narrative purposes by our authors. On one hand, there are certainly, as I shall be arguing, a great many examples that are undoubtedly authentic oracular consultations and prognostications, which consequently give us an invaluable insight into the crucial role that Oracles played in ancient Greek warfare, particularly in terms of their psychological impact on the *polis* and the army. On the other hand, those war oracles and oracular episodes that appear to be contemporary or later inventions, still reveal to us the

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<sup>33</sup> *Q.v.* Oracle no. 41, *infra*, p. 59ff.; Thuc. 1.118, 1.123, 2.54.



mindset of the ancient Greeks, which does as much for our understanding of ancient Greek warfare as the historical war oracles do, for they affirm and validate what we know from the genuine episodes and reveal the expectations and norms of the time.<sup>34</sup>

### **Historicity versus fiction**

Contrary to what more cynical scholars such as Crahay and Fontenrose would have us believe, particularly if an Oracle's prophecy is too good to be true and its foresight too accurate to be considered plausible, it does not necessarily follow that the oracular story recorded by our sources has to be consequently an *ex nihilo* invention or the consultation a *post-eventum* fabrication. Rather, I believe that behind the vast majority of the war oracles analysed in this study are in fact contemporary historical consultations by *poleis* or *strategoi*. Even if the historians' versions of the oracular consultations did diverge significantly from the original consultation of the Oracle by a *polis* or *strategos*, it does not detract from the fact that an actual consultation of an Oracle took place in the first instance during a time of war. Indeed, what is of more importance is the recognition that the oracles were part of an oral tradition, whereby later writers' and historians' contemporary perceptions and beliefs were projected onto their views and interpretations of the past. Moreover, Maurizio argues correctly that oracles should be regarded as oral literature, and as such their authenticity needs to be judged by a different set of criteria than that applied to written texts. She argues that it is impossible to identify the *ipsissima verba* of the Pythia as oracles are the product of oral transmission, and as a consequence the real authors of the responses were the communities who heard the oracles and accepted, interpreted, remembered, recited, and believed in them.<sup>35</sup>

Harrison suggests that there must have been a disparity between the oracular stories told by Herodotus and the actual oracles delivered, for if the majority of oracles were so ambiguous and open to such frequent disastrous misinterpretation then Delphi would have very quickly alienated its clientele.<sup>36</sup> However, that is not necessarily the case. The ancient Greeks knew that the gods spoke in riddles, and would have therefore expected such when they consulted

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<sup>34</sup> See Mikalson, J. D., *Herodotus and Religion in the Persian Wars* (Chapel Hill; London: University of North Carolina Press, 2003) 57-58; Raphals, L. A., *Divination and Prediction in Early China and Ancient Greece* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013) 28-30; Maurizio, L., 'Delphic Oracles as Oral Performances: Authenticity and Historical Evidence', *Classical Antiquity* 16, 2 (1997) 312-313. For further discussion, see *infra*, pp. 328-330.

<sup>35</sup> Maurizio, 1997: 312-313.

<sup>36</sup> Harrison, T. J., *Divinity and History: The Religion of Herodotus*, *Oxford Classical Monographs* (Oxford; New York: Clarendon Press, 2000)157.

the Oracles.<sup>37</sup> Perhaps in questions of more mundane enquiries, such as whether to get married or to go on a voyage, they may have expected and received a much more straightforward ‘yes’ or ‘no’ answer.<sup>38</sup> However, in such grand matters of war, where *poleis*’ fates and people’s lives lay in the balance, one must not be surprised that equivocal responses were delivered by the gods; it would only have been natural for the Oracles themselves in such weighty issues to hedge their bets behind ambiguous responses to protect their reputations and pass any subsequent blame onto the shoulders of the enquirer.<sup>39</sup> In this way, the burden of interpretation was passed on to the *poleis* themselves. Indeed, as Harrison himself admits, the oracular anecdotes recorded by Herodotus tell us much about the mechanisms used by the ancient Greeks to sustain their belief in divination, and, moreover, reminded the ancient audience of the miraculous fulfilment of earlier prophecies and, importantly, of the proper response to divination, which served to reinforce belief in the Oracles and in divination.<sup>40</sup> Harrison, moreover, argues that the ancient Greeks’ system of belief in divination was in fact sustained by the frequently ambiguous prophecies issued by the Oracles and the number of different interpretations they allowed.<sup>41</sup> Thus, ‘The equivocal nature of many prophecies and the

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<sup>37</sup> Harrison, 2000: 149; cf. Theogn. 805-810; Pind. *Ol.* 12.10-18; Aesch. *Ag.* 1255; Eur. *Med.* 674ff.; Eur. *Supp.* 138; Heraclitus *DK* 22 B 93; Asheri, D., ‘Platea vendetta delle Termopoli: Alle origini di un motivo teologico erodoteo’, in Sordi, M. ed., *Responsabilità perdono e vendetta nel mondo antico, CISA 24* (Milan, 1998) 65-86.

<sup>38</sup> Harrison, indeed, suggests that it very well may have been the case that in practice the majority of oracles were relatively unequivocal responses to clear questions; for example, when Dorieus consults Delphi on whether he should undertake a colony to Eryx, the Pythia responds simply that he should (*Hdt.* 5.43), or when the Cnidiads consult the Delphic Oracle concerning the great number of injuries they were sustaining during the digging of the canal across the Isthmus, they were told unequivocally to stop digging (*Hdt.* 1.174.3-5); see Harrison, 2000: 156-157.

<sup>39</sup> Johnston rightly argues that the god’s answers were crafted to address each specific situation that enquirers presented; the Pythia delivered ambiguous ‘conversational’ oracles alongside ‘binary’ forms of divination, and, indeed, that the two forms of divination could happily co-exist alongside each other - a fact clearly illustrated by an episode recorded by Plutarch and an inscription from the first half of the fourth century B.C., which shows that divination by lot existed alongside enthusiastic prophecy at Delphi: see Johnston, 2008: 52-53.

<sup>40</sup> Harrison, 2000: 156-157. For instance, Harrison points to the exemplary behaviour of Pausanias on the battlefield at Plataea, who, while being hard pressed by the Persians and suffering heavy casualties, waits for favourable omens from the battlefield sacrifices before he launches his attack, in contrast to Mardonius who advises his generals to ignore their unfavourable omens: see *Hdt.* 9.61.3-9.62.1. Harrison argues that such stories of obedience to divination in spite of one’s obvious interests, although not very common, served as models to the ancient Greeks for the proper reaction to such dilemmas: Harrison, 2000: 152-153. Cf. Agesilaos exposing his men to a similar danger in Akarnania in 389 B.C. (*Xen. Hell.* 4.6.9); the Ten Thousand suffering terrible hardship from hunger during a siege when the omens, repeatedly taken for four days, were unfavourable for carrying out a sortie (*Xen. Anab.* 6.4.19-25); and an eclipse of the moon preventing an Athenian retreat from Syracuse, while there was still a slight chance of escape (*Thuc.* 7.42). Indeed, in the latter case in point it is important to note that the negative reaction to the portent came from the rank and file, and not from their ultra-religious *strategos*, Nikias. For further discussion of these episodes, see Goodman, M. D. and Holladay, A. J., ‘Religious Scruples in Ancient Warfare’, *CQ* 36, 1 (1986) 151-171.

<sup>41</sup> Harrison, 2000: 149.

interpretation that this necessitates are not merely suffered as necessary evils: they are considered apparently to be of the essence of prophecy.<sup>42</sup>

Giangiulio, on the other hand, in his thought-provoking discussion of intentional history constructed by Greek political communities, goes even further to argue that in many instances the oracular traditions may have originated from the communities they referred to rather than from the Delphic Oracle itself.<sup>43</sup> Yet, asangiulio correctly argues, even in those instances where it is unclear if the oracular stories of archaic Greece originated from the local Greek *poleis* or from the Delphic shrine, it nevertheless reveals what the Greek communities *wanted* to believe about their past, in order to give their actions a divine dimension and authority.<sup>44</sup>

Consequently, although issues of historicity will be thoroughly examined throughout this study, when we cannot be certain that the actual consultation took place or the war oracle we possess is historically faithful, the focus will rather be on how the oracular stories woven into the ancient Greeks' myths, folklore, and historical narratives reveal what the ancient Greek audience believed about the Oracle's role in wartime, and the perceived impact their prognostications had upon *polis* and military decision-making and psychology.

In summation, to put the matter into its plainest terms, one cannot simply ignore the fact that the ancient Greeks habitually consulted Oracles on matters of war and subsequently received prognostications in response to their enquiries. Consequently, as I shall be arguing throughout the course of this study, I am loath to so quickly dismiss the war oracles, as many scholars are wont to do, as inventions; I believe many of the oracles were historical and took place, although through an oral tradition may have been embellished over time. However, for our purposes their historicity does not really matter - what really matters is that the Greeks believed they were real and happened and that the reaction, as told by our sources, occurred. Thus, they reveal what the Greeks believed about the power of oracular prophecy in war - to them the psychological responses were real and they applied it to their interpretations and storytelling, applying their present beliefs and expectations upon the historical episodes of the past.

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<sup>42</sup> Harrison, 2000: 150.

<sup>43</sup>angiulio, M., 'Collective Identities, Imagined Past, and Delphi', in Foxhall, L., Gehrke, H.-J., and Luraghi, N. eds., *Intentional History: Spinning Time in Ancient Greece* (Stuttgart, 2010) 121-135.

<sup>44</sup>angiulio, 2010: 131.

## Pre-historical and legendary war oracles

With this methodological approach to our sources in mind, much can be gleaned from the non-historical war oracles enshrined in myth and legend. Although we must of course tread carefully when using the non-historical oracular episodes as evidence for custom and practice in the Classical age and beyond, they still provide us with an invaluable insight into the contemporary beliefs and customs of those very Greeks who were looking back through the mists of time and recording and interpreting the heroic deeds of the dim and murky past with the subjectivity of their own times and mores. We see evidence of this process taking place elsewhere, for instance, with regards to ancient Greek religion, where contemporary religious practices were clearly influenced by ancient myth and legend. Herodotus, for example, states that it was in fact Homer and Hesiod who defined the Hellenic pantheon and gave the gods their appropriate titles, offices, and powers, and described their appearances.<sup>45</sup> Furthermore, as Mikalson argues, the Homeric epics were so well known that they would surely have influenced the ways in which later rituals were carried out, and also the ways in which artists and philosophers thought about Greek religion in their own time.<sup>46</sup> Although the debate about the relationships between myth and rituals is complicated and scholars have had an extremely difficult time adequately resolving the issue,<sup>47</sup> most scholars agree generally that some structural affinities exist between myths and rituals, and certainly, as Noegel asserts, a safe generalisation to make about myth is that 'it often serves an apologetic function providing belief systems, and thus ritual practices, with divinely sanctioned aetiologies.'<sup>48</sup> Perhaps the most obvious examples to point to would be the Athenian cults at Brauron and Eleusis. The metamorphosis of the eighth-century cult of Demeter and Persephone at Eleusis to the Mysteric cult during the early sixth century, and then expansion into a much larger cult and worshipping group, accompanied by a major building programme under Peisistratos, for instance, was all

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<sup>45</sup> Hdt. 2.53.

<sup>46</sup> Mikalson, J. D., 'Greece', in Johnston, S. I. ed., *Religions of the Ancient World: A Guide* (Cambridge, Mass.; London, 2004) 211.

<sup>47</sup> See Fontenrose, J. E., *The Ritual Theory of Myth* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1966); Parker, 2011: 22-29; Bremmer, J. N., 'Ritual', in Johnston, S. I. ed., *Religions of the Ancient World: A Guide* (Cambridge, Mass.; London, 2004) 32-44; Versnel, H. S., *Inconsistencies in Greek and Roman Religion*, 2 vols., vol. 2: *Transition and Reversal in Myth and Ritual* (Leiden; New York: E.J. Brill, 1993) 16-89; Burkert, W., *Homo Necans: The Anthropology of Ancient Greek Sacrificial Ritual and Myth*, trans. Bing, P. (Berkeley; London: University of California Press, 1983); Burkert, 1985; Csapo, E., *Theories of Mythology, Ancient Cultures* (Malden, MA; Oxford, Eng.: Blackwell, 2005); Graf, F., 'Myth', in Johnston, S. I. ed., *Religions of the Ancient World: A Guide* (Cambridge, Mass.; London, 2004) 45-58.

<sup>48</sup> Noegel, S. B., 'Greek Religion and the Ancient Near East', in Ogden, D. ed., *A Companion to Greek Religion* (Malden, Mass.; Oxford, 2007) 26.

given divine validation through Eleusinian myths that provided *aitia* for such changes.<sup>49</sup> The expansions of the myths of Herakles, for example, to include his initiation into the Eleusinian Mysteries even though he was a foreigner provided the *aition* for the Mysteries to be opened up to the wider Greek world during the Classical period rather than in the past when it had been just been open to the Athenians alone.<sup>50</sup> Moreover, the rites of the Eleusinian Mysteries, followed a purification ceremony which the goddess Demeter herself set out in the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter*.<sup>51</sup> Similarly, the rites and sacrifices involved in the cult of Artemis Brauronia had mythological correlatives too. Several Brauronian myths involving bears, young girls, ritual races, and sacrifices of substitutes aimed to explain the strange rites of passage performed at the sanctuary of Artemis at Brauron and in her related sanctuary in the Piraeus.<sup>52</sup> An aetiological myth, for instance, explained why the young girls dedicated at Brauron were called she-bears (*arktoi*) in atonement for the killing of a bear sacred to Artemis by Attic youths.<sup>53</sup>

Looking at the legendary war oracles in this light, the historical accounts of the heroic age can often reveal contemporary beliefs and *modi operandi*, or at least an ideal to which the ancient writers were hoping to persuade their audiences to emulate or aspire. Thus, many legends frequently have a distinct ring of truth about them. As Robertson succinctly and persuasively contends: 'From the circumstances of various inquiries recorded by Herodotus and other sources whether they are real or legendary does not matter, for legendary cases will be true to life.'<sup>54</sup> Indeed, Lendon argues compellingly in his survey of battle in classical antiquity that, because the ancients revered the past to such a degree that seems unfathomable today, the Greeks constantly strove to innovate by attempting to recreate what had gone before, and that going forward by looking backward was entirely characteristic of ancient habits of mind.<sup>55</sup> It is this idea, of the Greeks looking back to myth and legendary consultations of Oracles during

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<sup>49</sup> For further discussion, see Parker, R., *Athenian Religion: A History* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996; reprint, 2004) 97-101; Burkert, 1985: 285-290; Sourvinou-Inwood, C., "Reading" Greek Death: *To the End of the Classical Period* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995) 413-422; Sourvinou-Inwood, C., 'Reconstructing Change: Ideology and the Eleusinian Mysteries', in Golden, M. and Toohey, P. eds., *Inventing Ancient Culture: Historicism, Periodization and the Ancient World* (London, 1997) 132-164; Sourvinou-Inwood, C., 'Festivals and Mysteries: Aspects of the Eleusinian Cult', in Cosmopoulos, M. B. ed., *Greek Mysteries: The Archaeology and Ritual of Ancient Greek Secret Cults* (London, 2003) 25-49.

<sup>50</sup> Parker, 1996: 98-99.

<sup>51</sup> See Burkert, 1985: 286.

<sup>52</sup> Nielson, I., 'The Sanctuary of Artemis Brauronia: Can Architecture and Iconography Help to locate the Setting of the Rituals?', in Fischer-Hansen, T. and Paulsen, B. eds., *From Artemis to Diana: The Goddess of Man and Beast* (Copenhagen, 2009) 83-116, particularly 84-95.

<sup>53</sup> See Burkert, 1985: 151; Nielson, 2009: 86.

<sup>54</sup> Robertson, N., 'The True Meaning of the "Wooden Wall"', *Classical Philology* 82, 1 (1987) 4.

<sup>55</sup> Lendon, J. E., *Soldiers & Ghosts: A History of Battle in Classical Antiquity* (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2005) 11.

times of war, which is of critical importance to our understanding of how oracular prophecies could influence warfare during the Classical and Hellenistic periods. Lendon argues correctly that ‘inherited ethics could encourage soldiers to fight in ways loyal to those ethics and discourage methods that conflicted with them.’<sup>56</sup> So too then could an admired tradition inspire military leaders to imitate the pious devotion and *praxeis* of their ancestors with regards the use of oracular divination in warfare.

The reverence with which the ancient Greeks and Romans held the past meant that the Greeks of the Classical and Hellenistic eras looked to the past to learn from it and strove to follow the ways of their mythical forebears. Therefore, as Lendon avows: ‘the *Iliad* is the baseline for understanding the military ethos of the Greeks and important for understanding the military methods of the historical Greeks.’<sup>57</sup> Moreover, Lendon asserts that ‘the past of the Greeks was not inert, but to be imitated by the men of the present. The heroes of epic always sat invisible upon the shoulders of the Greeks, whispering their counsel.’<sup>58</sup> This is certainly true, for according to Plato, Homer was the ‘educator of Hellas’, yet the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* were more than just educational tools to teach reading and writing; they need to be seen also as moral texts. Indeed, Plato goes so far as to suggest that, ‘One should arrange one’s life according to this poet.’<sup>59</sup> Consequently, as Lendon neatly summarises: ‘Epic was the “encyclopaedia” of the Greeks, and the ways of epic were the good ways. So Greek civilisation, and Greek soldiers, also consciously reached back into epic for inspiration. Part of the military history of the Greeks is no more than a particular instance of this pervasive pattern of epic recollection.’<sup>60</sup> In short, if the Greeks of the historical period saw the mythical heroes consult the gods before and during war, and dutifully follow their counsel, then they would have striven to obediently do likewise.<sup>61</sup> Thus, the revered past of the ancient Greeks influenced warfare in their present.

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<sup>56</sup> Lendon, 2005: 12.

<sup>57</sup> Lendon, 2005: 22.

<sup>58</sup> Lendon, 2005: 37.

<sup>59</sup> Pl. *Resp.* 606E. Cf. Pl. *Prot.* 325E-326A for the same idea of children being taught to admire and imitate the epic heroes of the past in the present.

<sup>60</sup> Lendon, 2005: 38; 340 n. 37.

<sup>61</sup> For further discussion on the relationship of the ancient Greeks to their mythical past, their pervasive past-mindedness, and the enduring influence of Homer, see: Van Groningen, B. A., *In the Grip of the Past* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1953); Raubitschek, A. E., ‘What the Greeks Thought of their Early History’, *Ancient World* 20 (1989) 39-45; Robb, K., *Literacy and Paideia in Ancient Greece* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994); on the extensive influence of Homer in religion, see Burkert, 1985: 119-125.

## Historical war oracles

Without doubt our richest source of historical war oracles from both the Archaic and Classical periods comes from Herodotus and Pausanias. Of course, these historians' accounts do not come without their problems. It is certainly true that Herodotus and Pausanias had a personal penchant for divine interference in human affairs and the attendant supernatural phenomena, such as oracles, omens, and portents, which has caused many modern historians to criticise them for giving such features too much prominence in their narratives at the expense of more genuinely rational and earthly explanations of events.<sup>62</sup> However, Mikalson persuasively, and quite rightly, defends Herodotus' attention to the role of the divine and the supernatural in the Persian Wars, and his propounding of religious explanations for causes and outcomes of major and minor events of the invasion, against historians who regularly ignore, dismiss, or

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<sup>62</sup> For criticisms of Herodotus' religious beliefs and his ascription of religious causes in *The Histories*, see, Oertel, F., *Herodots ägyptischer Logos und die Glaubwürdigkeit Herodots* (Bonn: Habelt, 1970); Fehling, D., *Herodotus and his 'Sources': Citation, Invention and Narrative Art*, trans. Howie, J. G., *Arca* (Leeds: Cairns, 1989); Shimron, B., *Politics and Belief in Herodotus*, *Historia Einzelschriften* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag Wiesbaden, 1989); Lateiner, D., *The Historical Method of Herodotus*, *Phoenix Supplementary Volume* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1989). For a repudiation of Shimron, Lateiner, and Fehling, and a defence of Herodotus, see Pritchett, W. K., *The Liar School of Herodotus* (Amsterdam: Gieben, 1993); Rhodes, P. J., 'In Defence of the Greek Historians', *Greece & Rome* 41, 2 (1994) 156-171, in particular 160-161; Dewald, C. and Marincola, J., 'A Selective Introduction to Herodotean Studies', *Arctura* 201 (1987) 9-40, particularly 26-33; Marincola, J., *Greek Historians* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001) 31-60; Harrison, 2000: ; Gould, J., *Herodotus* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1989) 70-82; Gould, J., 'Herodotus and Religion', in Hornblower, S. ed., *Greek Historiography* (Oxford, 1994) 91-106; Romm, J. S., *Herodotus* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998) 142-147. For a middle course, see Moles, J., 'Truth and Untruth in Herodotus and Thucydides', in Gill, C. and Wiseman, T. P. eds., *Lies and Fiction in the Ancient World* (Exeter, 1993); Dover, K. J., 'Herodotean Plausibilities', in Austin, M. M., Harries, J., and Smith, C. eds., *Modus Operandi: Essays in Honour of Geoffrey Rickman* (London, 1998); Fowler, R. L., 'Herodotus and his Contemporaries', *JHS* 116 (1996) 62-87, especially 80-86; Forrest, W. G., 'Motivation in Herodotus: The Case of the Ionian Revolt', *The International History Review* 1, 3 (1979) 311-322; Waters, K. H., *Herodotus on Tyrants and Despots: A Study in Objectivity*, *Historia Einzelschriften* (Wiesbaden: F. Steiner, 1971). For a thorough treatment of the debate, see Harrison, 2000: 1-30; for a detailed analysis of religion in *The Histories*, see also Lachenaud, G., *Mythologies, religion et philosophie de l'histoire dans Herodote* (Paris: Université de Lille, 1978); Mikalson, 2003. The scholarship on religion in Pausanias is sparse in comparison to Herodotus; however, his biggest critic to date is perhaps Ulrich von Wilamowitz-Möllendorff, whose vitriolic lead was followed by his friends and pupils, August Kalkmann, Carl Robert, and Giorgio Pasquali: see Wilamowitz-Möllendorff, U. v., 'Die Thukydideslegende', *Hermes* 12 (1877) 326-367; Kalkmann, A., *Pausanias der Perieget: Untersuchungen über seine Schriftstellerei und seine Quellen* (Berlin: G. Reimer, 1886); Robert, C., *Pausanias als Schriftsteller: Studien und Beobachtungen* (Berlin: Wiedmann, 1909). For a defence of Pausanias' approach and methods, see Frazer, J. G., *Pausanias' Description of Greece*, 6 vols., vol. 4 (London: Macmillan, 1898); Juul, L. O., *Oracular Tales in Pausanias* (Odense: University Press of Southern Denmark, 2010); Alcock, S. E., Cherry, J. F., and Elsner, J. s., eds., *Pausanias: Travel and Memory in Roman Greece* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001); Pretzler, M., *Pausanias: Travel Writing in Ancient Greece* (London: Duckworth, 2007). For a strong defence, in particular, of how oracular tales were considered by Pausanias to be religious *testimonia*, and how they were considered to be true by his audience, see Juul, 2010: 106-134; Maurizio, 1997: 312-313. For further discussion of Pausanias' critics and supporters, see Habicht, C., 'An Ancient Baedeker and His Critics: Pausanias' "Guide to Greece"', *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 129, 2 (1985) 220-224; Habicht, C., *Pausanias' Guide to Ancient Greece*, trans. Beck, C. H. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998) 165-175.

disparage such inclinations.<sup>63</sup> He argues that to assume that the ancient Greeks would have in a religious vacuum prepared for, faced, fought, and won a war which threatened their entire existence, would be to fundamentally misunderstand and oversimplify classical Greek society. Indeed, Mikalson asserts: ‘I do not think it solely the prejudice of a religious historian to claim that the report of a miraculous event at Delphi or unfavourable battle omens at Plataea could affect the course of events every bit as much as a general’s strategy or the different styles of armour.’<sup>64</sup> The attribution of divine causation and the observance and import of oracles and omens may not sit well with modern sensibilities, but to Herodotus and Pausanias such things were very real and hugely significant, and as a result they included them and integrated them into their accounts. It is worthwhile to note Herodotus’ own view on the veracity and power of Oracles and divination when he states:

‘I cannot deny that there is truth in prophecies, and I have no wish to discredit them when they are expressed in unambiguous language...With that utterance of Bakis in mind, absolutely clear as it is, I do not venture to say anything against prophecies, nor will I listen to criticism from others.’<sup>65</sup>

Moreover, as Pritchett eloquently summarises, it is ‘by these very peculiarities such writers more fully represent the popular mind of the age and people and so become, in fresh application, historical in our eyes.’<sup>66</sup> Consequently, regardless of whether one considers the oracular episodes or the actual oracular responses to be historically valid, what is really of key importance is the fact that the ancient Greeks did, and as a result they provide us with an invaluable insight into the psyche of the ancient Greeks and the potential impact of oracular prophecy on ancient Greek warfare.

### ***Pausanias and the Messenian Wars***

Seven of the 68 historical oracular episodes in this study concern the First and Second Messenian Wars between Messenia and Sparta during the eighth and seventh centuries B.C. In many ways, the oracular tales of the Messenian Wars afford us a microcosmic picture of the wider practice in the Greek world of consulting Oracles in times of war, which neatly encapsulates the Oracle’s role, function, and ongoing involvement during a war from start to finish. Moreover, together they illustrate, crucially, the psychological impact of oracular prophecies on the *polis* and the army, and the beginnings of religious psychological warfare

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<sup>63</sup> Mikalson, 2003: 7-9.

<sup>64</sup> Mikalson, 2003: 7.

<sup>65</sup> Hdt. 8.77, trans. Aubrey De Sélincourt (*Herodotus: The Histories*).

<sup>66</sup> Pritchett, 1979: 3.



between ancient Greek *poleis*. In short, the oracular tales of the Messenian Wars provide us with a neat snapshot of the whole gamut of motivations behind oracular consultations in times of war, the utilisation and exploitation of the resultant oracular prognostications, and the subsequent psychological impact upon the *polis* and the army in wartime.

However, although the war oracles from Messenian Wars should be considered theoretically to be historical there are serious issues surrounding the historiography of the Messenian Wars and the historicity of the oracles recorded in our sources. This is mainly due to the fact that Pausanias is really the only ancient author who gives us a comprehensive account of Messenian history, and, of course, the fact that the stories of the Messenian past are suffused with Messenian perceptions of their own past and attempts to reconstruct their own ethnicity and forge their own identity after they achieved independence from Sparta in the fourth century B.C. following centuries of servitude.<sup>67</sup>

Although I shall deal with these issues when analysing each of the war oracles we possess from this period, in truth, once again, the historicity of the oracular episodes from the Messenian Wars does not really matter for the purposes of this study; what really matters is what they reveal to us in terms of what the ancient Greek audience believed and expected from their Oracles in times of war.

### ***Historiography and historicity of the Messenian Wars***

Although the war oracles recorded in the history of the First and Second Messenian wars provide us with a unique insight into the role of oracular divination in inter-*polis* warfare, it is necessary to examine the existent problems surrounding the accounts of the Messenian Wars when weighing up their usefulness in determining what they reveal about the power of prophecy in ancient Greek warfare.

Fontenrose argues that, although the two Messenian Wars waged between Sparta and Messenia c. 740-640 B.C. are indeed historical, Pausanias and our other sources' accounts of them are untrustworthy, and furthermore that the Delphic oracles attached to the wars, even though they are supposedly from after 800 B.C., and should therefore be deemed to belong to the historical

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<sup>67</sup> For a thorough examination of the history of Messenian identity, see Luraghi, N., *The Ancient Messenians: Constructions of Ethnicity and Memory* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008). See also *infra*, pp. 19-22.

period, are no more authentic than the Heraklid oracles and are just as legendary in character.<sup>68</sup> There are indeed several valid concerns with our sources. Pausanias has the only complete account of the Messenian Wars and he drew his material from third-century B.C. sources, the prose history of Myron of Priene, and Rianos of Bene's epic poem, the *Messenica*.<sup>69</sup>

There are, in essence, two distinct positions in the scholarship on the history of the Messenians. The first stance, favoured by Fontenrose and other historians, such as Grote, Roebuck, and Pearson, contends that the history of Messenia is in fact a 'pseudo-history' developed after the Messenians were restored to their country by Epaminondas in 370/69 B.C.<sup>70</sup> Pearson asserts that Rianos' and Myron's accounts are almost worthless as history due to the fact that they belong to the genre of 'romantic' or 'tragic' historians who, along with Kleitarchos, Hegesias of Magnesia, Phylarchos, and Duris, were more preoccupied with trying to produce a sensational narrative and dramatic incidents than creating an accurate chronicle or carrying out a methodical historical analysis.<sup>71</sup> Furthermore, Pearson also argues that it would have been impossible for the '*polis*' of Messenia to have a history when there was no *polis* in existence until after they had freed themselves from thralldom and created one.<sup>72</sup> Advocates of this camp therefore argue that the narratives we possess are all the invention of the post-liberation years, when the newly-freed Messenians found that they now required a past, so they simply manufactured one. However, there is another school of thought, argued by historians such as Shero, that it is possible that the Messenians, despite their years of servitude under the Spartan yoke, did have a sense of history, which they cherished and held on to voraciously as a form of resistance to their fate. They argue that the Messenians would surely have held dear stories about their fathers' struggles to preserve and regain their freedom and their land, and that this jealously-guarded history would have been handed down from generation to generation until it then effloresced in the years of Messenian emancipation and entered our textual record.<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> Fontenrose, 1978: 103.

<sup>69</sup> See Paus. 4.6.1.

<sup>70</sup> See Grote, G., *A History of Greece*, 12 vols. (London: Routledge, 1846-56) vol. II, chap. VII, 'First and Second Messenian Wars'; Roebuck, C. A., *A History of Messenia from 369 to 146 B.C.* (Chicago: 1941); Pearson, L., 'The Pseudo-History of Messenia and its Authors', *Historia* 11 (1962) 397-426. On the Hellenistic constructs of a Messenian past, see also Luraghi, 2008: 83-88. For a long list of references to the long-running nineteenth and twentieth-century debate over the authenticity of Messenian history, see Pearson, 1962: 397 n. 2.

<sup>71</sup> Pearson, 1962: 412.

<sup>72</sup> Pearson, 1962: 402, 425-426.

<sup>73</sup> Shero, L. R., 'Aristomenes the Messenian', *TAPA* 69 (1938) 504. Treves argues, in fact, that it was not Messenian independence that brought about a spate of historical mythology and literature on Messenia, but rather it was an unshakeable national solidarity and devotion to a revered past which caused the refounding of Messenia in the first place: see Treves, P., 'The Problem of a History of Messenia', *JHS* 64 (1944) 104. See also, Alcock, S. E.,

However, Alcock has more recently synthesised the two arguments and steers a very plausible middle course between both camps. Alcock uses recent archaeological evidence (admittedly not without its problems) on small helot communities in Pylos, and Messenian tomb cult practices during the Archaic and Classical periods (i.e. during the period of Spartan control), as well as recent anthropological, historical, sociological, religious, and Holocaust studies, to argue that both the previous extreme schools of thought, that of either total invention or total recall, are fundamentally wrong. She argues persuasively that Messenian history was in fact a dynamic ongoing memorial process of ‘remembrance and oblivion, commemoration and rejection.’<sup>74</sup> Acknowledging that Messenian history was in reality an endless process of remembering and forgetting their past, means that we should perhaps not be so hasty in dismissing the oracular tales of the Messenian Wars as mere legend concocted after Messenia’s liberation, and that as a consequence the oracular consultations discussed below may in fact have a certain ring of truth about them.

In addition, there are also considerable biases in our sources to take into account as well. Rianos’ epic, for instance, tells a version of the legend from a pro-Messenian point of view, whilst Isokrates clearly employs a pro-Spartan stance in his version, as he cites several oracles in the speech he wrote in support of Archidamos’ plea for Athenian aid to be given to Sparta against the Boiotians and Messenians.<sup>75</sup> The use of the Delphic oracles in Archidamos’ speech is clearly an attempt by Isokrates to justify Spartan hegemony over Messenia by portraying Sparta’s rule as being divinely ordained and Sparta’s war on the Messenians as a just war to avenge the murder of Kresphontes. Isokrates’ version, however, does not appear to marry with Ephorus’ account, which may also have been pro-Messenian and may have actually been the version that Myron and Rianos elaborated upon.<sup>76</sup>

It is Fontenrose’s contention, moreover, that Pausanias’ whole narrative and the oracular responses themselves have the traits of folktale and legend, and that, indeed, the narrative features of *manteis*, portents, dreams, and visions reflect the pre-Delphic legend. He argues

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‘The Pseudo-History of Messenia Unplugged’, *TAPA* 129 (1999) 335. For more discussion on the continuist vs discontinuist debate, see Luraghi, N., ‘Becoming Messenian’, *JHS* 122 (2002) 45-69.

<sup>74</sup> Alcock, 1999: 338.

<sup>75</sup> *Isoc. Or.* 6.17-18, 6.23, 6.31. For the oracles, see P-W 296, Fontenrose, Q13; & P-W 297-299, Fontenrose, Q18; Oracle no. 6, *infra*, p. 231.

<sup>76</sup> See Fontenrose, 1978: 103; and Huxley, G. L., ‘Observations on the Messeniaca of Rhianus of Bene’, *Kretika Chronika* XI (1957) 200-204.

that it could actually have been *manteis* who spoke the oracles in the earliest Messenian versions of the legend, and that Diodorus' version illustrates how Delphic Apollo later usurped the *manteis* in the literary tradition.<sup>77</sup> Diodorus' account, for instance, tells us that when the beleaguered Messenians were in a state of despair and despondency during the Spartans' siege of Ithome, and their morale was made worse by the omens of howling dogs and the distressing prophecies of the seers and oracle-mongers, an elder told them to pay no heed to the indiscriminate, disconcerting pronouncements of the seers, as they were incapable of foreseeing even the future of their own affairs, and that such grave matters could only be divined by the gods, and as such, they should send an envoy to Delphi.<sup>78</sup> It is Fontenrose's argument, therefore, that the elder's admonishment is merely a device for introducing the Delphic Oracle into the story of the Messenian Wars.

It is fairly clear, therefore, that the complexity of Messenian history throws up many obstacles and poses significant difficulties to the historian trying to sift fact from fiction. However, although there is undoubted fabrication and embellishment surrounding Messenian history and the oracular tales therein, I am, nevertheless, reluctant to dismiss outright the war oracles of the Messenian saga as being complete invention, and as a consequence I am inclined to follow the persuasive line of argument put forth by Alcock that Messenian history was a complicated, ongoing process of remembering and forgetting their past, and as such there may be the vestiges of truth woven into the elaborate tapestry of their reconstructed history. However, as already asserted above, for the purposes of this study the authenticity of the war oracles is not really the key issue here, it is what the oracular episodes reveal to us about the ancient Greeks' mindset which is of much greater importance. For, crucially, when the ancient Greeks recreated the Messenian past, they imposed the oracular tales upon it and in doing so used their contemporary expectations and experiences to compose the stories.

### **The rise of Macedon and after: the changing role of the Oracle over time**

As already stated above, this thesis will be concentrating mainly on the war oracles of Archaic and Classical Greece, with the bulk of that those oracles coming from the Classical period.<sup>79</sup> However, later Hellenistic and Roman examples have also been incorporated, particularly

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<sup>77</sup> Diod. Sic. 8.8.1-2; Fontenrose, 1978: 104-105.

<sup>78</sup> For the consequent oracle given by the Pythia to the Messenian envoy, Tisis, see Oracle no. 2, *infra*, p. 272ff.

<sup>79</sup> Of the 68 historical war oracles in this study, 22 are from Archaic Greece, 39 from Classical Greece, four from the Hellenistic period, and three from the Roman era.

when they demonstrate an adoption or continuation of earlier Greek practices. Admittedly, this is clearly a large body of evidence spanning very different time periods, and as such requires justification for its use in this study. Even within the Classical period, it is important to acknowledge that the role of the Oracle, particularly that of the most important oracular shrine, Delphi, changed over time in ancient Greece, and consequently it is necessary to address such changes and assess its impact on the usefulness and relevance of our later sources.

### *The Macedonian ascendancy*

The biggest change in the role of Greek Oracles during the Classical period was undoubtedly following the rise of Macedon and the radical change that took place in the autonomy of Greek *poleis* once Philip established the League of Corinth after his victory at Chaeroneia in 338 B.C., which ended the Fourth Sacred War.<sup>80</sup> At the first meeting in Corinth in the winter of 338 B.C. a common peace (*koine eirene*) was enforced by Philip upon the Greeks, which was to be maintained by a common council (*koinon synedrion*) of the new Hellenic League.<sup>81</sup> However, it soon became blatantly clear that, although Macedonia was not a member of the League, it was Philip who was in complete control. At the second meeting of the League in 337 B.C., Philip was appointed *hegemon* of the *synedrion* and *strategos autokrator* of Greece, and the Greeks had no choice but to accept that they were now living under Macedonian hegemony. Alexander, unsurprisingly, renewed the political and military pact in 336 B.C. after his father's assassination.<sup>82</sup> As the regulations of the League of Corinth stipulated that member states were not allowed to take up arms against one another, nor attempt to overthrow Philip and his descendants, and that members were not to undertake anything contrary to the agreements of the League, Philip had, in essence, taken matters of war out of the hands of the Greek *poleis* and finally put an end to the internal wars the Greeks had engaged in throughout their history.<sup>83</sup>

Consequently, now that the *synedrion* of the League of Corinth with the Macedonian kings at its helm had supplanted the role of Delphi in matters of foreign policy and war, one would

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<sup>80</sup> See Parke and Wormell, 1956b: 233-238.

<sup>81</sup> See Dixon, M. D., *Late Classical and Early Hellenistic Corinth: 338-196 B.C.* (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2014) 20-21; Müller, S., 'Philip II', in Roisman, J. and Worthington, I. eds., *A Companion to Ancient Macedonia* (Oxford, 2010) 178.

<sup>82</sup> See Poddighe, E., 'Alexander and the Greeks: The Corinthian League', in Heckel, W. and Tritle, L. A. eds., *Alexander the Great: A New History* (Chichester, U.K.; Malden, MA, 2009) 99-106.

<sup>83</sup> For the oaths sworn by members of the League of Corinth, see Dixon, 2014: 21; Rhodes, P. J., *A History of the Classical Greek World: 478-323 B.C.*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010) 227.

expect to see that reflected in the oracular record from 337 B.C. onwards. This paradigm shift did, indeed, have a significant impact on war oracles arising from that period, with the Greek *poleis* no longer requiring the guidance of Delphi on issues that they no longer had any choice in themselves; however, it is certainly not the case that the importance of Delphi diminished into insignificance as some historians would contend.<sup>84</sup>

Although war oracles dating from after the Macedonian ascendancy in 338 B.C. may show a shift away from *poleis* consulting the Oracles on matters of war, they still demonstrate a continuity of customs, attitudes, and beliefs from earlier Greek history: the main shift was simply from the *polis* to the Macedonian kings as they were the ones making the executive decisions on war for the Greeks collectively. Nevertheless, both Philip and Alexander still felt the need to consult the Oracles to obtain religious justification and divine sanction for their campaigns, and as a means to unite the disparate and feuding *poleis* behind their Panhellenic crusades against Persia.<sup>85</sup>

Moreover, even though the Greek *poleis* may have less frequently consulted the oracular shrines on matters of war after the rise of Macedon, with the questions of war no longer being within their remit, they still sought the counsel of the gods on all kinds of other human concerns.<sup>86</sup> Thus, the Oracles remained an essential link between the ancient Greeks and their gods and a vital source of assistance and reassurance. In this way the Oracles did not lose their influence or decline in importance in the eyes of the common man and his everyday needs and worries.

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<sup>84</sup> For instance, see Parke and Wormell, 1956b: 244; Hoyle, P., *Delphi* (London: Cassell, 1967) 118-121. For an adroit discussion of the decline of Delphi during this transitional period, see Scott, 2014b: 163-174.

<sup>85</sup> See Müller, 2010: 178; Poddighe, 2009: 102; Scott, 2014b: 163; Oracle no. 57, *infra*, p. 254; Oracle no. 58, *infra*, p. 63.

<sup>86</sup> Of the 75 Historical responses recorded by Fontenrose, the vast majority (53 of them) after Philip's alliance with Chalkidike in 356 B.C. (*q.v.* Oracle no. 55, *infra*, p. 220) concern *Res Divinae*, such as cult foundations, festivals, sacrifices, and offerings, etc.; and *Res Domesticae et Profane*, such as marriages, births, deaths, desire for children, etc.: see Fontenrose, 1978: 27-30, 244-267. The same can be said of the 268 Quasi-Historical responses, where, after Alexander's consultation of Delphi in 335 B.C. on his proposed Persian campaign (*q.v.* Oracle no. 58, *infra*, p. 63), the majority of the remaining 52 responses concern only *Res Divinae* and *Res Domesticae et Profane*: see Fontenrose, 1978: 48-50, 268-354. That is not to say, of course, that individuals did not still seek private guidance from the gods regarding their personal decisions to go to war, such as the Dodona tablet dating from the late fourth to early third century B.C. illustrates (*q.v.* Oracle no. 62, *infra*, p. 96). See also Scott, 2014b: 167-180 for a discussion of the continued use of Delphi in the late fourth and third centuries B.C. by Hellenistic *poleis* and Romans, particularly the building of the new stadium and the continued dedications by *poleis* for their military victories.

## *The Hellenistic and Roman worlds*

With regard to the Hellenistic period, Parke and Wormell argue correctly, to a certain extent, that following the death of Alexander, in the new world of the Hellenistic monarchies the importance of Delphi diminished. The chief reason for this was because the chief political value of the Pythia during the Archaic and Classical periods had been in the feuding interests and inter-*polis* wars of the little city-states ‘where its guidance might be sought and its decisions respected.’<sup>87</sup> However, to the Hellenistic rulers of vast kingdoms in the Mediterranean World, the utterances of a prophetess in a tiny Greek *polis* came to be of little consequence; indeed, in practical matters the Hellenistic kings trusted to secular advisers or in their own divine wisdom.<sup>88</sup> That being said, the Hellenistic kings were not openly indifferent to the honour of Delphic Apollo, indeed some of them bestowed generous gifts on the god or had their statues dedicated in his sacred precinct; however, as Parke and Wormell rightly point out, much of this activity was carried out conspicuously to use Delphi for their own political purposes, and the Oracle was never consulted on matters of general policy.<sup>89</sup> It was, nevertheless, still occasionally consulted on religious matters by Hellenistic monarchs, although once again it can be argued that for the most part the motive was not really religious, but political.<sup>90</sup> There were some instances where *poleis* did still consult the Oracle on matters of war, such as the Delphians during Brennos’ invasion in 279 B.C.,<sup>91</sup> and the Achaeans during their siege of Phana in 189 B.C.,<sup>92</sup> though admittedly these were few and far between. The Delphic Oracle was, however, still consulted on matters of cult and colonisation by *poleis*, and by individuals on everyday, worldly issues.<sup>93</sup>

In its twilight years, there was a bit of a renaissance in the importance and prestige of Delphi under the Roman emperors, particularly under Hadrian, before its final silencing with the rise of Christianity, but even then it was mostly for propagandistic purposes and the shrine was not functioning like it had been in the past.<sup>94</sup> That being said, there were still individual admirers

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<sup>87</sup> Parke and Wormell, 1956b: 244.

<sup>88</sup> Parke and Wormell, 1956b: 244; *cf.* Scott, 2014b: 168.

<sup>89</sup> Parke and Wormell, 1956b: 246.

<sup>90</sup> Parke and Wormell, 1956b: 246.

<sup>91</sup> *Q.v.* Oracle no. 63, *infra*, p. 143.

<sup>92</sup> *Q.v.* Oracle no. 64, *infra*, p. 189.

<sup>93</sup> See Parke and Wormell, 1956b: 246-263; Scott, 2014b: 167-180.

<sup>94</sup> Scott, 2014b: 221-222. For a discussion of the role of Delphi under the Roman Republic, see Parke and Wormell, 1956b: 265-282 Scott, 2014b: 183-202; for its role under the Roman Emperors, see Parke and Wormell, 1956b: 283-291; Scott, 2014b: 203-245. For the Christian suppression of the Oracles, see Stoneman, 2011: 199-219.

and devotees of Delphi, such as Appius Claudius and the emperors Licinius and Julian, who consulted the shrine on military matters, and for this reason have been included in this study.

Yet, an insight into the continued importance of Oracles and divination to give divine sanction and authority to the actions of Hellenistic kings and later Roman *imperatores* can be seen particularly with the phenomenon of god and king as fellow synoikists. Buraselis, for instance, argues, regarding Alexander's foundation of Alexandria, that it is clear from the early account by Arrian that Alexander had made all the arrangements for the foundation of the city before anticipatedly and cursorily consulting the gods for divine approbation of his plans.<sup>95</sup> This procedure, however, usurped the traditional role of the gods in Greek colonisation; therefore, the later narratives attempted to redress this deficit in divine participation, adding in omens, dreams, and oracles presaging the successful foundation of the city, such as Alexander out of expediency demarcating lines for the plans of the city with the *alphita* of his soldiers, which was interpreted by the seer, Aristandros of Telmessos, to mean that the city would become prosperous,<sup>96</sup> and Alexander being visited in a dream by Homer, who indicates that the area of Pharos would be the best place to found an important Greek city in Egypt.<sup>97</sup> The Oracle of Ammon provides the same advice in the Alexander Romance.<sup>98</sup> Consequently, as Buraselis persuasively argues, the foundation of Alexandria not only acquired divine blessing *a posteriori*, but also supernatural guidance from its inception.<sup>99</sup> Crucially, for our purposes, as Buraselis astutely stresses:

‘Even after Alexander had been long recognised as a god at his foundation in Egypt, and more generally in the Hellenistic world, it was still important that his city should not be traced back only to his thinking and planning. The gods could not be deprived of their traditional part in the creation of this city too, and in determining its future destiny, if its citizens were to feel secure about their future.’<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>95</sup> Arr. *Anab.* 3.1.5; Buraselis, K., 'God and King as Synoikists: Divine Disposition and Monarchic Wishes combined in the Traditions of City Foundations for Alexander's and Hellenistic Times', in Foxhall, L., Gehrke, H.-J., and Luraghi, N. eds., *Intentional History: Spinning Time in Ancient Greece* (Stuttgart, 2010) 265.

<sup>96</sup> Arr. *Anab.* 3.2.1-2; Strab. 17.1.6. In succeeding versions of the narrative, this episode was expanded to include ornithomantic elements in the form of birds eating up the meal, which was then interpreted to mean that Alexandria should become the food supplier of the world, thus providing further divine confirmation of the royal founder's plans: see Plut. *Alex.* 26; Curt. 4.8.2, Steph. Byz. s.v. Ἀλεξάνδρεια; *Alexander Romance* 1.32.4; Buraselis, 2010: 266.

<sup>97</sup> Plut. *Alex.* 26; Steph. Byz. s.v. Ἀλεξάνδρεια.

<sup>98</sup> Ps.-Kallisthenes, 1.30.5; cf. Malkin, I., *Religion and Colonization in Ancient Greece* (Leiden: Brill, 1987) 107. See also Oracle no. 60, *infra*, p. 152.

<sup>99</sup> Buraselis, 2010: 266-267.

<sup>100</sup> Buraselis, 2010: 267.



The same argument can be made for the foundation of cities in the Hellenistic period; for instance, the foundations of Seleukeia in Pieria and Seleukeia on the Tigris by Seleukos I, which, despite being foreplanned, were given divine approval through the interpretation of omens by *manteis*.<sup>101</sup>

Comparable divine involvement can be found in the foundation narratives of Antiocheia in Syria, in the form of an eagle pointing out where the site of Seleukos' new city should be built,<sup>102</sup> and similarly in the foundation stories of Laodikeia and Apameia.<sup>103</sup> Indeed, the motif of divine guidance in the form of Zeus' eagle carried on into the Roman imperial period, as demonstrated on the coinage of Antiocheia on the Orontes,<sup>104</sup> and of Prusias near Olympus under Geta and Caracalla.<sup>105</sup> Another common motif of divine guidance is that of dreams, as already seen in that of Homer's visitation to Alexander before the foundation of Alexandria.<sup>106</sup> According to Pausanias, for instance, Alexander also received divine instruction on where to build Smyrna from the Nemeseis in a dream,<sup>107</sup> while the visitation of three female figures in a dream to Antiochos (whom he took to be his mother, his wife, and his daughter) were

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<sup>101</sup> With regards to Seleukeia in Pieria, Seleukos was provided with heavenly guidance for the exact location of his new city through a thunderbolt: see App. *Syr.* 58. Although a storm at the seaside would have been nothing remarkable, Seleukos and his human advisers seemed to have been more than happy to accept the thunderbolt as a favourable divine omen for the foundation of the city at a site which seemed promising to them anyway. What is particularly worthy of note, however, is that the importance of the thunderbolt from heaven in the tradition and identity of the city can be seen in the cult of the thunderbolt there, and in the use of that symbol on the coins of the city, even into imperial times: see Buraselis, 2010: 267; Mørkholm, O., *Early Hellenistic Coinage: From the Accession of Alexander to the Peace of Apamea (336-188 B.C.)* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991) no. 154, p. 75. Apropos the foundation of Seleukeia on the Tigris, we see an even more clear connection between divine and monarchic plans. According to Appian (*Syr.* 58), Seleukos had made all the plans for the city in advance and his army stood ready to lay the foundations for the new city, yet he felt the need to await the positive signs of the magi before he gave the order to commence. The magi, however, unnerved by the thought of the counter-fortification (ἐπιτείχισμα) being erected in their area, withheld the propitious day and hour they had divined for the beginning of the foundations from the king. As Seleukos waited in his tent for the divine assent from the magi and the army waited patiently for the signal to begin from their king, the soldiers apparently heard a voice ordering them on and began their work with alacrity before anyone could stop them. When the nervous magi later came to confess their trick to the disquieted king, a convenient and shrewd interpretation resolved the tense situation and provided the foundation of Seleukeia on the Tigris with divine sanction: the plans of both Seleukos and the magi had been overtaken by the destiny of the city, which had been determined by the gods: see Buraselis, 2010: 268.

<sup>102</sup> Lib. *Antioch.* 85-88; Buraselis, 269-270. Indeed, Libanios (*Antioch.* 88) concludes: 'the highest god became through this oracle our *oikistes*' (ἡμῖν ὁ τῶν θεῶν κορυφαῖος διὰ τῆς μαντείας οἰκιστὴς ἐγένετο).

<sup>103</sup> Ioannes Malalas, p. 199.4-12, 203.2-8, 203.17-20 Dind.; Buraselis, 2010: 270.

<sup>104</sup> Leschhorn, W., *Gründer der Stadt: Studien zu einem politisch-religiösen Phänomen der griechischen Geschichte* (Stuttgart: F. Steiner, 1984) 231, 271-274; Malalas, p. 202.6-7 Dind.; Buraselis, 2010: 271.

<sup>105</sup> Leschhorn, 1984: 282-284. We must assume, therefore, that this element of divine direction can be traced back to the foundation of the city by Prusias I, and, consequently, that either the Bithynian kings themselves or later local traditions integrated the eagle motif as a symbol of heavenly cooperation into the Bithynian city foundations too: see Buraselis, 2010: 271.

<sup>106</sup> *Supra*, p. 26.

<sup>107</sup> Paus. 7.5.1-2.

responsible for the building of the three Karian cities of Laodikeia, Nysa, and Antiocheia.<sup>108</sup> However, in the case of Laodikeia, Stephanos of Byzantium tells us additionally of a proper oracle of Apollo delivered to Antiochos I in a dream, directing him to build the city.<sup>109</sup> Buraselis argues that this oracular dream ‘testifies again to the unequivocal need to invest the city with a still higher legitimisation.’<sup>110</sup>

In summation, Buraselis quite rightly maintains that neither the kings nor the citizens of the new Hellenistic cities ever renounced the idea of divine participation in the inauguration of these new civic entities, and that ‘The component of divine advice (mainly through an oracle) or even divine guidance of the Greek colonists abided.’<sup>111</sup> Thus, it is clear that even in Hellenistic times, it was important for both the contemporary Greeks and the later Greeks looking back on their past, to find divine legitimisation and blessing in the foundation of their cities. The same also applied to the Hellenistic Greeks looking back to the wars of their history, seeking divine validation and attestation of divine intervention on their behalf.

### *Conclusion*

Although the war oracles used in this study have been garnered from very different time periods, there is a broad continuity of attitudes and themes within the evidence collected. The early legendary oracular stories and Archaic war oracles, particularly those of Messenia recorded by Pausanias, reveal how the ancient Greeks in their present projected their own beliefs, views, and customs on to their distant past, and, reciprocally how the oracular tales of the past influenced and coloured their beliefs and practices in their present. Furthermore, although one must acknowledge the changing role of the Greek Oracles over time, later war oracles are still of great importance to this study in that they reveal the continuing need for leaders and *stratēgoi* to obtain divine guidance and sanction for the sake of their own convictions and conscience, but perhaps more so, out of necessitous obligations to protocol and for the vital psychological benefits it bestowed upon the common man in the citizenry and soldiery.

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<sup>108</sup> Steph. Byz. s.v. Ἀντιόχεια.

<sup>109</sup> Steph. Byz. s.v. Λαοδίκεια.

<sup>110</sup> Buraselis, 2010: 272.

<sup>111</sup> Buraselis, 2010: 272.

As Sourvinou-Inwood correctly asserts, when discussing the changing role of Delphi: ‘Its influence continued, only its “political role” inevitably diminished in the radically changed circumstances of the Hellenistic and Graeco-Roman world.’<sup>112</sup> Moreover, as Scott argues, talking about the political role of Oracles after the ascension of Macedon: ‘Yet, because of their accumulation of dedications over centuries and their sheer monumentality, these sanctuaries, and especially Delphi, remained important resources through which the Greeks could gain, create and manipulate a sense of their own past. It was in this capacity, as carriers of memory, that these sanctuaries would prove even more important resources for later writers keen to create a particular image of Greece and Greek identity in the Roman and later periods.’<sup>113</sup>

### **The use of the term ‘psychology’**

As already discussed above, and, as the title of this thesis explicitly indicates, the focus of this study is on the psychological impact of oracular prophecy on ancient Greek warfare. As a result, it is necessary to define what is meant by the term ‘psychology’ within the confines of this study.

The field of military psychology itself is a wide and diverse discipline, which, according to Laurence and Matthews, is concerned with ‘recruiting, training, socializing, assigning, employing, deploying, motivating, rewarding, managing, integrating, retaining, transitioning, supporting, counselling, and healing military members.’<sup>114</sup> It is also defined by Walters as ‘the application of research techniques and principles of psychology to the resolution of problems to either optimize the behavioural capabilities of one’s own military forces or minimize the enemies’ behavioural capabilities to conduct war.’<sup>115</sup> Colonel Joseph Greene, on the other hand, simplifies the concept of military psychology even further by stating straightforwardly that ‘it is probably best not to think in terms of “military psychology” but rather in terms of “psychology for the military man.”’<sup>116</sup>

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<sup>112</sup> Hornblower, S. and Spawforth, A. J. S. S., eds., *The Oxford Classical Dictionary*, 3rd ed. (NY: Oxford University Press, 2003) *ap.* Delphic Oracle, p. 445.

<sup>113</sup> Scott, M., *Delphi and Olympia: The Spatial Politics of Panhellenism in the Archaic and Classical Periods* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014a) 269.

<sup>114</sup> Laurence, J. H. and Matthews, M. D., eds., *The Oxford Handbook of Military Psychology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012) 1; Maheshwari, N., Kumar, V. V., and Singh, N. P., ‘Military Psychology: The Centurion Phenomenon’, in Maheshwari, N. and Kumar, V. V. eds., *Military Psychology: Concepts, Trends and Interventions* (London, 2016) 14.

<sup>115</sup> Quoted in Maheshwari, Kumar, and Singh, 2016: 14. See Walters, H. C., *Military Psychology: Its Use in Modern War and Indirect Conflict* (Dubuque, Iowa: William C. Brown, 1968).

<sup>116</sup> Greene, J. I., *Preface* viii in Boring, E. G., ed., *Psychology for the Armed Services* (Washington: The Infantry Journal, 1945).

With regards to this study of the ancient Greek world, however, the main foci, taken from both Laurence and Matthews' and Walters' definitions of military psychology, will be that of combat motivation, morale, and psychological warfare.

In terms of combat motivation, much has been made of the importance of the primary group in warfare, as advocated by the likes of Cooley,<sup>117</sup> Wesbrook,<sup>118</sup> du Picq,<sup>119</sup> Marshall,<sup>120</sup> Shalit,<sup>121</sup> and Lynn.<sup>122</sup> This viewpoint argues that it is the co-dependency and supportive role of comrades in the primary group which is vital in keeping soldiers fighting and dying for one another even when against seemingly insurmountable odds.<sup>123</sup> However, others, such as Rush and Bartov, have challenged the primary group primacy and argue that there are, outside the primary group, other factors that sustain the soldier in battle. For instance, Rush contends that during the battle in Hürtgen Forest in 1944 the US Army's 22<sup>nd</sup> Infantry Regiment suffered massive casualties, which after three days of combat had effectively destroyed its operational primary groups, yet the 22<sup>nd</sup> continued to fight effectively for fifteen more days.<sup>124</sup> Rush proposes, therefore, that military authority, unit structure, and exemplary small-unit leadership in particular, are more important than the primary group's role in the will to combat.<sup>125</sup> Whereas, in Bartov's analysis of the *Wehrmacht* on the Eastern Front in WWII, during which the primary group was continually being destroyed in a war of annihilation,<sup>126</sup> he argues the German soldiers' motivation to fight was sustained by both an apocalyptic *Weltanschauung*, which compelled them to fight to the death,<sup>127</sup> and by draconian military discipline.<sup>128</sup>

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<sup>117</sup> Cooley, C. H., *Social Organization: A Study of the Larger Mind* (New York: Schocken Books, 1983) 23-50.

<sup>118</sup> Wesbrook, S. D., 'The Potential for Military Disintegration', in Sarkesian, S. C. ed., *Combat Effectiveness: Cohesion, Stress, and the Volunteer Military* (London, 1980) 244-278.

<sup>119</sup> Du Picq, C. A., *Battle Studies: Ancient and Modern Battle* (London: Windham Press, 1987) esp. 110-114, 125, 136.

<sup>120</sup> Marshall, S. L. A., *Men Against Fire: The Problem of Battle Command* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2000) 124-128.

<sup>121</sup> Shalit, B., *The Psychology of Conflict and Combat* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1988) 79, 142-144.

<sup>122</sup> Lynn, J. A., *The Bayonets of the Republic: Motivation and Tactics in the Army of Revolutionary France, 1791-94, History and Warfare* (Oxford: Westview Press, 1996) Chap. 2, esp. 30-35.

<sup>123</sup> See Crowley, 2012: 7-11.

<sup>124</sup> Rush, R. S., *Hell in Hürtgen Forest: The Ordeal and Triumph of an American Infantry Regiment* (Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 2001) 2-3, 9-10, 263, 280-281, 285, 312, 330-333, 335, 341; Crowley, 2012: 12.

<sup>125</sup> Rush, 2001: 285, xvii, 300, 313, 333, 335, 341-342, 346. Rush's argument, however, is not without its flaws and contradictions: see Crowley, 2012: 13.

<sup>126</sup> Bartov, O., *Hitler's Army: Soldiers, Nazis, and War in the Third Reich* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992) 12-58; Crowley, 2012: 13-15; Kellett, A., *Combat Motivation: The Behaviour of Soldiers in Battle* (London: Kluwer-Nijhoff, 1982) 266-267.

<sup>127</sup> Bartov, 1992: 12-35, 106-178; Crowley, 2012: 13; Shils, E. A. and Janowitz, M., 'Cohesion and Disintegration in the Wehrmacht in World War II', *The Public Opinion Quarterly* 12, 2 (1948) 292, 301, 309-310.

<sup>128</sup> Bartov, 1992: 28-30, 59-105; Crowley, 2012: 15.

It is fair to say, therefore, that the primary group alone cannot adequately account for the will to combat.<sup>129</sup> Conveniently, apropos this, Crowley provides an excellent survey and convincing synthesis of the various competing theories of combat motivation in modern warfare.<sup>130</sup> However, although, as Crowley persuasively demonstrates, the co-dependency of the primary group, combined with a series of other socio-political pressures and compliance relationships, undoubtedly enabled the ancient Greek hoplite to go to war and face the stress and strain of combat on a frequent basis, this study will not be concentrating on those particular psychological factors of combat motivation. Rather, this thesis will be focused specifically on the role religion and divination played in addition to the primary group, military unit cohesion, and socio-political forces acting upon the ancient Greek hoplite; that is, its crucial role in reinforcing and endorsing *polis* and army decision-making, and bolstering the confidence and resilience of both the citizenry and soldiery in times of war. Essentially, therefore, this study will be concerned in the plainest terms with the effect of oracular prophecy on motivation and morale.

### **Motivation and Morale**

The great British World War II commander, Field-Marshal Montgomery, once stated that ‘The morale of the soldier is the greatest single factor in war.’<sup>131</sup> Likewise, Napoleon also asserted that in war ‘the moral [psychological] is to the physical as three is to one’ and that ‘In the end the Spirit will always conquer the Sword.’<sup>132</sup> It is a belief common among all great military leaders past and present, and summarises succinctly what generals and military writers have been saying since at least the fourth century B.C. Xenophon, for instance, states: ‘I am sure, that neither numbers nor strength bring victory in war; but whichever army goes into battle stronger

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<sup>129</sup> See, for instance, Henderson, W. D., *Cohesion: The Human Element in Combat. Leadership and Societal Influence in the Armies of the Soviet Union, the United States, North Vietnam, and Israel* (Washington, DC: National Defense University Press, 1985) 6; Kellett, 1982: 319, 333; Stouffer, S. A. et al., *The American Soldier: Combat and its Aftermath*, vol. 2, *Studies in Social Psychology in World War II* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1949) 102-104.

<sup>130</sup> See Crowley, 2012: 5-21 on the ‘architecture of aggression’.

<sup>131</sup> Quoted in Richardson, F. M., *Fighting Spirit: A Study of Psychological Factors in War* (Dehra Dun: Natraj Publishers, 2009) 1.

<sup>132</sup> See Bliese, J. R. E., ‘Rhetoric Goes to War: The Doctrine of Ancient and Medieval Military Manuals’, *Rhetoric Society Quarterly* 24, 3/4 (1994)105; Richardson, 2009: 1

in soul, their enemies generally cannot withstand them.’<sup>133</sup> The same conviction is affirmed by Vegetius when he avows simply that: ‘Valour is superior to numbers.’<sup>134</sup>

Once more, however, for the purposes of this study it is necessary to be clear on what exactly is meant by ‘morale’ in a military context. The Oxford English Dictionary defines ‘morale’ as: ‘The mental or emotional state (with regard to confidence, hope, enthusiasm, etc.) of a person or group engaged in some activity, esp. of troops...; degree of contentment with one’s lot or situation; the confidence, enthusiasm, and discipline of a person or group at a particular time.’<sup>135</sup>

Kellett makes the astute point that although motivation and morale are substantially different concepts, there has often been a tendency by military theorists to confuse them or to treat them as synonymous.<sup>136</sup> Moreover, he states that military writers have tended to ‘relate morale to such characteristics as mission orientation, pride, cohesion, leadership, discipline, and triumph over adversity.’<sup>137</sup> Indeed, in Motowidlo et al.’s study of motivation, morale, and satisfaction in army careers, it was observed that the three main elements among various definitions of morale are: motivation (goals, determination, persistence, tenacity, progress); satisfaction (cheerfulness, contentment, freedom from worry, satisfaction of physical needs for food, water, rest, etc.); and group cohesiveness (solidarity, cooperation, self-sacrifice for the group, *esprit de corps*, traditions).<sup>138</sup>

More specifically, Field Marshal Montgomery, in a paper he wrote in 1946, defined morale as ‘endurance and courage in supporting fatigue and danger...the quality which makes men go forward in an attack and hold their ground in defence.’<sup>139</sup> However, he stated categorically that high morale ‘is not contentment or satisfaction’ or ‘happiness’; according to Montgomery,

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<sup>133</sup> Xen. *Anab.* 3.1.42.

<sup>134</sup> Veg. *Mil.* 3.26. Cf. Lord Moran’s avowal in his study of the psychological effects of war on soldiers in WWI: ‘It is not the number of soldiers, but their will to win which decides battles.’ See Moran, C. M. W., *The Anatomy of Courage: The Classic WWI Account of the Psychological Effects of War* (London: Robinson, 2007) 81.

<sup>135</sup> "morale, n." *OED Online*. Oxford University Press, December 2016 (accessed 9 March 2017).

<sup>136</sup> Kellett, 1982: 7. For further discussion of the differences between motivation and morale, see Kellett, 1982: 5-7.

<sup>137</sup> Kellett, 1982: 7.

<sup>138</sup> Motowidlo, S. J. et al., eds., *Motivation, Satisfaction, and Morale in Army Careers: A Review of Theory and Measurement* (Minneapolis: Personnel Decisions Inc., 1976) 49; Evonic, I. N., ‘Motivation and Morale in Military Noncombat Organisations’, in, *Proceedings of the NATO Panel VIII Symposium on Motivation and Morale in NATO Forces* (Brussels, Belgium, 1980) 173-210; Fennell, J., ‘In Search of the ‘X’ Factor: Morale and the Study of Strategy’, *Journal of Strategic Studies* 37, 6-7 (2014) 4-9; Kellett, 1982: 7.

<sup>139</sup> Imperial War Museum (IWM) 99/1/2 Major General Raymond Briggs Papers, Paper by Field-Marshal Montgomery, ‘Morale in Battle: Analysis’, 30 April 1946, 43; quoted in Fennell, 2014: 8.

happiness 'may be a contributory factor in the maintenance of morale over a long period, but it is no more than that. A man can be unhappy but can still, regularly and without complaining, advance and defend'.<sup>140</sup>

Fennell, therefore, using Montgomery's definition of morale as a causative influence on a soldier's conduct,<sup>141</sup> defines it further 'as the willingness of an individual or group to engage in an action required by an authority or institution; this willingness may be engendered by a positive desire for action and/or by the discipline to accept orders to take such action. The degree of morale of an individual or army relates to the extent of their willingness or discipline to act, or their determination to see an action through.'<sup>142</sup>

It is clear, therefore, that motivation is frequently considered to be an intricate component of 'morale' in terms of military theory. With regards to this, Kellet usefully defines motivation as: 'the conscious or unconscious calculation by the combat soldier of the material and spiritual benefits and costs likely to be attached to various courses of action arising from his assigned combat tasks. Hence motivation comprises the influences that bear on a soldier's choice of, and degree of commitment to, and persistence in effecting, a certain course of action.'<sup>143</sup> In terms of oracular prophecy and ancient Greek warfare, this will be referring to the 'spiritual' benefits or religious influences bearing upon the ancient Greek hoplite, in particular piety and reverence to the dicta of the gods, and the *ius ad bellum* provided by oracular sanction.

What is more, MacKinnon, maintains that there are twelve key physical and psychological conditions that aid military morale and help to add zest to the performance of duty.<sup>144</sup> One of these key determiners is that of ideology, vis-à-vis which MacKinnon asserts plainly that 'A man's belief about the war, its causes and its rightness, may affect his morale.'<sup>145</sup>

Moreover, another vital determiner of morale, closely allied with the belief of the moral rightness of a conflict, is that of religion. MacKinnon states that: 'All reports from men who

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<sup>140</sup> Montgomery, 1946: 47-48; quoted in Fennell, 2014: 9.

<sup>141</sup> Fennell argues, indeed, that some psychologists use the term 'motivation' in similar contexts: see Fennell, 2014: 9; Bernstein, D. A. et al., *Psychology*, 3rd ed ed. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1997) 337.

<sup>142</sup> Fennell, 2014: 9.

<sup>143</sup> Kellett, 1982: 6.

<sup>144</sup> MacKinnon, D., 'Motivation and Morale', in Boring, E. G. ed., *Psychology for the Armed Services* (Washington, 1945) 327. See also Fennell, 2014: 11-13 for a discussion of the endogenous and exogenous factors affecting morale.

<sup>145</sup> MacKinnon, 1945: 339.

have seen troops facing danger at the front show that a trust in God and a belief in some kind of immortality is a great supporter of morale. Men who have faith in the power of prayer find that it works for them, gives them assurance, lessens fear. For this reason the armed services support religious faith, provide chaplains to minister to the spiritual needs of the men and opportunities for religious observances.<sup>146</sup> With regard to the importance of an established *ius ad bellum* and a belief in divine support, and their crucial effect on army morale, we shall see that not much has changed over nearly three millennia. In ancient Greek warfare, as I shall argue, it was the Oracle that conveniently provided the ancient Greek *polis* and hoplite soldier with both.

### **Psychological warfare**

With regards to psychological warfare, that is, as Walters defines it, the attempt to optimise the behavioural capabilities of one's own military forces whilst at the same time minimise that of one's enemies,<sup>147</sup> this will be dealt with more specifically in Chapter 4, where I shall be exploring the deliberate and conscious use and exploitation of oracular prophecy as a psychological weapon in warfare between ancient Greek *poleis*.<sup>148</sup> In order to do so, I shall be using the modern Arab-Israeli conflict as a comparative framework for analysis of ancient Greek psychological warfare; however, this shall be explained in more detail in the later chapter.

### **Conclusion**

Baynes, in his study of the Scottish Rifles at Neuve Chapelle in France during World War I, defines high morale as:

‘the most important quality of a soldier. It is a quality of mind and spirit which combines courage, self-discipline, and endurance. It springs from infinitely varying and sometimes contradictory sources, but is easily recognisable, having as its hallmarks cheerfulness and unselfishness. In time of peace good morale is developed by sound training and the fostering of *esprit de corps*. In time of war it manifests itself in the soldier's absolute determination to do his duty to the best of his ability in any circumstances. At its highest peak it is seen as an individual's readiness to accept his

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<sup>146</sup> MacKinnon, 1945: 340.

<sup>147</sup> *Supra*, p. 29.

<sup>148</sup> *Infra*, pp. 290-327.



fate willingly even to the point of death, and to refuse all roads that lead to safety at the price of conscience.’<sup>149</sup>

This definition, combined with Montgomery’s succinct definition of morale as ‘courage’ or ‘a quality’ which makes soldiers go forward or hold their ground, is the conceptualisation of morale that will be taken in this study. In turn, of course, poor morale or demoralisation, will be identified by the opposite emotions and reactions to that of high morale.

Thus when using the term ‘psychology’ in this thesis, I shall be referring to the emotional responses of the ancient Greek citizenry and soldiery to prognostications of the Oracles in times of war, particularly the positive or negative effects on the confidence, motivation, and resilience of the ancient Greek *polis* and its army. Accordingly, when referring to the ‘psychological’ impact of oracular prophecy on ancient Greek warfare, I shall be referring (unless explicitly stated otherwise) to the crucial effect upon citizen and hoplite morale, and its influence on the decision-making processes of the ancient Greeks in both foreign policy and on the battlefield. In short, therefore, when discussing ‘psychology’ in ancient Greek warfare, I shall be, in essence, referring to that all too vital factor in war: morale.

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<sup>149</sup> Baynes, J. C. M., *Morale: A Study of Men and Courage; The Second Scottish Rifles at the Battle of Neuve Chapelle, 1915* (London: Cassell, 1967) 108.

## CHAPTER ONE

### PSYCHOLOGICAL REASONS FOR CONSULTING THE ORACLES ON MATTERS OF WAR

#### 1. Introduction

This chapter will look in depth at the various different reasons why Greek *poleis* and *strategoí* felt the need to consult the Oracles on matters of war both before and during a conflict, and the important psychological motivations behind such activity. Most frequently, the ancient Greeks sought the counsel of the Oracles for divine sanction, affirmation, guidance, and reassurance, although there was often no one single purpose for consulting the gods and many of these motivations acted upon the consultants at different levels simultaneously. Although it may appear *prima facie* that the consultations of the Oracles were merely carried out by *poleis* and individuals out of habit and custom, on closer scrutiny it becomes clear that there were much deeper compulsions at work, and that, in fact, rather than being mere procedure, the consultation of the divine played an absolutely vital role in the ancient Greeks' psychological preparation for war and battle.

#### 2. Why consult the gods on matters of war?

To the ancient Greek *polis* and *strategos*, it was an absolute necessity to consult the oracular shrines to obtain divine sanction for foreign policy decisions and for guidance whilst on military campaigns, not necessarily to obtain definitive, precise instructions on what to do, or for specific strategical advice on how to obtain victory (although there are examples of this happening),<sup>1</sup> but because to not do so would have been considered unthinkable to the ancient Greeks, and indeed utter folly, for to not seek approval and guidance from the gods would have been setting oneself up for a fall and inviting the wrath of the gods. It certainly seems that it was inadvisable to overlook the formality of consulting an Oracle, or worse still to ignore or fly in the face of a prophecy, as deference to the Oracles and compliance with their commands was rewarded with success, whereas neglect and irreverence were met with disaster. There are many vivid tales of warning from the ancient literature about the dangers of neglect and irreverence, of ignoring prophecies and omens sent by the gods, and of impious acts, such as

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<sup>1</sup> *Q.v. infra*, p. 201ff.

the breaking of holy oaths. One such example can be seen with Polykrates of Samos' death.<sup>2</sup> According to Herodotus, despite many attempts by his friends and *manteis* to dissuade him from visiting Oroetes, the satrap of Sardis, Polykrates would not be moved on the issue. His daughter, too, tried to convince him not to go as a result of a prophetic dream in which she foresaw his death, but he obstinately refused to listen to her and sailed to meet Oroetes anyway, where he was subsequently murdered and his corpse was crucified, and his daughter's dream-prophecy was fulfilled. The same sentiment permeates several of the accounts of the disastrous Sicilian expedition by Athens between 415-413 B.C. Plutarch, for instance, suggests that Athens paid the price for ignoring warnings at Delphi about undertaking the expedition to Sicily, while it is Dio Chrysostom's belief that the Athenians paid the ultimate price for misinterpreting the prophecy of the Oracle on account of their avarice.<sup>3</sup>

Likewise, in the instance of the Spartans consulting Delphi before the Peloponnesian War, Thucydides tells us that Sparta had already made up her mind to go to war, therefore the consultation must have been to obtain divine sanction for their decision and confirmation that the Athenians had broken the holy truce.<sup>4</sup> However, Hornblower argues that Thucydides later suggests that during the Peloponnesian War when Sparta was faring badly, the Spartans came to believe that the 'wrong' had in fact been on their own side, and that they deserved to be defeated, as in effect they were in the Archidamian War, and that the misfortunes they were suffering, such as the disaster at Pylos, were justified.<sup>5</sup> The reason for this self-doubt was because the Spartans had refused arbitration even though it had been offered to them by the Athenians and the Thirty Years' Peace treaty had stipulated that there should be no recourse to arms if the other side was willing to submit to arbitration.<sup>6</sup> Hornblower rightly suggests that the Spartans would have adopted the view of the pious Xenophon that 'the gods do not overlook

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<sup>2</sup> Hdt. 3.124-5.

<sup>3</sup> Plut. *Nic.* 13.1-5; Dio Chrys. *Or.* 17.17: see Oracle no. 43, *infra*, p. 246ff. Cf. Min. Fel. *Oct.* 7, where Minucius Felix lists Roman examples of when contempt for auguries and auspices was met with military disaster.

<sup>4</sup> Thuc. 1.118, 1.123, 2.54. For more detailed discussion, see Oracle no. 41, *infra*, p. 59ff.

<sup>5</sup> Hornblower, S., *A Commentary on Thucydides*, 3 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991) *ap.* 1.118.3, p. 195; *ap.* 7.18.2, pp. 572-5.

<sup>6</sup> Thuc. 7.18.2. See Hornblower, 1991: *ap.* 7.18.2, p. 574.

impiety'.<sup>7</sup> Thus, the outcome of the Archidamian War revealed the unsuspected or neglected power of divine pleasure in the same way as would the Spartan defeat at Leuktra.<sup>8</sup>

Outside of the realm of war, the same concept of divine punishment for neglecting the gods can be clearly seen in the words of the second-century philosopher Celsus, whose work has been preserved in the third-century counter-polemic *Contra Celsum* of Origenes Adamantius. Celsus asks the rhetorical question:

‘How many cities have been built in obedience to commands received from Oracles; how often, in the same way, delivered from disease and famine! Or again, how many cities, from disregard or forgetfulness of these Oracles, have perished miserably! How many colonies have been established and made to flourish by following their orders!’<sup>9</sup>

Indeed, Herodotus records how, c. 514 B.C., Dorieus of Sparta attempted to establish a colony in Libya without previously consulting the Delphic Oracle on a suitable site, or without observing the usual formalities, which resulted in the subsequent failure of the settlement within three years.<sup>10</sup> This should be contrasted with the Spartans’ later foundation of the successful colony of Herakleia in 426 B.C., when, according to Thucydides, the Spartans followed the formal conventions of consulting the Delphic Oracle before embarking upon the venture and sending colonists out, and were rewarded with a successful and permanent colony.<sup>11</sup>

As a result, it becomes clear that, although some ancient Greeks may have often consulted the Oracles and utilised various other forms of divination out of genuine religious reverence, and a sincere belief in the ability of the gods to provide them with a glimpse into the future and assistance when making extremely difficult, life-and-death decisions during wartime, many others did so simply out of trepidation of what might happen if they neglected to do so. As Goodman and Holladay neatly put it: ‘Some exceptionally pious people may have performed their religious duties in war as in peace from pure motives of love and respect for the deities

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<sup>7</sup> Xen. *Hell.* 5.4.1. Badian, on the other hand, cynically argues, that ‘we are meant to see the Spartans as developing a conscience only when things begin to go wrong.’: see Badian, E., ‘Thucydides and the Outbreak of the Peloponnesian War: A Historian’s Brief’, in Allison, J. W. ed., *Conflict, Antithesis, and the Ancient Historian* (Columbus, 1990) 69. However, Hornblower correctly dismisses this view by pointing to the fact that the language used in this passage asserts a change in the Spartan attitude, or at least the attitude of some of the Spartans: see Hornblower, 1991: *ap.* 7.18.2, p. 574.

<sup>8</sup> Xen. *Hell.* 6.4.3. For further discussion, see *infra*, p. 43.

<sup>9</sup> Origen, *C. Cels.*, 8.45.

<sup>10</sup> Hdt. 5.42.

<sup>11</sup> Thuc. 3.92.

involved, but the average human being probably did so for fear of the consequences if he did not.’<sup>12</sup> Consequently, the psychological repercussions for a *polis* and its army for omitting to consult the Oracles in the first place or for failing to carry out its commands, once given, were very serious indeed.

Another important psychological reason why the ancient Greeks felt it was necessary to consult the gods on matters of war, was to gain some degree of control over their fate. As Esther Eidinow asserts, oracular consultation was a strategy whereby ordinary ancient Greek men and women ‘individually and collectively, expressed and managed aspects of uncertainty and risk of everyday life.’<sup>13</sup> This was never more urgent and necessary than in times of war. Put very simply, those who used Oracles were unsure and apprehensive and wanted to be sure they were making the right choice.<sup>14</sup> Oracles therefore offered the ancient Greeks reassurance that they were making the correct decisions in a time of great uncertainty and fear, and crucial insurance against misfortune. Consequently, the modern historians’ views that propose practical, political, and pragmatic reasons behind foreign policy and military strategy decisions, and argue away religious motivations behind their actions, reflect, as Pritchett astutely points out, ‘the modern’s inability to recapture the religious background of the time.’<sup>15</sup> Indeed, the crux to our entire understanding of the role and impact of divination in ancient Greek warfare is the acceptance of Dodds’ stance that ‘The Greeks believed in their Oracle, not because they were superstitious fools, but because they could not do without believing in it.’<sup>16</sup>

## **2.1 Consulting the gods in war: Xenophon as a case study**

Several episodes and remarks recorded in the writings of Xenophon provide us with a particularly useful opportunity to see the psychological motivations behind wartime oracular consultations at work, and at the same time help us to gain a crucial insight into the religious attitudes of the time. Moreover, Xenophon’s works also provide us with a chance to see the importance of Oracles and divination in war from the unique perspective of both soldier and *strategos*, with Xenophon, of course, having served in both roles. To begin with I shall examine several of these episodes to expound what they reveal about the psychological role and impact

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<sup>12</sup> Goodman and Holladay, 1986: 152.

<sup>13</sup> Eidinow, 2007: 4. For a fuller discussion of the use of Oracles in response to ancient ‘risk’, see Eidinow, 2007: 23, 142, 239.

<sup>14</sup> Eidinow, 2007: 5.

<sup>15</sup> Pritchett, 1979: 311.

<sup>16</sup> Dodds, 1951: 75.

of oracular consultation and divination in ancient Greek warfare, before discussing the extent to which Xenophon can be used to exemplify the typical views held by an ordinary Greek of his time.

One episode in particular from the *Anabasis* reveals the vital part Oracles, and divination as a whole, played in the psychology of ancient Greek warfare. In it, Xenophon relates how the Ten Thousand were in dire straits; after being betrayed by their Persian escorts and having their generals and captains captured and put to death, they were miles from home and surrounded on all sides by their enemies.<sup>17</sup> As a result of their gloomy predicament, the Greeks were, naturally, in a state of deep despondency and Xenophon was trying to find a way to raise the morale of the mercenary army. That night, Xenophon had a vivid dream, which, believing it was sent from Zeus, roused him to call a meeting of the remaining Greek army captains, where they discussed their bleak situation and the poor condition and low morale of the troops.<sup>18</sup> At the conclusion of the meeting Xenophon says: ‘But there will be a great rise in their spirits if one can change the way they think, so that instead of having in their heads the one idea of “What is going to happen to me?” they may think, “What action am I going to take?”’<sup>19</sup> His words inspire the officers in his audience and they appoint new leaders and assemble the troops. It is crucial to note that throughout his rallying speech to his fellow officers, and subsequently to the marshalled soldiers, Xenophon repeatedly refers to the fact that the gods will be on the Greeks’ side for the Persians were the ones who violated their holy vows to the gods and broke the truce, and that as a consequence the Greeks will be rewarded for their piety to the gods and the Persians punished for their impiety.<sup>20</sup> His speech, of course, has the desired effect and the previously dejected Greek mercenaries are roused into action with their spirits lifted enormously.

The episode reveals, and neatly encapsulates, several crucial things about the role of Oracles and divination in ancient Greek warfare. First and foremost, it demonstrates plainly that the Greeks consulted the Oracles and performed sacrifices on the battlefield in order to get the gods on their side, the importance of which is abundantly clear during Xenophon’s speeches. Indeed, when describing the plight of the Ten Thousand, the implicit understanding from Xenophon’s words is not only will the Greeks have the gods on their side, morally, they will receive

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<sup>17</sup> Xen. *Anab.* 3.1.2.

<sup>18</sup> Xen. *Anab.* 3.1.12-13.

<sup>19</sup> Xen. *Anab.* 3.1.41

<sup>20</sup> Xen. *Anab.* 3.1.21-3; 3.2.6; 3.2.8; 3.2.10.

tangible, real aid from them, whether it be physical or supernatural. Moreover, the feeling from the *Anabasis* is that the gods' support may be obtained without asking for it directly, through steady and sincere piety; such pious actions include, primarily, frequent prayer, regular sacrificing, and keeping of one's oaths.<sup>21</sup> It appears, also, that this applied to individuals, groups, and cities alike.<sup>22</sup> A powerful illustration of this belief in action can be seen with the Athenians' consultation of the Oracle of Zeus at Ammon during an unspecified war with Sparta.<sup>23</sup> In Plato's Socratic dialogue *Alkibiades II*, Socrates describes how the Athenians, after they had suffered a series of defeats on both land and sea at the hands of the Lakedaimonians, decided to consult Ammon to ascertain why the gods were granting the Spartans victory and to obtain advice on how to alter their fortunes in the conflict. According to Plato, the Athenians were particularly aggrieved by the fact that the gods were bestowing success on the Spartans, whom they argued were often neglectful in their religious duties and parsimonious in their offerings, whilst, conversely, the Athenians were much more attentive and more munificent than all the Greeks put together. The Oracle responded by stating: 'I would rather have the reverent reserve of the Spartans than all the ritual of the Greeks.' Plato interpreted the words 'reverent reserve' to mean prayer, thus suggesting that the gods favoured the pious and sincere entreaties of *poleis* rather than trivial, irreverent petitions backed up by expensive superficial gestures of splendid dedications, sacrifices and processions.

However, Xenophon's cursory comment, regarding the need to change the mindset of the troops from one of debilitating worry to one of productive action and motion, inadvertently hits upon one of the key reasons for oracular consultations and divination before and during war: the act of consulting the gods gave the ancient Greeks the feeling that they were doing something to give them some kind of control in the face of grave danger and doubt. Indeed, Eidinow identifies a pattern which emerges in the *Anabasis*, where Xenophon, when he is most at a loss of what to do, acknowledges his helplessness and then immediately seeks the advice

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<sup>21</sup> See Eidinow, 2007: 13. For example, Cambyses commends his son for his piety and declares that as Cyrus prays to the gods regularly he can expect to obtain what he asks for (Xen. *Cyr.* 1.6.4); the seer Euclides advises Xenophon, who has been remiss in his sacrifices to Zeus of Propitiation since he left on expedition, to do so again regularly as he had done in the past in order to improve his fortune (Xen. *Anab.* 7.8.4); and Clearchus makes the point to Tissaphernes about the inescapable doom which faces any man who breaks his oaths to the gods (Xen. *Anab.* 2.5.7), to which Tissaphernes wholeheartedly agrees and states that those who do so must be, 'without means and desperate and without any other way out, and even then they must be villains.' (Xen. *Anab.* 2.5.21). Cf. also Delphic Apollo's unbridled offer of support to Sparta on the eve of the Peloponnesian War: see Oracle no. 41, *infra*, p. 59ff.

<sup>22</sup> Eidinow, 2007: 13.

<sup>23</sup> Oracle no. 50: Pl. *Alc.* 2.148D-149C.

of the gods.<sup>24</sup> One of the most obvious examples of this occurs in Book Six, when Xenophon is considering whether or not to accept the position of supreme commander, which has been offered to him. Whilst mulling over the decision, Xenophon comes to the realisation that as ‘no man can tell what the future will bring’, the best thing to do will be to put the matter before the gods, whereby he subsequently makes a sacrifice to Zeus Basileus, as previously directed to do by Delphi.<sup>25</sup> Eidinow points out that each time this pattern occurs, the divine intervention, whether it be a divinatory sacrifice or one of Xenophon’s *oneiromantic* dreams, follows an explicit reference to a state of ἀπορία, that is of ‘being at a loss’ about what to do.<sup>26</sup> The exact same idea is echoed in Xenophon’s *Oikonomikos* and *Kyropaedia*, where he states that, ‘men engaged in war try to propitiate the gods before taking action; and with sacrifices and omens seek to know what they ought to do and what they ought not to do’<sup>27</sup> and that:

‘mere human wisdom does not know how to choose what is best any more than if any one were to cast lots and do as the lot fell. But the gods, my son, the eternal gods, know all things, both what has been and what is and what shall come to pass as a result of each present or past event; and if men consult them, they reveal to those to whom they are propitious what they ought to do and what they ought not to do.’<sup>28</sup>

It is abundantly clear from these passages that Xenophon believes that in times of great uncertainty it is necessary to consult the gods for guidance, for they are omniscient and will reveal through oracles and omens what is the best course action to take. That being said, it does not mean that Xenophon abandons free will and autonomy in the face of divine mandate. Through his personal divinatory activities, Xenophon clearly believes that it is possible for mortals, with supernatural support, to shape their own future.<sup>29</sup> As Eidinow argues, Xenophon ‘clearly believes that the gods know what the future holds, and gaining access to this divine data is a crucial part of his campaign strategy.’<sup>30</sup> Thus, Xenophon’s consultation of Oracles and repeated battlefield sacrifices, reinforced by prophetic dreams and omens, are an attempt to glimpse the future and are therefore an intricate part of his decision-making process, but the

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<sup>24</sup> Eidinow, 2007: 12.

<sup>25</sup> Xen. *Anab.* 6.1.22; for the Delphic oracle, see Xen. *Anab.* 3.1.5-7; Oracle no. 45, *infra*, p. 95.

<sup>26</sup> Eidinow, 2007: 12.

<sup>27</sup> Xen. *Oik.* 5.19-20.

<sup>28</sup> Xen. *Cyr.* 1.6.46. A very similar comment is made at Xen. *Eq. Mag.* 9.8-9.

<sup>29</sup> This is admittedly in contrast to writers such as Herodotus, who believe that no man can escape his fate, despite his attempts to do otherwise. That being said, he can still learn about his future from the Oracles if he keeps an open mind. For a fuller discussion of Herodotus’ religious beliefs, see Eidinow, 2007: 11; Harrison, 2000: esp. 31ff. For a useful discussion on the ancient Greeks’ views of fate, fatalism, and determinism, see Eidinow, E., *Luck, Fate and Fortune: Antiquity and its Legacy* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2011); Pelling, C. B. R., ‘Thucydides’ Archidamus and Herodotus’ Artabanus’, in Flower, M. A. and Toher, M. eds., *Georgica: Greek Studies in Honour of George Cawkwell* (London, 1991) 120-142.

<sup>30</sup> Eidinow, 2007: 12.



final interpretation of those divine messages lies with Xenophon himself. It is still clearly a difficult task, as Xenophon himself admits, which often only becomes apparent with hindsight,<sup>31</sup> but it is still most certainly a human province. It is something which is also revealed in Xenophon's consultation of Delphi before he embarked upon the campaign in the first place, in which he asks the Delphic Pythia which gods he should sacrifice to in order to return home safely and successfully.<sup>32</sup> The phrasing of the question, of course, suggests that Xenophon had already made up his mind to join Cyrus' expedition and go to war, since the question was seeking divine protection, not divine guidance, something for which Socrates rebukes him afterwards.<sup>33</sup> Therefore, analogous to the Spartans' consultation of Delphi before the Peloponnesian war, Xenophon's consultation of Delphic Apollo reveals a much deeper, ulterior reason to consult the gods before going to war other than simply seeking their guidance and permission to do so. There was a need for the ancient Greeks, not only to feel like they were taking their fate into their own hands and managing the risks they faced, but also to garner supernatural support for psychological reasons. Like the Lakedaimonians as a whole, Xenophon needed personally to know that he was going to war with the gods on his side, in order to give him the courage and mettle he needed to embark upon a hugely risky and perilous venture.

Lastly, as demonstrated by Xenophon's speeches to both his fellow officers and the rank and file, the episode also illustrates how a *strategos* could utilise Oracles and divination and the favour of the gods as a psychological tool to rouse and rally the soldiers under his command. Thus, the consultation of Oracles and use of divination in times of war was a complex practice with multifaceted motivations and effects. It is when seen in this light that Oracles and their prognostications, in terms of their psychological impact, become an absolutely vital part of ancient Greek warfare.

The *Hellenica* provides us with further insights into Xenophon's religious views. The notion that piety and devotion to the gods would be rewarded with their support and assistance in war, and that inversely impiety and disregard would be punished by Heaven is perhaps most markedly illustrated by two comments made by Xenophon in the *Hellenica*. The first comment relates to the Spartans' breach, in 382 B.C., of their oath to leave the *poleis* of Hellas independent by seizing the Akropolis of Thebes. Here Xenophon suggests a direct line of divine

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<sup>31</sup> Xen. *Anab.* 3.1.13.

<sup>32</sup> Xen. *Anab.* 3.1.6; Oracle no. 45, *infra*, p. 95ff.

<sup>33</sup> Xen. *Anab.* 3.1.7.

causation from the Spartans' impious act of seizing possession of the Kadmeia in 382 B.C. to their defeat at the hands of the Thebans at Leuktra ten years later in 371 B.C. He states:

‘Now one could bring up many other instances, both Greek and barbarian, which show that the gods neglect neither impious persons nor those who do wicked deeds; but at present I will speak of the case which is before me. The Lacedaemonians, namely, who had sworn that they would leave the states independent, after seizing possession of the Akropolis of Thebes were punished by the very men, unaided, who had been thus wronged, although they had not been conquered by any single one of all the peoples that ever existed.’<sup>34</sup>

Dillery argues further that it is Xenophon's firm belief that historical permanence is proof and reward for piety, and that the cities and individuals' fortunes that remain stable and prosper are those that are the most pious.<sup>35</sup> Bowden, on the other hand, although he firmly acknowledges Xenophon's belief in the divine and their involvement in human affairs, defends Xenophon's historical method concerning this episode and suggests that he is merely emphasising the wickedness of oath-breaking and rebuking the Spartans (and their Theban supporters) for their impiety rather than suggesting direct divine causation.<sup>36</sup> However, Gray suggests another similar demonstration of Xenophon's belief in impiety causing the subsequent destruction of the perpetrators in his description of the revolution in Corinth in 392 B.C.<sup>37</sup> Gray argues that the revolution, which is portrayed by Xenophon as being particularly impious, is met with swift divine retribution at the hands of the Spartans, and is described with much approval by Xenophon:

‘As for the Spartans, they were at no loss about whom to kill next, for this was certainly an occasion when the god gave them an opportunity beyond anything they could have prayed for. Here was a great mass of their enemies delivered over to them in a state of utter panic, offering their unprotected sides, with no one making the least effort to fight and everyone doing everything possible to ensure his own destruction: what can one call this except an instance of divine intervention?’<sup>38</sup>

Once more Bowden argues that the utter annihilation of the Corinthians does not necessarily need to be seen as divine justice, but instead that it is simply the quantity of the dead and the

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<sup>34</sup> Xen. *Hell.* 5.4.1. trans. Bowden, H., 'Xenophon and the Scientific Study of Religion', in Tuplin, C. and Azoulay, V. eds., *Xenophon and his World: Papers from a Conference held in Liverpool in July 1999* (Stuttgart, 2004) 243.

<sup>35</sup> Dillery, J., *Xenophon and the History of His Times* (London: Routledge, 1995) 189.

<sup>36</sup> See Bowden, 2004: 243-244; Tuplin, C., *The Failings of Empire: A Reading of Xenophon Hellenica 2.3.11-7.5.27*, *Historia Einzelschriften* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner, 1993) 99-100.

<sup>37</sup> Xen. *Hell.* 4.4.2-3.

<sup>38</sup> Xen. *Hell.* 4.4.12, trans. Bowden, H. (*Xenophon and the Scientific Study of Religion*).

ease with which the Spartans are able to slaughter them, which suggests to Xenophon that there must have been divine involvement.<sup>39</sup> Indeed, Bowden maintains that due to the ancient Greeks' massive ignorance of the gods and their motivations, Xenophon's writings do not attempt to assign divine causation to events and presume to know why the gods act in a particular way, but merely infer divine involvement in certain incidents.<sup>40</sup> Either way, and regardless of Xenophon's historical methodology, it does not really matter. What is important for the purposes of this study is simply the belief on Xenophon's part, and that of many of his contemporaries, that the gods undoubtedly existed and clearly interfered in the affairs of humans, and that piety could help secure their aid, or at the very least ensure that they did not work against them. Therefore, as Bowden concludes: 'Xenophon's works in general show how he and his contemporaries might engage with the gods: regular sacrifice and avoidance of impiety might lead the gods to look favourably on an individual; the gods might communicate information to someone whom they favoured; but that was the best one could hope for.'<sup>41</sup> However, what Bowden perhaps underestimates is that in a time of war, that ardent hope of obtaining divine favour and aid would have been fiercely grasped and tenaciously held on to, thus pious oracular consultation and ongoing divination and sacrifice were absolutely essential to the psyche of the ancient Greek *polis* and its soldiers.

## 2.2 Xenophon as a paradigm for ancient Greek religious views

Unfortunately because of Xenophon's pious devotion to the gods and his penchant for the supernatural, he is, to many of his commentators, a disappointment. As Bowden justifiably laments,<sup>42</sup> Xenophon's 'approach to religion appears to be so different from that expected of an enlightened intellectual that scholars treat it at best as a forgivable personal eccentricity,<sup>43</sup> and at worst as a sign of his mediocrity.'<sup>44</sup> However, this dismissive stance is regrettable and misguided, for Xenophon's approach to religion can in fact shed a great deal of light upon the

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<sup>39</sup> Bowden, 2004: 244; Tuplin, 1993: 69-70.

<sup>40</sup> Bowden, 2004: 244.

<sup>41</sup> Bowden, 2004: 245.

<sup>42</sup> Bowden, 2004: 229.

<sup>43</sup> See Anderson, J. K., *Xenophon* (London: 1974) 34-35.

<sup>44</sup> See Cawkwell in Xenophon, *Hellenica*, translated by R. Warner, with an introduction and notes by G. Cawkwell (London, 1979) 45; Cartledge, P., *Agasilaos and the Crisis of Sparta* (London: Duckworth, 1987) 65; Luccioni, J., *Xenophon et le Socratisme* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1953) 137. For a fuller discussion and defence of Xenophon's historical approach and belief in the divine as a historical agent, see Dillery, 1995: 179-194; for further discussion of Xenophon's contemporaries and their attitudes towards religion, see Dillery, 1995: 224-225 and nn. 77-85.

religious attitudes of the Athenians of his time and, by extension, the wider ancient Greek world. As Bowden argues, Xenophon's religious behaviour is typical of an average member of the Athenian elite: he will pray to the gods and offer sacrifices and other offerings when he remembers, and particularly when he is in difficulties; in times of trouble he will probably promise to perform a service to the god that helps him, which, once again, he will carry out if he remembers; he will attend public festivals most of the time, unless a really pressing engagement prevents him from doing so; and whilst recognising the importance of keeping an oath to the gods, he may occasionally break one if necessity and circumstances dictate, and if he thinks he will be able to get away with it.<sup>45</sup> It is important to appreciate, therefore, that Xenophon should not be seen as some kind of eccentric religious zealot, but rather as a man who held fairly conventional and mainstream religious views. He is clearly a man who believes in the existence of the gods and their very real and persistent interference in human affairs, hence his rigorous traditional piety and devotion to them, but beyond that he does not purport to know what they think or how they will act.

Bowden looks to Attic drama of the last quarter of the fifth century B.C. to demonstrate how Xenophon's beliefs must have been shared by the majority of his contemporaries. For instance, in Euripides' *Hippolytus* and *Bacchae*, and Sophocles' *Antigone*, several of the chief protagonists fail to comprehend the danger of not showing respect to the gods, yet their ignorance of the gods prevents them from being able to know for certain what to do about it.<sup>46</sup> This common ignorance of the gods is illustrated further by the fact that five of Euripides' plays (*Alcestis*, *Andromache*, *Bacchae*, *Helen*, and *Medea*) end with the chorus declaring that the ways of the gods are difficult to predict.<sup>47</sup> It is an ignorance not confined to tragedy or the fifth century.<sup>48</sup> Consequently, the lack of any certain knowledge about the gods made it possible to hold a range of different religious views. What is clear, however, is that in this context of a hazy and ambiguous knowledge and understanding of the divine, Xenophon's fairly loose and innocuous religious beliefs that: through divination humans can hope for guidance from the gods, but they are by no means guaranteed to be given it; and that mankind has a duty to honour the gods by performing certain duties, such as regular sacrifice (in times of peace and war) and attending religious festivals, which will hopefully be met with reward,

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<sup>45</sup> Bowden, 2004: 229.

<sup>46</sup> Bowden, 2004: 230

<sup>47</sup> Eur. *Alc.* 1159-1160; Eur. *Andr.* 1284-1285; Eur. *Bacch.* 1388-1390; Eur. *Hel.* 1688-1690; Eur. *Med.* 1455ff.

<sup>48</sup> See Bowden, 2004: 230; Hom. *Il.* 5.127-8; Hdt. 2.45, 2.53; Thuc. 5.105.2.

but once again does not ensure it, would surely not have been considered controversial in the ancient Greek world.

Furthermore, although many modern historians generally hold a critical view of the attention Xenophon gives to divine involvement in human affairs in his writing, and instead extol the virtues of the rational and objective Thucydides,<sup>49</sup> one must remember that Thucydides was in fact the exception rather than the rule and his predecessor Herodotus and his successor Xenophon reflect much more accurately the religious beliefs of the ancient Greek masses. Indeed, as Dillery argues, 'Thucydides was an extremely unusual historian; much more widespread was a belief that the divine in some way guided human affairs'<sup>50</sup> – a fact emphatically affirmed by Herodotus' own statement that 'it is clear from many proofs that the gods influence human affairs.'<sup>51</sup> In fact, Hornblower argues that Thucydides' neglect of religious factors in his history creates a distorted and misleading picture of the world in which the Peloponnesian War was fought.<sup>52</sup>

The general picture which emerges from Xenophon's works is that it was extremely prudent to consult the gods before and regularly during war to avail of their guidance and to hopefully gain their support and aid for both the *polis* and the individual. Although their help was by no means guaranteed, to not do so was in Xenophon's mind clearly foolish and reckless, and the risk of retribution for impiety far too great. In short, the potential benefits far outweighed the dangers of negligence and irreverence. Furthermore, the psychological importance of obtaining affirmative divine sanction for a war or military expedition from the outset and setting the venture off on the right footing from the very start cannot be underestimated.

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<sup>49</sup> See Hornblower, S., *Thucydides* (London: Duckworth, 1987) 182. The majority of Thucydidean scholars share Hornblower's view and regard Thucydides as an agnostic, although others such as Dover and Powell go further by suggesting that he was in fact an atheist: see Dover, K. J., *Thucydides* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1973) 41; Andrewes, A., Dover, K. J., and Gomme, A. W., *A Historical Commentary on Thucydides* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1950) 4.394; Powell, C. A., 'Thucydides and Divination', *BICS* 26 (1979b) 45-50. B. Jordan, on the other hand, persuasively argues that Thucydides makes frequent connections between the supernatural and mundane events and political actions, and that contrary to the widely-held view, Thucydides clearly understands the importance of religion and appreciates the powerful role which it plays in human affairs: see Jordan, B., 'Religion in Thucydides', *TAPA* 116 (1986) 119-147. Marinatos, too, argues that lurking just below the surface there is an idea of religious causation in Thucydides: see Marinatos, N., 'Thucydides and Oracles', *JHS* 101 (1981a) 138-140. For a fuller discussion and bibliography of both sides of the argument: see Jordan, 1986: 119-120.

<sup>50</sup> Dillery, 1995: 180.

<sup>51</sup> Hdt. 9.100.2.

<sup>52</sup> Hornblower, S., 'The Religious Dimension to the Peloponnesian War, or, What Thucydides Does Not Tell Us', *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology* 94 (1992) 169-197; Tuplin, C., 'Xenophon and his World: An Introductory Review', in Tuplin, C. and Azoulay, V. eds., *Xenophon and his World: Papers from a Conference held in Liverpool in July 1999* (Stuttgart, 2004) 18-19.

I have, of course, already stated the importance of human agency and the key role of interpretation in all of this, in terms of *polis* and military decision-making: Xenophon was certainly no mindless drone, slavishly obeying the gods' every command to the letter; however, the response delivered by an Oracle at the very beginning of a war would have huge psychological implications for the entirety of the conflict, as it had the potential to profoundly colour any subsequent divination and interpretation during the war as well. An initial positive divine sanction would undoubtedly have encouraged, even subconsciously, later battle sacrifices and other methods of divination to be interpreted positively, whilst a negative oracular prophecy, or perhaps worse still, a complete absence of one in the first place, would surely have tainted and adversely affected the interpretation of later omens during the war. In this way even the human agency of decision-making and the gift of interpretation could still be heavily influenced by oracular prognostications delivered or omens received at the commencement of a war: a fact illustrated by Xenophon's determination in a moment of uncertainty on campaign in the *Anabasis*, on whether or not to assume the supreme command of the Ten Thousand, to put the matter before the gods and sacrifice to Zeus Basileus as he had been instructed to do by Delphi before he left. Just before he commenced the sacrifice, he recalled an omen involving an eagle he had observed when setting out from Ephesus at the beginning of the expedition, which had been interpreted in a negative light by the soothsayer accompanying him. The subsequent portents from the sacrifice were interpreted by Xenophon as a clear indication that he should neither seek nor accept additional command.<sup>53</sup>

Crucially, the evidence of a *strategos* consulting Oracles and carrying out divinatory sacrifices before embarking upon a campaign or engaging in battle in order to determine the will of the gods is not just confined to the narratives in Xenophon's histories. Indeed, at the beginning of his military treatise on the art of cavalry command, *Hipparchikos*, Xenophon *in propria persona* opens his exposition on the subject with the directive:

The first duty is to sacrifice to the gods and pray them to grant you the thoughts, words and deeds likely to render your command most pleasing to the gods and to bring yourself, your friends and your city the fullest measure of affection and glory and advantage. Having gained the goodwill of the gods, you have then to recruit a sufficient

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<sup>53</sup> Xen. *Anab.* 6.1.22-24.

number of mounted men that you may bring the number up to the total required by the law.<sup>54</sup>

The fact that Xenophon's advice, first and foremost, to a military commander is to seek the will of the gods before commencing with any other martial duty, illustrates just how important Xenophon believed the role of the divine to be in warfare. Indeed, he sums up his views about the vital role of the gods and divination in warfare at the end of *Hipparchikos* when he comments:

If anyone is surprised at my frequent repetition of the exhortation to work with God, I can assure him that his surprise will diminish, if he is often in peril, and if he considers that in time of war foemen plot and counterplot, but seldom know what will come of their plots. Therefore there is none other that can give counsel in such a case but the gods. They know all things, and warn whomsoever they will in sacrifices, in omens, in voices, and in dreams. And we may suppose that they are more ready to counsel those who not only ask what they ought to do in the hour of need, but also serve the gods in the days of their prosperity with all their might.<sup>55</sup>

Although it is virtually impossible to say with absolute surety that Xenophon's religious views represent a 'typical' ancient Greek of his time, it is more than reasonable to posit that at the very least his views would not have been deemed unusual or been balked at by his contemporaries; indeed, it would rather have been the viewpoint of the atypical Thucydides that would have been more likely to raise a few eyebrows and disconcert his readers. As Dillery correctly asserts, 'men like Xenophon represented the majority of Greeks when they saw the divine at work in history; Thucydides and those who closely followed him must have been in the minority on this point.'<sup>56</sup> It is also important to note, in this regard, how Xenophon was regarded by his contemporaries in the ancient world. At the time of his own death, Xenophon's standing as an historian and hero of the Persian Expedition, nearly fifty years prior, had never been higher. Posthumously, as Tuplin states, 'his place in the canon of ancient authors was secure; he was a historian, philosopher, and man of action, a perfect model for the young (a view expressed, for example, by Dio Chrysostom) and an object of systematic literary imitation

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<sup>54</sup> Xen. *Eq. Mag.* 1.1-2. See also Dillery, 1995: 183. Cf. also Xen. *Eq. Mag.* 3.1: 'Now we come to duties that the cavalry commander must perform himself. First, he must sacrifice to propitiate the gods on behalf of the cavalry.'; and Xen. *Eq. Mag.* 5.14: 'For the practical application of these devices and any others you may contrive for the undoing of your foes by force or craft, I counsel you to work with God, so that, the gods being propitious, fortune too may favour you.' See also, Dillery, J., 'Xenophon, The Military Review and the Hellenistic *Pompeii*', in Tuplin, C. and Azoulay, V. eds., *Xenophon and his World: Papers from a Conference held in Liverpool in July 1999* (Stuttgart, 2004) 259-276.

<sup>55</sup> Xen. *Eq. Mag.* 9.8-9. See also Bowden, 2004: 232. Cf. Xen. *Cyr.* 1.5.6.

<sup>56</sup> Dillery, 1995: 224.

by Arrian.<sup>57</sup> Plutarch, furthermore, in his *Non posse suaviter vivi secundum Epicurum*, clearly holds both Herodotus and Xenophon in very high esteem.<sup>58</sup> In his discussion of the intellectual life and pleasures of the mind, Plutarch states that the works of Herodotus and Xenophon give great joy and pleasure to the reader.<sup>59</sup> The fact that historians such as Herodotus and Xenophon, who paid such close attention to the divine and the supernatural in their works, were regarded with the utmost respect in Antiquity and were so eagerly read by so many, is further indicative that their religious views and beliefs were in fact widely shared. Moreover, the amount of oracular traffic which took place in ancient Greece and the plenteous amount of references recorded in our sources to oracular consultations on issues of war and instances of divination on campaign strongly suggests that Xenophon was by no means alone in his beliefs and practices. Consequently, it is safe to assert with a considerable degree of confidence, insofar as the evidence allows, that Xenophon does indeed represent a typical 'man of his time' and that it is Thucydides who is the eccentric when it comes to ancient Greek views on religion. Thus, for the purposes of this study, Xenophon's approach to religion and his deference and obedience to the gods in warfare can serve as a paradigm for the rest of the ancient Greek world.

### 2.3 Psychological reasons for consulting the Oracles on matters of war

The first and most straightforward reason for consulting an Oracle on the issue of war was out of genuine reverence and deference to the gods. As we have already seen with the pious Xenophon, he believed strongly that piety and obedience to the gods would be rewarded with victory, and impiety would be met with divine retribution and punishment. Indeed, Xenophon

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<sup>57</sup> Tuplin, C.J., in *Encyclopædia Britannica Online*, s. v. "Xenophon", accessed January 11, 2016, <http://www.britannica.com/biography/Xenophon>. Dio Chrysostom says of Xenophon, 'I esteem Xenophon as alone sufficient of all the ancients for the accomplishments of a political man, whether a military commander, a city magistrate, or a public orator...Xenophon, to my fancy, is the most excellent and beneficial in this view of all the Socratic writers.' Moreover, he also asserts, 'If it become expedient for a statesman to encourage his fellow-citizens in a crisis of extreme dejection, many specimens of propriety in this respect are exhibited in that history [the *Anabasis*]:' see Dio. Chrys. *Or.* 18.

<sup>58</sup> Plut. *Mor.* 1093b-c.

<sup>59</sup> Plut. *Mor.* 1093b. Although Plutarch had his reservations about Herodotus' methodology and truthfulness, it is clear that he respected him as a writer, and the power, charm, and persuasiveness of his *History*. He states at the end of *De Herodoti malignitate* (874B): 'We must admit that Herodotus is an artist, that his history makes good reading, and that there is charm and skill and grace in his narrative, and that he has told his story as a bard tells a tale...To be sure, these writings charm, and attract everyone.' For a further discussion of Plutarch's assessments of Herodotus and the *History*, see Hershbell, J. P., 'Plutarch and Herodotus - the Beetle in the Rose', *Rheinisches Museum Für Philologie* 136, 2 (1993) 143-163.



clearly believed that victory was granted by the gods,<sup>60</sup> therefore to not consult them on issues of war would have been unthinkable and sheer foolishness, and we can assume that there must surely have been a considerable amount of ancient Greeks just like him. However, setting aside the devoutly religious section of ancient Greek society for now, there would still clearly have been a very large section of the populace who would have felt the need to consult the Oracles on matters of war for reasons other than simple piety. As touched upon already in the introduction of this chapter, two of the main driving factors that impelled the ancient Greeks to consult the Oracles on matters of war were the need to seek guidance in a time of great uncertainty and thereby assert some kind of control over their fate, and a superstitious fear of the consequences if they did not follow tradition and fulfil religious protocol; indeed, the two impulses most likely went hand in hand. The final, and perhaps most important reason for *poleis* and *strategoi* to consult the gods on issues of warfare was to obtain divine sanction and justification for a war or their military strategy, and in doing so hopefully acquire divine support and aid for their side. Even those deeply religious characters in the ancient world like Xenophon must surely have also consulted the Oracles for these more secular, earthly reasons too; Xenophon's consultation of the Delphic Oracle before his expedition to Asia in 401 B.C., even though he had already made up his mind to go, illustrates this perfectly.<sup>61</sup> All of the different motivations, of course, as we shall see, had psychological ramifications for both sides in a conflict.

## 2.4 Divine guidance and managing risk

For a deeply religious *strategos*, such as Xenophon, there was a genuine belief in the power of divination and the ability of the gods to give mortals a glimpse into the future, which they could then use to the best of their ability to shape their decisions and their fate. However, that being said, despite Xenophon's unswerving faith in the gods, he does not mechanically and indiscriminately place his decisions and fate in the hands of the gods. Although we see Xenophon resort to divination frequently on campaign, it is only when he is at a loss of what to do.<sup>62</sup> It was a doctrine shared by his mentor Socrates.

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<sup>60</sup> For instance, see Xenophon's account of the Lakedaimonians' massacre of the Corinthians, Argives, and Boiotians during the Corinthian War in 392 B.C., which is described as 'a gift from Heaven': Xen. *Hell.* 4.4.12; *supra*, p. 44. Cf. also Xen. *Cyr.* 7.1.11-13, 7.1.20; Xen. *Hell.* 7.5.13, 7.5.26; Xen. *Oik.* 5.19-20.

<sup>61</sup> Oracle no. 45, *infra*, p. 95ff.

<sup>62</sup> Q.v. *supra*, p. 42.

In his *Memorabilia*, Xenophon recounts Socrates' belief that if a course of action was clear then there was no need to consult the gods. In fact he argued that the gods would not help anyone who could not use their own wit and intelligence to work out for themselves what steps to take.<sup>63</sup> However, Socrates also believed that if something was unseen, unclear, or beyond the scope of human judgement then oracular aid could, and should, be sought.<sup>64</sup> In other words, he believed that humans should endeavour to carry out tasks and make judgements to the best of their ability with all the worldly faculties they possessed, but when circumstances or events conspired that were beyond human knowledge or ability to comprehend or solve then they should consult the gods, who were the highest authorities on such areas of knowledge and in whose domain such issues belonged. Socrates illustrates his argument with examples of several 'things which are not clear to men', such as a farmer who sows his field cannot know who will reap it, a man who builds a house cannot know who will live in it, and a general who accepts a command cannot know whether it will be a successful one.<sup>65</sup> There is, of course, perhaps no other time more pertinent than in a time of war when things are more unknown and the future so uncertain.

Almost certainly inseparable from a desire to know the future and obtain legitimate divine guidance was the need of the ancients to gain some element of control over their fate by managing the risk and obtaining some degree of reassurance that they were making the right decisions in a time of great peril. This must surely have been one of the reasons why Xenophon consulted the Delphic Oracle prior to joining Cyrus' campaign against Artaxerxes II in 401 B.C., for although we can see from the question he put to the Pythia that he had already decided to go, he still needed the divine endorsement to ease his mind and bolster his self-belief.

Regardless of the various intermingled motivations of the devout believer for consulting the gods, and despite the final interpretation lying with the consultant, the oracular prophecy or omen obtained from another divinatory method still has, nevertheless, a powerful psychological impact upon the person or *polis* receiving it. In the case of Xenophon, for instance, the omens from his sacrifice to Zeus and a remembered *ornithomantic* portent from

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<sup>63</sup> Xen. *Mem.* 1.1.6-9. See Eidinow, 2007: 43. For further discussion of Socrates' views on Oracles, see Guthrie, W. K. C., *Socrates* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971) 82-88; O'Connor, D. K., 'Xenophon and the Envious Life of Socrates', in Morrison, D. R. ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Socrates* (Cambridge, 2011) 48-74; Bartlett, R. C., ed., *Xenophon, The Shorter Socratic Writings: "Apology of Socrates to the Jury," "Oeconomicus," and "Symposium"* (Ithaca, NY; London: Cornell University Press, 2006) 9-38.

<sup>64</sup> Xen. *Mem.* 1.1.6; 1.4.15; *Anab.* 3.1.5.

<sup>65</sup> Xen. *Mem.* 1.1.8.

the very beginning of his expedition persuaded him not to take the post of commander-in-chief of the Ten Thousand.<sup>66</sup> What is also important to note is that despite Socrates' chastisement of Xenophon for his phrasing of his question to the Pythia before he left on campaign, Socrates then tells Xenophon that since he did put the question in that way, he must do all that the god directed him to do.<sup>67</sup> Thus, oracles sought by and delivered into the hands of a devout military commander such as Xenophon, or a pious *polis* such as Sparta,<sup>68</sup> had a potent psychological effect, which consequently could significantly affect military strategy and the outcome of wars in the ancient Greek world.

## 2.5 'With god on our side': consultation for divine sanction and support

Although we can safely assume that there must have been a significant number of ancient Greeks who shared Xenophon's pious view of the gods in the ancient Greek world, we must also presume that there would have been, too, an equally significant percentage of men and women who were of a more sceptical persuasion, or at least less fervent in their religious beliefs and habits. However, for the aim of obtaining divine sanction and support for their wars and military decisions, it does not really matter whether the consultants were truly devout believers or were more agnostic, for regardless of the strength of their religious conviction, the psychological impact of doing so was absolutely crucial in warfare in the ancient world. No doubt both the devout and the less devout denizens of ancient Greece felt the need to consult the Oracles on issues of war out of superstitious fear of what might happen to them if they did not do so.<sup>69</sup> However, there was also an equally forceful, if not more powerful, inducement for *poleis* and *strategoï* to consult the Oracles on matters of war, and this to obtain divine assent and support in the forthcoming conflict for the psychological benefits it would bestow upon the citizenry and army, and the psychological blow it would strike against their enemies.

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<sup>66</sup> Xen. *Anab.* 6.1.22-24.

<sup>67</sup> Xen. *Anab.* 3.1.7.

<sup>68</sup> For the religiosity of ancient Sparta, see Parker, R., 'Spartan Religion', in Powell, A. ed., *Classical Sparta: Techniques behind Her Success* (London, 1989) 142-172; Cartledge, P., *Sparta and Lakonia: A Regional History, 1300-362 B.C.*, 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2002a) *passim*; Powell, C. A., 'Athens' Difficulty, Sparta's Opportunity: Causation and the Peloponnesian War', *L'Antiquité Classique Année* 49 (1980) 112; Hodkinson, S., 'Social Order and the Conflict of Values in Classical Sparta', *Chiron* 13 (1983) 273-276; for an interesting attempt to explain why the Spartans may have been so exceptionally pious, see Cartledge, P., 'Seismicity and Spartan Society', *Liverpool Classical Monthly* 1 (1976) 25-28.

<sup>69</sup> Q.v. *supra*, p. 36ff.

In Schleifer's analysis of psychological warfare in the modern Arab-Israeli conflict, he argues that a state has to convince its inhabitants that the war they are embarking upon is just and that right is on their side, for it has to mobilise its resources in times of war and persuade its citizens to sacrifice their lives for their country. Indeed, he states that 'History shows that victory is unattainable in a state that fails to convince its soldiers of the justification of the war's aims.'<sup>70</sup> It is a tenet that applies to warfare across all cultures throughout the ages. The ancient Chinese military general and strategist, Sun Tzu, for instance, writing in the fifth century B.C., argues that war is, in essence, a moral contest that is won in the temples even before it is fought.<sup>71</sup> In a similar vein, the nineteenth-century Prussian general and military theorist, Carl von Clausewitz, who fought during the Napoleonic Wars, states in his military treatise *Vom Kriege* (*On War*), which stresses the psychological aspects of warfare, that, 'the moral [psychological] elements are among the most important in war. They constitute the spirit that permeates war as a whole, and at an early stage they establish a close affinity with the will that moves and leads the whole mass of force, practically merging with it, since the will itself is a moral quantity.'<sup>72</sup> Indeed, it is for this reason that the fourteenth-century military treatise, *Le Livre des Faits d'Armes et de Chevalerie*, by the Italian-French writer, Christine de Pizan, whose work is based heavily on the late fourth-century Roman military writer, Vegetius, advises that a captain should assemble his men and tell them that they are fighting for the just cause of their prince against a foe who has committed many wrongs, and that consequently they can rest assured that God will be with them and victory will undoubtedly be theirs.<sup>73</sup> Moreover, the Greek philosopher and military writer, Onasander, writing in the first century A.D., which is particularly pertinent for our purposes, states in his military treatise, *Strategikos*, that:

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<sup>70</sup> Schleifer, R., *Psychological Warfare in the Arab-Israeli Conflict* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2014) 13.

<sup>71</sup> Sun Tzu, *The Art of War*, 1.26. He states: 'Now the general who wins a battle makes many calculations in his temple ere the battle is fought. The general who loses a battle makes but few calculations beforehand. Thus do many calculations lead to victory, and few calculations to defeat: how much more no calculations at all! It is by attention to this point that I can foresee who is likely to win or lose.' Furthermore, Sun Tzu (1.5.6) also argues that the art of war is governed by five constant factors, which a general must take into account in his deliberations before taking the field. One of these is 'The Moral Law', which 'causes the people to be in complete accord with their ruler, so that they will follow him regardless of their lives, undismayed by any danger.' Thus, 'The Moral Law' is the unifying cause that unites a nation or an army. Chang Yu also tells us that in ancient times it was customary for a temple to be set apart for the use of a general who was about to take the field, in order that he might there elaborate his plan of campaign: see Tzu, S., *The Art of War*, edited with an introduction by Dallas Galvin; translated from the Chinese by Lionel Giles, with his Notes and Commentaries from the Chinese Masters (New York, 2003) 92.

<sup>72</sup> Carl von Clausewitz, *Vom Kriege*, 3.3: see Von Clausewitz, C., *On War*, translated by Michael Howard and Peter Paret; Abridged with an Introduction and Notes by Beatrice Heuser (Oxford, 2008) 141.

<sup>73</sup> See Bliese, 1994: 116. Cf. also Satan's rhetoric in Milton's seventeenth-century epic poem, *Paradise Lost*, which is aimed to persuade his army of rebel angels that it acts with probity: see Freeman, J. A., *Milton and the Martial Muse: Paradise Lost and European Traditions of War* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980) 144-146.

The causes of war, I believe, should be marshalled with the greatest care; it should be evident to all that one fights on the side of justice. For then the gods also, kindly disposed, become comrades in arms to the soldiers, and men are more eager to take their stand against the foe. For with the knowledge that they are not fighting an aggressive but a defensive war, with consciences free from evil designs, they contribute a courage that is complete; while those who believe an unjust war is displeasing to heaven, because of this very opinion enter the war with fear, even if they are not about to face danger at the hands of the enemy.<sup>74</sup>

Furthermore, in addition to the authoritative voice of Onasander, the same sentiments are echoed strongly by other voices in antiquity, such as Thucydides and Xenophon (*strategoï* in their own right, of course), as well as Dionysius of Halicarnassus, and Livy.<sup>75</sup> For instance, clearly one of the motives of King Archidamos before his assault on Plataea in 429 B.C., was to establish a *ius ad bellum* and to strike an accord with the gods, when, according to Thucydides, he made a solemn appeal to the gods to bear witness that it was in fact the Plataeans who were the aggressors in the war and that they were the ones who had broken their holy oath, not the Spartans.<sup>76</sup> Although Archidamos' prayer to the gods and heroes of Plataea may, of course, have been partly out of superstitious fear and an attempt not to incur their wrath by invading and violating their territory, his very public petition to the gods must also have been for the benefit of his troops, establishing the righteousness of their cause and thus bolstering their morale before combat. Xenophon, on the other hand, in his portrait of Cyrus as an ideal ruler in the *Cyropaedia*, narrates how when Cyrus accepted Cyaxares' invitation to command the Median army, the first thing that he did was to consult the gods, and it was not until he had sacrificed and received propitious omens that he then chose the two hundred men to accompany him on the expedition to Media.<sup>77</sup> Furthermore, once he had carried out these rites Cyrus then proceeded to address his troops, declaring:

For, as it is, the enemy are coming, aggressors in wrong, and our friends are calling us to their assistance. What, then, is more justifiable than to defend oneself, or what more noble than to assist one's friends? This, moreover, will, I think, strengthen your confidence: I have not neglected the gods as we embark upon this expedition. For you have been with me enough to know that not only in great things but also in small I always try to begin with the approval of the gods.<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> Onas. *Strat.* 4.1-2, trans. Illinois Greek Club (*Loeb Classical Library*).

<sup>75</sup> See Thuc. 2.74; Xen. *Cyr.* 1.5.13-14; Dion. Hal. *Ant. Rom.* 2.72.3; Livy, 1.32.

<sup>76</sup> Thuc. 2.74. For further discussion of Archidamos' *epitheiasmos* at Plataea, see *infra*, p. 123.

<sup>77</sup> Xen. *Cyr.* 1.5.6.

<sup>78</sup> Xen. *Cyr.* 1.5.13-14.

Once more, analogous to Archidamos' speech, yet perhaps even more explicit on this occasion, the psychological motivations behind Cyrus' speech to his men is clearly to establish the virtue of their cause, affirm the falseness of their enemy's claims, and to assure the army that the gods will be on their side in the forthcoming conflict. Likewise, the practice clearly continued on to Roman times. Dionysius of Halicarnassus, in his discussion of the establishment of the college of the *fetiales* under King Numa, for instance, states that the Romans of those times were successful in all of their wars because 'the origin and motives of them all were most holy, and for this reason especially the gods were propitious to them in the dangers that attended them.'<sup>79</sup> He goes on to describe the ritual function of the *fetiales* in declarations of war, stating that it was the duty of the *fetiales* to take care that the Romans did not enter into an unjust war against any city in alliance with them, and, if any city violated treaties against Rome unlawfully, to sanction war. It was therefore only through the fetial rites that a war, having met the requirements of religion, could be considered a just war (*bellum iustum*).<sup>80</sup> Livy, too, details the role of the *fetiales* in making a treaty during Rome's war with Alba Longa under Tullus Hostilius' reign.<sup>81</sup> It is abundantly clear from the rites carried out by the *fetiales* that should either side break the terms of the accord, the transgressors would suffer the wrath of Jupiter in the subsequent war.<sup>82</sup> This was clearly demonstrated during the reign of Tullus' successor, Ancus Marcius, when the Latins invaded Roman territory and then contemptuously rebuffed Roman demands for restitution.<sup>83</sup> According to Livy, the *fetiales* subsequently went to the borders of the enemy territory, and after calling the gods to bear witness, publicly proclaimed the righteousness of the Romans in the quarrel and stated the contraventions of the Latins, and then when the Romans' set of demands were not met, declared war in the name of the gods.<sup>84</sup> Livy stated that this was the first time that the Romans had declared war by means of the rites of the *fetiales* and that the custom was carried on into his present day.<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> Dion. Hal. *Ant. Rom.* 2.72.3. Livy attributes the institution of the *fetiales* to Numa's successor, Tullus Hostilius: see Livy, 1.24, 1.32.

<sup>80</sup> For further discussion on the *ius fetiale* and *bellum iustum*, see Ager, S. L., 'Roman Perspectives on Greek Diplomacy', in Eilers, C. ed., *Diplomats and Diplomacy in the Roman World* (Leiden; Boston, 2009) 17-24.

<sup>81</sup> Livy, 1.24.4-8.

<sup>82</sup> Livy, 1.24.8.

<sup>83</sup> Livy, 1.32.1-5.

<sup>84</sup> Livy, 1.32.6-13.

<sup>85</sup> Livy, 1.32.14. Augustus revived the fetial rites in 32 B.C. when he declared war on Cleopatra. According to Cassius Dio (50.4.4-5), Augustus entered the Temple of Bellona as a fetial priest and performed the preliminary rites connected with a formal declaration of war. As Rowell states, this not only lent the occasion a solemnity, but it also strengthened the idea that this was a just and unavoidable war and that Augustus had the backing of the gods against a foreign enemy: see Rowell, H. T., *Rome in the Augustan Age* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1962) 181. See also, Eder, W., 'Augustus and the Power of Tradition', in Galinsky, K. ed., *The Cambridge*

Ager rightly maintains that the idea that warfare is a trial before the gods, and that the gods deliver a verdict through battle, is a commonly-held notion, widespread among human cultures.<sup>86</sup> This was most certainly the case for the ancient Greek world: they believed strongly in the notion of justice in war, and each side went into battle armed with the conviction that the gods supported their cause in the conflict.<sup>87</sup> It is precisely for this reason, therefore, that ancient Greek *poleis* needed to obtain divine justification and sanction for going to war, or for carrying out certain military actions during a campaign. As Onasander warns, a general should only take the field after he has firmly established compelling grounds for going to war and convinced the populace and the army of the moral righteousness of their cause, thereby satisfying them that they go to war with the support of Heaven: ‘For those whose cause is weak, when they take up the heavy burden of war, are quickly crushed by it and fail.’<sup>88</sup> Indeed, Onasander goes on to assert later that ‘Soldiers are far more courageous when they believe they are facing dangers with the good will of the gods.’<sup>89</sup> Thus, when seen in this light, it becomes abundantly clear that the consultation of Oracles before and during a conflict played an absolutely vital psychological role upon which the success or failure of the entire war depended from the very beginning: something that was very clearly recognised by the ancient sources.

Crowley, in his examination of the psychology of the Athenian hoplite, identifies several compliance relationships and socio-political pressures which drove the ancient Athenian man

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*Companion to the Age of Augustus* (Cambridge, 2005) 22; Scheid, J., 'Augustus and Roman Religion: Continuity, Conservatism, and Innovation', in Galinsky, K. ed., *The Cambridge Companion to the Age of Augustus* (Cambridge, 2005) 180; Southern, P., *Augustus*, Second ed. (London: Routledge, 2014) 159.

<sup>86</sup> Ager, 2009: 23. See also Dawson, D., *The Origins of Western Warfare: Militarism and Morality in the Ancient World* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1996) 121 n. 4; Rich, J. W., 'Fear, Greed, and Glory: the Causes of Roman War Making in the Middle Republic', in Champion, C. B. ed., *Roman Imperialism: Readings and Sources* (Malden, Mass.; Oxford, 2004) 60.

<sup>87</sup> Chaniotis, A., *War in the Hellenistic World: A Social and Cultural History* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2005) 180-181. This need to establish a *ius ad bellum* for psychological reasons for one's own citizenry and soldiery and as a psychological tool against one's enemies continued into the Middle Ages and the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. Johnson in his discussion of classic just war doctrine, states that both sides in a conflict, because of 'invincible ignorance', could prosecute the war believing they were the ones who were morally in the right, and that in such cases 'only God could know who was really fighting justly': see Johnson, J. T., 'Ideology and the Jus Ad Bellum: Justice in the Initiation of War', *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 41, 2 (1973) 220. Moreover, when referring to the hundred years of war for religion that followed the Reformation, particularly the civil war between Protestant and Catholic leagues in Germany, the French Wars of Religion, the first English Civil War, and the Thirty Years' War, Johnson states that: 'In all these conflicts holy war advocates on either side sprayed streams of invective against their opponents as being in league with the devil - and therefore without a just cause for fighting - while they cast themselves as children of righteousness - and thus implicitly the possessors of true justice.': see Johnson, 1973: 220.

<sup>88</sup> Onas. *Strat.* 4.4.

<sup>89</sup> Onas. *Strat.* 10.26.

to engage in nearly constant war throughout his lifetime, and which also enabled him to face the horrors of hoplite warfare with bravery.<sup>90</sup> In doing so, Crowley rightly acknowledges the role that religion played in reinforcing these socio-political pressures, in that the Greek gods clearly approved of the institution of warfare, and that the ancient Greeks believed that the gods were a potential source of support, as they could, if they so desired, become their firmest allies, instil them with courage, harm their enemies, and grant them victory.<sup>91</sup> Consequently, as Crowley notes: ‘the Greeks did their best to actualise this potential, that is to say they endeavoured to solicit, establish and maintain divine approval, usually before allowing a dispute to escalate into armed conflict, before an army marched off to war, and once again before combat was joined, at which point last minute appeals could be made to the gods, including the promise of future dedications in return for victory in the field.’<sup>92</sup> However, although Crowley cursorily recognises the ongoing role that consultation of gods had in ancient Greek warfare, he underestimates the extent of its psychological impact upon the *polis* and the army. Rather than merely reinforcing the socio-political pressures and civic obligations which acted upon the ancient Greek male citizen, the consultation of the gods before and during a war was absolutely vital for the success or failure of the struggle, for to enter the war without the approval of the gods and their perceived assistance meant that the city-state and its army was at a psychological disadvantage to their opponents from the very beginning. Therefore, although Crowley concludes that one of the main reasons why the Athenian hoplite unhesitatingly went to war and courageously fought in hand-to-hand combat was because he ‘was morally committed to his socio-political system, and that system focused normative pressures upon him to ensure that he fought,’<sup>93</sup> it went deeper than that: the moral commitment of the ancient Greek hoplite was also driven by a legitimate and just cause, which was conveniently provided by the divine sanction of the Oracle. Thus provided, *poleis* and their warriors could enter their wars full of confidence and conviction, safe in the knowledge that the gods were on their side.

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<sup>90</sup> Crowley, 2012: 80-126.

<sup>91</sup> Crowley, 2012: 96-100.

<sup>92</sup> Crowley, 2012: 98.

<sup>93</sup> Crowley, 2012: 128.



## 2.6 Oracles obtained for divine sanction and their psychological effects

The psychological importance of obtaining divine sanction for a war is perhaps demonstrated most clearly with Sparta's consultation of the Delphic Oracle before the start of the Peloponnesian War.<sup>94</sup> Following the Potidaean Revolt of 432 B.C., and the subsequent siege of the city by Athens, it was considered by many of Sparta's allies, and also by many within Sparta itself, that the Thirty Years' Peace signed in 445 B.C. had been broken and that Sparta should go to war to end Athenian aggression.<sup>95</sup> Thus, in 432 B.C., chiefly as a result of Corinthian incitement, an assembly was called at Sparta to hear the complaints of her allies and 'anyone else who claimed to have suffered from Athenian aggression.'<sup>96</sup> After hearing the arguments of the allies, the majority of Spartans voted that the truce had indeed been broken and immediately called a full assembly of the Peloponnesian League to vote on the question of going to war against Athens.<sup>97</sup> However, Thucydides tells us that in the meantime, even though the Spartans had already decided that the truce had been broken by the Athenians, they sent delegates to Delphi to enquire whether it would be wise for them to go to war.<sup>98</sup> The god replied that 'if they fought with all their might, victory would be theirs, and that he himself would be on their side, whether they invoked him or not.' With this positive endorsement ringing in their ears, the Spartans met with their allies once more and the League voted for war.<sup>99</sup> It should be noted that the fact that the Spartans called an assembly of the Peloponnesian League to vote on the question of war after they had received such a clear sanction from the Pythia is not a slight on the Delphic Oracle's influence, but rather simply a question of procedure and part of the formal decision-making process of the League.<sup>100</sup>

This account by Thucydides is enlightening for several reasons. Firstly, it is a clear demonstration of a city-state seeking divine approval and guidance from an Oracle in their decision to go to war. Pritchett states that this particular oracle is 'a clear example of a case where the Pythian Apollo was consulted on a major case of policy, which had no connection

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<sup>94</sup> Oracle no. 41: Thuc. 1.118, 1.123, 2.54; *Suda* s.v. *Aklêton*; Plut. *De Pyth or: Mor.* 403A; Philostr. *Vit. Soph.* 1.5.575; Jul. *Or.* 8.25oc; P-W 137; Fontenrose, H5.

<sup>95</sup> Thuc. 1.118.3.

<sup>96</sup> Thuc. 1.67.3.

<sup>97</sup> For a narrative of the events, see Thuc. 1.66-88, 118-25.

<sup>98</sup> Thuc. 1.118.3.

<sup>99</sup> Thuc. 1.125.

<sup>100</sup> See M.I. Finley in Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War*, translated by R. Warner, with an introduction and notes by M.I. Finley (London, 1972) Appendix I, pp. 607-8; Hornblower, 1991: *ap.* 1.118.3; pp. 194-196.

with cult or ritual.<sup>101</sup> This argument is echoed by Immerwahr, who states that this ‘must be an authentic enquiry showing that Delphi was indeed questioned about “political” affairs, such as the conduct of war. It must also be a historical fact that an answer was given: hence Delphi did at times predict the future.’<sup>102</sup> Immerwahr also goes on to argue that the wording of the reply does not necessarily need to be regarded as genuine, as Thucydides himself states that the answer was a matter of tradition, presumably because it belonged to the recipient and was not kept on record in the shrine.<sup>103</sup> What is more, Fontenrose classifies this oracle as being one of only 75 ‘historical’ responses, compared to 268 ‘quasi-historical’, 176 ‘legendary’, and 16 ‘fictional’.<sup>104</sup> Westlake, on the other hand, casts a hint of doubt over the authenticity of the oracle due to the fact that he detects some uneasiness in Thucydides’ use of the word λέγεται (‘it is reported’).<sup>105</sup> That being said, Hornblower argues correctly that Westlake is being too sceptical here and that Fontenrose’s view is preferable.<sup>106</sup> Badian, meanwhile, makes the very pertinent point that the Spartans’ question to the Oracle would almost certainly have taken the usual form of ‘whether it would be better to go to war’, which illustrates how the Spartans must not yet have determined absolutely to go to war without consulting the god at Delphi first.<sup>107</sup> Badian maintains, indeed, that the Spartan consultation was much more than simply procedural due process, arguing that the mission ‘was far from comparable, say, to a request to the Pope to bless the armed forces of Italy.’<sup>108</sup> Furthermore, Thucydides’ later account of the plague in Athens in 431 B.C. reveals that the Athenians clearly remembered and resented the oracle that Delphi had given to Sparta at this time, again suggesting that the Oracle’s prophecies were considered by the ancient mind to be much more than just a rubber stamp for the schemes of *poleis*.<sup>109</sup>

Indeed, Fontenrose argues that although the form of the question suggests that the Pythia actually delivered a sanction, the message is essentially a command: ‘Fight with all your strength in order to have victory.’<sup>110</sup> However, Fontenrose goes on to make the salient point

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<sup>101</sup> Pritchett, 1979: 313.

<sup>102</sup> Immerwahr, H. R., ‘Review of Roland Crahay: La littérature oraculaire chez Herodote’, *Gnomon* 31 (1959) 206.

<sup>103</sup> Immerwahr, 1959: 206.

<sup>104</sup> Fontenrose, 1978: 8-9.

<sup>105</sup> Westlake, H. D., ‘ΛΕΓΕΤΑΙ in Thucydides’, *Mnemosyne* 30, 4 (1977) 350, 354.

<sup>106</sup> Hornblower, 1991: *ap.* 1.118.3.

<sup>107</sup> Badian, 1990: 74-75.

<sup>108</sup> Badian, 1990: 75.

<sup>109</sup> Thuc. 2.54.4 See Hornblower, 1991: *ap.* 1.118.3 & 2.54.4. For a more detailed discussion of Thucydides’ views on this oracle and its impact on Athenian morale, see Oracle no. 42, *infra*, p. 281ff.

<sup>110</sup> Fontenrose, 1978: 246.

that whether it was sanction or command, the Pythia added the promise of Apollo's help, which clearly expressed the Oracle's partisanship for the Lakedaimonians, which in turn must have been simultaneously a tremendous boost to Sparta and a significant blow to Athens.<sup>111</sup> This is, of course, once more supported by the fact that when the Athenians were suffering terribly from the Great Plague in 431/0 B.C., they recalled only too well the oracle Delphi had delivered to the Spartans on the eve of the Peloponnesian War and patently felt aggrieved by Apollo's offer of assistance to the Lakedaimonians.<sup>112</sup>

Secondly, during the Allied Congress at Sparta following the oracular consultation, when Corinth was urging the allies to declare war, the Corinthian ambassador consciously and overtly used the oracle as righteous justification for going to war and as a tool to raise the spirits and confidence of the allies. In his speech he states: 'we must go forward into this war, in the knowledge that we have many reasons for feeling confident: we are acting on the authority of the god, who has himself promised to support us...It is not you who will be the first to break the treaty, since the god, in ordering us to make war, regards the treaty as already broken.'<sup>113</sup> The fact that the envoy deliberately uses the Delphic sanction to bolster his argument, and persuade the allies in favour of war, illustrates once more the weight of influence an oracular prognostication could have, and also the effects it could have on the minds and morale of the ancient Greeks.

One must tread carefully when using a speech from Thucydides as concrete evidence, as it is extremely difficult to know if Thucydides simply made the speech up or whether he included exact information about what was said from contemporary sources and/or eyewitness accounts.<sup>114</sup> However, in this particular case it does not really matter; what is of crucial importance is the *sentiment* of the speech content. Clearly Thucydides felt, when composing the speech of the Corinthian envoys, that it was a valid and persuasive gambit on Corinth's part to use the Delphic Oracle's response to convince the rest of the members of the Peloponnesian

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<sup>111</sup> Fontenrose, 1978: 246.

<sup>112</sup> Thuc. 2.54.4.

<sup>113</sup> Thuc. 1.123.

<sup>114</sup> For general discussion about Thucydides' use of speeches in his history, see M.I. Finley in Warner, 1972: 25-29; F.W. Walbank, 'Speeches in Greek Historians', in Walbank, F. W., *Selected Papers: Studies in Greek and Roman History and Historiography* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985) 242-261; Hornblower, 1987: 45ff.; Hornblower, 1991: *ap.* 1.22; and Stadter, P. A., *The Speeches in Thucydides* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1973). For incisive analysis on the series of speeches surrounding the debate and vote for war at Sparta, and the subsequent meeting of the Peloponnesian League, particularly Thucydides' intent to demonstrate 'Spartan duplicity and Athenian innocence' in forcing the outbreak of war, see Badian, 1990: 71-79.

League to go to war against Athens, and accordingly that his readers would have no problem in finding it entirely credible. Furthermore, as Hornblower rightly points out, although some scholars are worried about the degree of detail and specificity of Perikles' speech,<sup>115</sup> which follows on from the Corinthians' speech and answers and echoes it at many points, it does not necessarily prove fatal to their historical authenticity. Hornblower argues convincingly that 'The "correspondences" are not really troubling: the ideas voiced by the Corinthians were very probably in the air at the time, and the Athenians surely heard reports of what was said and done at this meeting.'<sup>116</sup>

However, it is Thucydides' cursory, almost dismissive, remark that 'Although the Lakedaimonians had already voted that the treaty had been broken, and decided that the Athenians were guilty, they now sent to Delphi to enquire from the god whether it would be wise for them to go to war' which speaks volumes about the importance of Oracles in affairs of war.<sup>117</sup> Thucydides states earlier that the Spartan Assembly had decided that the truce had been broken by Athenian aggression and had voted in favour of going to war.<sup>118</sup> Yet his later fleeting comment infers disdain for the Spartans' need to consult the Delphic Oracle when they had already made their minds up. However, it is this precise action by the Spartans which demonstrates brilliantly the essential role and powerful psychological impact of oracles in warfare. It is abundantly clear that the Spartans had decided to go to war before going to Delphi and calling a meeting of the Peloponnesian League; however, the need for the Spartans to follow religious protocol and seek divine sanction for their already-made decision illustrates two vitally important things. Firstly, it reveals that even though the decision to go to war had been made on a human level, it must have been inconceivable for the Lakedaimonians to actually go to war without the approval of the gods, for to do so would risk incurring their wrath for impiety and put them at a perceived disadvantage from the very outset. Secondly, such a positive affirmation and pellucid assurance of victory, along with a promise of divine support from the god as well, must surely have played a major role in helping persuade the Spartans and her allies to go to war, confirmed to them the righteousness of their cause, and given the League's forces an enormous psychological boost before the first blows were struck in battle. This can be seen unmistakably in the words of the Corinthian delegate, who stresses

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<sup>115</sup> Thuc. 1.140-144.

<sup>116</sup> Hornblower, 1991: *ap.* 1.120 & 1.140, and Hornblower, 1987: 54, 59.

<sup>117</sup> Thuc. 1.118.3.

<sup>118</sup> Thuc. 1.87.3-6.

to the League members that it is the Athenians who are in the wrong by breaking their holy oath to the gods and that consequently it is Sparta and her allies who are in the right and will therefore enter the war with the gods on their side.<sup>119</sup>

A similarly powerful oracle in terms of psychological impact can be seen with Alexander's consultation of the Delphic Oracle (or the Oracle of Ammon) before his expedition to Persia, or, depending on which source's version we follow, Philomelos' consultation of the Delphic Oracle during the Third Sacred War.<sup>120</sup>

After Philip's assassination, Alexander quickly adopted and developed his father's plans for the invasion and conquest of Persia. In 335 B.C., after a congress of the Greek states at the Isthmus of Corinth had voted in favour of a Panhellenic invasion of Persia, with Alexander as the commander-in-chief of the expedition, Alexander himself visited Delphi to consult the Oracle on the venture. However, according to Plutarch, Alexander arrived on one of the days that were considered inauspicious for consultations and it was therefore forbidden for the Oracle to deliver a reply. Nevertheless, Alexander demanded that the Pythia deliver an oracle. When the priestess refused to officiate and explained that the law forbade her to do so, Alexander began to drag her to the shrine. Overwhelmed by Alexander's persistence, the Pythia exclaimed, 'You are invincible, my son!' Upon hearing this, Alexander then declared that 'he wanted no other prophecy, but had obtained from her the oracle he was seeking.'<sup>121</sup>

Although this oracular episode is very revealing and intriguing for several reasons, the account is part of the Alexander legend and as a result poses several historiographical problems. Firstly, the story seems to have become divided between Delphic Apollo and Ammon as the speaker.

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<sup>119</sup> Thuc. 1.123. It is important to note that when *poleis* concluded a treaty or alliance the oaths were made to the gods not to each other, therefore a peace treaty or alliance was a sacred accord. This can be clearly seen in Thucydides' reference at 1.118.3 to the Spartans consulting the Delphic Oracle on the question of the Athenians' apparent breach of the Thirty Years' Peace. As Hornblower explains, the religious association between the first part of the sentence discussing the treaty being broken and the reference to the Spartans sending to Delphi for advice is more clear in the original Greek, as the word *σπονδάς*, 'treaty', comes from the word *σπένδομαι*, 'I pour a libation', and was a religious act: see Hornblower, 1991: *ap.* 1.118.3, p. 195. *Cf.* Xen. *Anab.* 2.5.7; 3.1.21-22; 3.2.10.

<sup>120</sup> Oracle no. 58: Plut. *Alex.* 14.4; Diod. Sic. 17.93.4; Ps.-Callisthenes, *Historia Alexandri Magni*, p. 62 Stoneman; Parmenion *ap.* Anth. Pal. 7.239; P-W 270. Fontenrose, Q216.

<sup>121</sup> Plut. *Alex.* 14. Once more this expedition was preceded by numerous phenomena and omens, such as a statue of Orpheus, carved from cypress wood, which was seen to be covered with sweat. Although the portent initially caused considerable consternation, Aristander interpreted the sign favourably, arguing that it signified that Alexander was destined to perform great deeds that would be immortalised in song and poetry, which would cause poets and musicians much sweat and toil to compose and perform them. *Cf.* the omens of Timoleon's expedition to Sicily: Oracle no. 56, *infra*, p. 148.

Diodorus' sources indicated both, but his narrative at 17.51, has Ammon as the original speaker and details the response in much greater depth than the cursory mention the Pythia's remark is given at 17.93.4 or in Plutarch's account. In Diodorus' account at 17.51, Zeus Ammon, through his prophet, tells Alexander that he will be 'invincible [ἀνίκητος] for all time'.<sup>122</sup> It then appears that at some point someone attributed this statement to Delphi and the story of Alexander's visit was amalgamated with that of the consultation of the Oracle by the Phokian commander, Philomelos, in the summer of 355 B.C.<sup>123</sup> According to Diodorus, after Philomelos had taken control of Delphi, he directed the Pythia to mount the tripod in order to make her prophecies about the conduct of the current war, to which she refused. Philomelos responded by threatening her with violence and then forced her to mount the tripod. In submission the Pythia remarked that he had the power to do as he pleased, and Philomelos swiftly and gladly accepted her utterance and declared that he had obtained the oracle which suited him. He then 'immediately had the oracle inscribed and set it up in full view, and made it clear to everyone that the god gave him the authority to do as he pleased.'<sup>124</sup> In both cases it is not really a response from the Delphic Oracle *per se*, but a remark made by the Pythia, which is eagerly seized upon and used by the generals to fulfil their purposes.

Philomelos' consultation of the Pythia is one of the limited number that make it into Fontenrose's select category of Historical responses, mainly on the supposition that Diodorus found it in Ephorus' history and that it was likely added by Demophilos.<sup>125</sup> However, with characteristic scepticism, Fontenrose does check this categorisation with the possibility that the story may be no more than the association of an oracular anecdote with Philomelos made soon after the event; and furthermore, if Demophilos did record it, it would have been more than 25 years after the supposed event took place.<sup>126</sup> Parke and Wormell also believe that Philomelos' attempt to force the prophetess to speak is to be taken as historic, as too is his subsequent use of her spontaneous exclamation for propaganda purposes, but they consider the version concerning Alexander to be fictitious and a later invention modelled on the Philomelos episode.<sup>127</sup>

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<sup>122</sup> Cf. Oracle no. 60, *infra*, p. 152.

<sup>123</sup> For discussion on Diodorus' dating of Philomelos' consultation, see Green, P., 'Diodorus Siculus on the Third Sacred War', in Marincola, J. ed., *A Companion to Greek and Roman Historiography* (Oxford, 2011) 363-370.

<sup>124</sup> Diod. Sic. 16.27.1 (16.25.3).

<sup>125</sup> Fontenrose, H20; P-W 261.

<sup>126</sup> See Fontenrose, 1978: 251.

<sup>127</sup> See Parke and Wormell, 1956b: 240.

However, even if we accept that the incident originally involved Philomelos, the fact remains that the ancient authors ascribed the same attitude and behaviour to Alexander. Therefore, regardless of the historiographical problems relating to this oracular episode, and irrespective of whether the protagonist was Alexander or Philomelos, or both, the crucial issue is how both *strategoi* deemed it necessary to consult Oracles on military and foreign policy matters and, vitally, how the oracle was used by both generals for psychological purposes.

It may appear *prima facie* that both Alexander and Philomelos treat the Pythia with disrespect and irreverence by brusquely forcing her to deliver an oracle against her will; however, on further examination of the accounts of the incidents it appears, remarkably, not to have been seen as such by the ancient authors. First and foremost, the sources pass no comment expressing disapproval of their behaviour whatsoever. Instead, the sources' focus is on the words uttered by the Pythia, which are immediately and eagerly taken by both generals as the words of the god, and on Alexander and Philomelos' use of the prognostications for their advantage afterwards. Indeed, the only real criticism that can be levelled at both Alexander and Philomelos from the ancient writers is that of impatience, which, rather than diminishing their estimation of the Oracle, actually emphasises their belief in it, for it illustrates how essential they believed its affirmation to be and were consequently in a hurry to obtain it.<sup>128</sup> Furthermore, in the case at least of Alexander, his behaviour elsewhere suggests that he was in fact a very pious and reverent individual. Arrian, for instance, states that Alexander was 'most conscientious in his devotion to the gods'<sup>129</sup> – a fact well attested throughout his lifetime.<sup>130</sup>

That being the case, then their consultation of the Delphic Oracle comes into even tighter focus: for the exigency and urgency to obtain divine sanction from the Oracle then and there suggests that a key reason must have been for the psychological benefits that the consultation would reap for their troops and, particularly for Alexander, for the benefits it would provide in helping

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<sup>128</sup> Connelly argues that the accounts of impatient consultants such as Alexander, Philomelos, and Appius Claudius, who were frustrated by the limited schedule of times for consultation of the Delphic Oracle, help forge a tradition 'in which calm and composed Delphic priestesses handled impertinent male inquirers with a certain diplomatic aplomb', which may account somewhat for the silence of the sources on what appears to be such irreverent conduct by the generals: see Connelly, J. B., *Portrait of a Priestess: Women and Ritual in Ancient Greece* (Princeton, N.J.; Woodstock: Princeton University Press, 2007) 74.

<sup>129</sup> Arr. *Anab.* 7.28.1.

<sup>130</sup> For discussion of Alexander's religious punctiliousness and steadfast observance of oracles, prophecies, and omens of all kinds throughout his life, see Edmunds, L., 'The Religiosity of Alexander', *GRBS* 12 (1971) 368-381. For a thorough examination of Alexander's religious beliefs and divinity, see Fredricksmeyer, E. A., 'Alexander's Religion and Divinity', in Roisman, J. ed., *Brill's Companion to Alexander the Great* (Leiden, 2003) 253-278, which presents a persuasive synthesis of the scholarly debate on the matter.

him to win over and control the nations he intended to conquer. This is borne out by the actions taken by both generals following the consultation. Alexander would later use this oracular response and the response obtained from his consultation of the Oracle of Ammon to propagate the myth that he was divine,<sup>131</sup> in order to aid his rule over Egypt and Persia. Philomelos, on the other hand, immediately had the Pythia's words inscribed and displayed in full view to show everyone he had the god's permission to do whatever he wanted.<sup>132</sup> The oracular episodes reveal, therefore, that, aside from any personal religious motivations and desires on the part of Alexander or Philomelos, there was an urgent need to fulfil religious protocol and obtain overt divine sanction for their military plans, in order to keep their respective armies content and boost their morale, while also at the same time negatively affect their enemies' morale and determination to resist, by sowing doubt and weakening their conviction that they were in fact fighting on the winning side.

### 3. Bones transferral and the impact on psychology

Another area where Oracles played a vital part in ancient Greek foreign policy and warfare was their role in the transferral of heroes' bones, which had particularly powerful psychological ramifications for those city-states involved. Although many of the motivations for *poleis* obtaining divine guidance and sanction to locate and transfer the bones of heroes are similar to those already discussed, such as rallying support, boosting morale, and ensuring divine favour and assistance, there were also additional psychological reasons involved in the process, and as such, the topic deserves to be dealt with separately. Two war oracles in particular deal with the issue of bones transferral: the oracle delivered by Delphic Apollo to the Spartans concerning their war with the Tegeans and the bones of Orestes,<sup>133</sup> and the Delphic oracle given to the Athenians regarding the bones of Theseus and their war with Skyros.<sup>134</sup>

Herodotus records how, during Sparta's war with Tegea c. 580-550 B.C.,<sup>135</sup> the Spartans, who had suffered a series of setbacks, asked the Delphic Oracle which god they should entreat to

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<sup>131</sup> *Q.v.* Oracle no. 60, *infra*, p. 152.

<sup>132</sup> Diod. Sic. 16.27.1.

<sup>133</sup> Oracle no. 17: Hdt. 1.67-69; Diod. Sic. 9.36.3; Paus. 3.3.6 & 3.11.10; Plin. *HN.* 7.16.74; P-W 32 & 33; Fontenrose, Q89 & Q90.

<sup>134</sup> Oracle no. 37: Paus. 1.17.6 & 3.3.7; Plut. *Cim.* 8 & *Thes.* 36; Aristeides, *Or.* 46.241; Schol. on Aristeides 46.172, p. 561 Dind.; Schol. on Aristeides 46.241, p. 688 Dind.; Schol. vet. on Aristoph. *Pl.* 627; Schol. on Eur. *Hipp.* 11; P-W 113; Fontenrose, Q164.

<sup>135</sup> *Q.v.* Oracle no. 14, *infra*, p. 244ff.



ensure their conquest of Tegea and were told that if they brought home the bones of Agamemnon's son, Orestes, they would be victorious.<sup>136</sup> The Spartans duly searched for the tomb, but after being unable to find its location, they consulted the Oracle a second time for guidance, whereupon they received another enigmatic oracle telling them that the bones lay somewhere in the plain of Tegea and once more that if they brought them home they would prevail over the Tegeans. The Pythia's reply this time ran as follows:

In Arcady lies Tegea in the level plain,  
Where under strong constraint two winds are blowing;  
Smiting is there and counter-smiting, and woe upon woe;  
This earth, the giver of life, holds Agamemnon's son.  
Bring him home, and you will be the protector of Tegea.<sup>137</sup>

The Lakedaimonians, however, still searched in vain until Lichas, one of the Spartan *Agathoergi*, eventually located Orestes' grave in a Tegean blacksmith's courtyard by chance and surreptitiously brought the bones back to Sparta. It was only then that the Lakedaimonians were able to finally defeat Tegea and quickly went on to subdue the rest of the Peloponnese.<sup>138</sup>

Parke and Wormell state that the story of the Spartan *Agathoergos* discovering the bones in the blacksmith's forge is evidently created by Herodotus to make it effective as a popular tale, but yet at the same time it has a solid foundation of truth. They state that 'It is the first of a series of translations of heroic relics ordered by the Delphic Oracle for political purposes', and that 'the transference brings with it the "luck", the spiritual force, of the people from whom they are taken, and thus is followed more or less by a transfer of sovereignty.'<sup>139</sup>

This oracular episode is particularly interesting for several reasons. Firstly, if we are to take the oracle story at face value, it illustrates the psychological advantage the ownership of heroic relics gave to a *polis* with regards to warfare or foreign policy, and consequently the important

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<sup>136</sup> For the dates of these events, see Murray, O., *Early Greece*, 2nd ed. (Glasgow: Fontana Press, 1993) 262-263.

<sup>137</sup> Hdt. 1.67.4, trans. Aubrey De Sélincourt (*Herodotus: The Histories*).

<sup>138</sup> The translation of Orestes' bones was a famous topic in antiquity, which was still being talked about in the third century A.D. in Philostratus' *Heroikos*: see Philostr. *Her.* 8.3. For a list of discovered bones of heroes in the ancient world, see Philostr. *Her.* 8; Rusten, J., 'Living in the Past: Allusive Narratives and Elusive Authorities in the World of *Heroikos*', in Maclean, J. K. B. and Aitken, E. B. eds., *Philostratus's Heroikos: Religion and Cultural Identity in the third Century C.E.* (Atlanta, 2004) 143-158.

<sup>139</sup> Parke and Wormell, 1956b: 95. For more on the function of bone transference, see McCauley, B., 'Heroes and Power: The Politics of Bone Transferral', in Hägg, R. ed., *Ancient Greek Hero Cult* (Stockholm, 1999) 85-98; Fontenrose, 1978: 75; Coppola, A., *L'eroe ritrovato: il mito del corpo nella Grecia classica, Elementi* (Venezia: Marsilio, 2008); Boedeker, D., 'Hero Cult and Politics in Herodotus: The Bones of Orestes', in Dougherty, C. and Kurke, L. eds., *Cultural Poetics in Archaic Greece: Cult, Performance, Politics* (Cambridge, 1993) 164-177.

influence the Delphic Oracle could wield in giving *poleis* advice on obtaining such powerful talismans. In this instance, the Spartans gained a psychological boost following their recently failed attempt to subdue all of Arkadia by fulfilling the oracular prophecy and by physically obtaining the supernatural aid of Orestes. Secondly, and perhaps more importantly, they were able to strike a damaging blow to Tegean morale by stealing Orestes' assistance and protection from them.<sup>140</sup> That being said, McCauley, although acknowledging the morale boost that the appropriation of the bones would have brought the Spartans, argues sensibly that the action alone would surely not have broken Tegean hearts so much that they lost all hope and ceased to continue their resistance.<sup>141</sup> Examination of the relationship between Sparta and Tegea after the incident disproves that fact. The Spartans' initial intention appears to have been a war of annexation against Tegea, but Tegea never became Spartan territory. However, the Spartans were subsequently able to make an advantageous treaty with Tegea that enabled them to control Tegean foreign policy.<sup>142</sup> McCauley argues, therefore, that it was the transferral of Orestes' bones that empowered Sparta to achieve such a result.<sup>143</sup>

However, Parke and Wormell suggest a more subtle, but no less powerful, influence of the Oracle at work here.<sup>144</sup> They argue that the Spartans' failure to conquer all of Arkadia by force taught her to extend her power in a new way, by incorporation in a league of allied states, and that divine sanction by Delphi could help further this policy, hence why they asked the more modest question of the Oracle – which of the gods should they propitiate so that they might get the better of the Tegeans in war? Parke and Wormell see this as part of the Spartans' new policy towards their northern neighbours. They argue convincingly that the Spartans' new strategy at this time was to cease to stress their own Dorianism in opposition to the non-Dorian majority, and instead to promote themselves as heirs to the traditions of heroic sovereignty in the

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<sup>140</sup> For more discussion on the importance of heroes' tombs and the supernatural protection they conferred on the community, see Parke and Wormell, 1956b: 348; *infra*, pp. 85-87.

<sup>141</sup> McCauley, 1999: 88.

<sup>142</sup> McCauley, 1999: 88.

<sup>143</sup> See McCauley, 1999: 88-90. McCauley suggests that the combination of Sparta's philachaeon policy and the removal of Orestes' bones provided the Tegeans with a way out of the war with Sparta, which allowed them to retain their personal freedom. As the Tegeans had not fared well in battle following the removal of the bones, it could have provided them with a timely and convenient pretext for accepting Spartan hegemony. For more discussion on the existence of a philachaeon policy in Sparta in the mid sixth century, which has been accepted by most scholars, see: Dickins, G., 'The Growth of Spartan Policy', *JHS* 32 (1912) 1-42, esp. 22f.; Huxley, G. L., *Early Sparta* (London: Faber and Faber, 1962) 68-71; Forrest, W. G., *A History of Sparta* (London: Hutchinson, 1968) 74-76; Cartledge, 2002a: 137-139; Leahy, D. M., 'The Bones of Tisamenus', *Historia* 4, 1 (1955) 26-38, esp. 30-31; Murray, 1993: 248-252; and Calame, C., 'Spartan Genealogies: The Mythological Representation of a Spatial Organisation', in Bremmer, J. N. and Graf, F. eds., *Interpretations of Greek mythology* (London, 1987) 153-186, esp. 177.

<sup>144</sup> See Parke and Wormell, 1956b: 94-96.

Peloponnese: it is a view widely shared by several other historians, such as Forrest, Murray, McCauley, Malkin, and Cartledge.<sup>145</sup> Thus, for this purpose, the Spartans had to twist the Homeric account and present Sparta, not Argos, as the seat of the monarchs of the house of Agamemnon.<sup>146</sup> Parke and Wormell attest that the transference of the bones of Orestes to Sparta is the first trace of this policy. Indeed, they also suggest that ‘Perhaps the hint came originally from Delphi, the Oracle conveying a suggestion of the sort in using the strange phrase ‘protector of Tegea’ in preference to one implying plain conquest. Perhaps Sparta had already conceived the notion and prompted Delphi to give official sanction.’<sup>147</sup> Regardless of whether it was the Pythia or Sparta who initiated the idea, the incident clearly shows the importance of

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<sup>145</sup> See Forrest, 1968: 73-76; Murray, 1993: 262-263; McCauley, 1999: 88-89; Malkin, I., *Myth and Territory in the Spartan Mediterranean* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994) 22-47, esp. 29-30; Cartledge, 2002a: 119-120. Indeed, the foundation of the cults of Helen and Menelaos at Therapne illustrates how the Spartans, as early as the eighth century B.C., were attempting to cement their relationship to the epic past: see McCauley, 1999: 89, and Coldstream, J. N., ‘Hero-Cults in the Age of Homer’, *JHS* 96 (1976) 8-17, esp. 15. Moreover, Cartledge sees the construction of the Menelaion in 700 B.C. as the Spartans confidently asserting ‘their rightful claim to the heritage of Menelaos in addition to that of the Herakleidai as ideological charters for their rampantly dynamic “conquest-state”’: see Cartledge, P., ‘Early Lakedaimon: The Making of a Conquest State’, in Sanders, J. M. ed., *Philolakon: Lakonian Studies in Honour of Hector Catling* (London, 1992) 49-55. Sparta’s efforts throughout the seventh and sixth centuries to establish connections between themselves and the former rulers of Lakonia and the Peloponnese, such as Agamemnon, Menelaos, Helen, and Orestes have been summarised most recently by Boedeker, 1993: 164-177.

<sup>146</sup> A similar strategy can be seen developing during the fifth and fourth centuries in Athens, where there appears to have been a conscious attempt to take over Peloponnesian heroes for propagandistic reasons and psychological purposes. For instance, Aeschylus’ *Oresteia*, particularly the *Eumenides*, clearly demonstrates an attempt to steal Orestes from Sparta and give a heroic foundation and seal of approval to the Argive alliance of 462 B.C.: see Dover, K. J., ‘The Political Aspect of Aeschylus’s *Eumenides*’, *The Journal of Hellenic Studies* 77 (1957) 230-237; Cole, J. R., ‘The *Oresteia* and Cimon’, *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology* 81 (1977) 102-104; MacLeod, C. W., ‘Politics and the *Oresteia*’, *The Journal of Hellenic Studies* 102 (1982) 124-144. Similar arguments can also be made for the construction of the Hephaisteion in the Athenian agora in the mid-to-late fifth century B.C., which has arguably more to do with Theseus than it does for Hephaistos. The metopes of the Hephaisteion, for instance, depict the labours and Theseus alongside the deeds of Herakles, as if to proclaim that the exploits of the Athenian hero were equal to those of his Peloponnesian counterpart: see Whitley, J., *The Archaeology of Ancient Greece* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001) 343; Dinsmoor, W. B., ‘Observations on the Hephaisteion’, *Hesperia Supplements* 5 (1941) 1-171; Thompson, H. A., ‘The Sculptural Adornment of the Hephaisteion’, *American Journal of Archaeology* 66, 3 (1962) 339-347; Garland, R., *Introducing New Gods: the Politics of Athenian Religion* (London: Duckworth, 1992) 92; Barringer, J. M., ‘A New Approach to the Hephaisteion: Heroic Models in the Athenian Agora’, in Schultz, P. and Hoff, R. v. d. eds., *Structure, Image, Ornament: Architectural Sculpture in the Greek World* (Oxford, 2014) 105-120. Cf. also Athenian attempts to ‘steal’ the Dioskouroi from the Spartans during the fifth century B.C., particularly during the Peloponnesian War, demonstrated by a growth in popularity and importance of the cult of the Dioskouroi in Athens, and documented in the iconography of vase-painting, especially the scenes of the *theoxenia* where the recipient is nearly always identified as the twin hero-gods: see Shapiro, H. A., ‘Cult Warfare: The Dioskouroi between Sparta and Athens’, in Hägg, R. ed., *Ancient Greek Hero Cult* (Stockholm, 1999) 99-107; *infra*, pp. 310ff.

<sup>147</sup> Parke and Wormell, 1956b: 96. The theory that the transference of Orestes’ bones was part of a new strategy of diplomacy employed by the Spartans, brought on by their realisation that they could not conquer and control all of Arkadia by force, has been challenged by Boedeker, who stresses that the annexation of Orestes’ bones was not motivated by concerns of external policy, but rather by internal factors, such as an attempt to guarantee Spartan military superiority by installing a hero who transcended familial claims. I agree with McCauley, however, who argues correctly that there is no reason to reject external aims behind the transfer of Orestes’ bones and that, like all good propaganda, it may well have served several different purposes, both internally and externally: see Boedeker, 1993: 167; and McCauley, 1999: 89.

the Delphic Oracle in matters of foreign policy, whether it be directly shaping it through guiding *poleis* on certain courses of action, or whether through the fact that its divine sanction was needed to consolidate foreign policy decisions and military actions on account of the weight it carried in the ancient world. As McCauley states, ‘The fact that the transfer was made at the command of the Oracle of Delphi put a divine stamp of approval upon Spartan claims.’<sup>148</sup>

Comparable in many ways to the oracle given to the Spartans regarding Orestes’ bones and the conquest of Tegea is the Delphic Oracle’s command to the Athenians to locate and bring back the bones of Theseus in order to secure the defeat of Skyros.<sup>149</sup> In 476/5 B.C., Kimon led an expedition to Skyros in response to a plea from some Dolopian pirates, who invited him to come and capture the city. Plutarch and Pausanias both record an oracle which the Athenians had received, telling them to bring back the bones of Theseus from Skyros or else they would never capture the island.<sup>150</sup> In 474/3 B.C., after considerable determined effort, Kimon discovered the grave of Theseus, and the subjugation of Skyros swiftly followed.<sup>151</sup> Theseus’ bones were then brought back from Skyros and buried in the Theseion in the heart of Athens, making Theseus very much the property of Athens alone.<sup>152</sup>

Fontenrose argues that, although this oracular narrative is treated by the sources as history and embodies historical facts and events, it actually contains the folkloric motif of the ‘animal guide’, where the Oracle tells a city-state to retrieve the bones of a hero, and, when asked where

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<sup>148</sup> McCauley, 1999: 89.

<sup>149</sup> Oracle no. 37: Paus. 1.17.6 & 3.3.7; Plut. *Cim.* 8 & *Thes.* 36; Aristeides, *Or.* 46.241; Schol. on Aristeides 46.172, p. 561 Dind.; Schol. on Aristeides 46.241, p. 688 Dind.; Schol. vet. on Aristoph. *Pl.* 627; Schol. on Eur. *Hipp.* 11; P-W 113; Fontenrose, Q164.

<sup>150</sup> Aristeides’ version differs slightly in the fact that the bones were needed to be brought back to Athens or else the famine would not end.

<sup>151</sup> The only specific point of reference we have for the date of the capture of Skyros comes from Plutarch’s reference to an oracle given to the Athenians ‘when Phaidon was archon’ (*Thes.* 36.1), which was in 476/5 B.C. However, as Busolt points out, this was only the date of the oracle, and that the capture of Skyros may have occurred as late as 474/3 or 473/2 B.C.: see Busolt, G., *Griechische Geschichte bis zur Schlacht bei Chaeroneia*, 2nd ed., 3 vols. (Gotha: F. A. Perthes, 1885-1904) II Part I, 105-6 n. 2. J.D. Smart dates the return of the bones to 469/8 B.C.; however, Barron disagrees and argues, referring to Thuc. 1.98.1-2, which states that the campaigns against Eion and Skyros were the first undertaken by the Delian League, that it is hard to suppose that the newly founded military alliance would have remained inactive for nearly a decade after its formation in 478/7 B.C.: see Smart, J. D., ‘Kimon’s Capture of Eion’, *JHS* 87 (1967) 136 f.; and Barron, J. P., ‘New Light on Old Walls: The Murals of the Theseion’, *JHS* 92 (1972) 20 n. 4 & 21 n. 7. Sourvinou-Inwood also disagrees with Smart and argues convincingly for the years around 475 B.C., placing the transportation of Theseus’ bones into the context of political events of Athens at that time, such as Kimon sealing his alliance with the Alkmaionids through his marriage to Isodike and the final stages of the campaign against Themistokles before his ostracism in 474/3 or 471 B.C.: see Sourvinou-Inwood, C., ‘Theseus Lifting the Rock and a Cup near the Pithos Painter’, *JHS* 91 (1971) 108-109. For further discussion on the arguments over dates of the event, see Podlecki, A. J., ‘Cimon, Skyros and Theseus’ Bones’, *JHS* 91 (1971) 141-2, and Wells, J., *Studies in Herodotus* (Oxford: B. Blackwell, 1923) 134.

<sup>152</sup> Paus. 1.17.6. Cf. Paus. 3.3.7; Plut. *Cim.* 8.6; Plut. *Thes.* 36.2.

they shall find them, is informed that an animal (usually a bird) will show them the location.<sup>153</sup> The Scholiast on Aristeides states that the Athenians were directed to bring the bones of Theseus from Skyros, and that the god would be sending them a guide. Consequently, when they were on Skyros, the Athenians saw an eagle fly down and begin to claw the earth and realised that that was the guide and the location of the bones. However, although the Scholiast's account fits Fontenrose's theory, Plutarch and Pausanias fail to mention the second response from the Oracle, and, indeed, Plutarch states only that Kimon saw an eagle scratching a mound of earth and then through some sudden divine inspiration decided to dig at that place, discovering the grave. Thucydides, on the other hand, does not even explicitly state that Kimon led this expedition, nor does he mention Theseus' bones being discovered and brought back from the island.<sup>154</sup> That being said, as Hornblower notes, it is not a surprising omission considering Thucydides' tendency to under-report religious factors.<sup>155</sup>

Fontenrose further muddies the waters concerning Kimon's retrieval of Theseus' bones from Skyros by pointing out Diodorus' statement that Theseus' bones had been brought to Athens and a cult founded in prehistoric times,<sup>156</sup> and that according to Aristotle there was a Theseion in Athens in Peisistratos' time.<sup>157</sup> However, Fontenrose's cynicism seems to stem from the frustration that he cannot, with complete conviction, dismiss the oracle as being simply 'legendary'.<sup>158</sup>

However, Aristotle's reference to Peisistratos disarming the Athenians after calling them to an assembly in the Theseion can be explained away as being an error and that it should have instead referred to the Anakeion, the sanctuary of the Dioskouroi, since Polyaeus, writing in the second century A.D., states that is where Peisistratos' trick took place,<sup>159</sup> and, furthermore, there is no evidence for any Theseion, never mind one that was large enough to accommodate an armed parade, in the fifth century B.C.<sup>160</sup> Diodorus, on the other hand, does not specifically

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<sup>153</sup> Fontenrose, 1978: 73-4. Fontenrose illustrates this folklore theme further with the examples of Hesiod's bones (L41 & L42) and the Delian exiles searching for Apollo's birthplace (Q191).

<sup>154</sup> Thuc. 1.98.2. Thucydides only states categorically that Kimon led the siege of Eion, which preceded the attack on Skyros.

<sup>155</sup> Hornblower, 1991: *ap.* 1.98.2.

<sup>156</sup> Diod. Sic. 4.62.4.

<sup>157</sup> Arist. *Ath. Pol.* 15; Fontenrose, 1978: 74.

<sup>158</sup> Fontenrose, 1978: 74 n. 28.

<sup>159</sup> Polyaeus. *Strat.* 1.21.2.

<sup>160</sup> See P.J. Rhodes in Aristotle, *The Athenian Constitution*, translated with an introduction and notes by P.J. Rhodes (London, 2002) 127 n. 15.4.

mention when the bones were retrieved and the Theseion set up in Athens, and could conceivably be referring to Kimon's later actions in the fifth century B.C. Furthermore, Fontenrose himself puts forward the plausible suggestion that there may only have been a cenotaph to Theseus in Athens, which can help to explain away both Diodorus and Aristotle's references.<sup>161</sup>

Indeed, as Thompson and Wycherley quite rightly argue, it is irrelevant whether the Athenians assembled in the Anakeion or the Theseion in Peisistratos' time; the important thing is to regard Aristotle's text as being accurate and accept that by the sixth century B.C. there was a 'simple but extensive *temenos*.'<sup>162</sup> This interpretation happily accommodates all the sources' statements and allows for the apparent discrepancies in the accounts, for, as Thompson and Wycherley further argue, Pausanias speaks only of a temple (*hieron*) and an enclosure (*sekos*) and he does not deny that there was already a holy precinct (*temenos*) or Theseion in Athens, which are specific terms used by Euripides, Aristotle, and Plutarch. Consequently, it would have made perfect sense for Kimon to bring the bones of Theseus home to a sacred *temenos*, built centuries earlier, and then bury them in a new shrine within the older Theseion.<sup>163</sup> There is epigraphical evidence, too, which provides further proof to support the authenticity of the oracle. Forrest and Podlecki make the tentative, but attractive suggestion that a thank-offering inscription at Delphi from Athens, which thanks the god for a victory won 'in response to an oracle', refers to the Athenian victory at Skyros.<sup>164</sup>

Once more this oracle can be interpreted in several ways. Firstly, it can be argued that it is another illustration of the Delphic Oracle giving divine guidance to city-states on how to achieve victory over their enemies by obtaining the bones of heroes, and how those city-states avidly embraced the Oracle's direction and actively sought the heroes' graves in order to fulfil those prophecies and thus gain a supernatural and psychological advantage over their enemies.

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<sup>161</sup> Diod. Sic. 4.62.4; Arist. *Ath. Pol.* 15.

<sup>162</sup> Thompson, H. A. and Wycherley, R. E., *The Agora of Athens: The History, Shape and Uses of an Ancient City Center*, vol. XIV (Princeton, N. J.: The American School of Classical Studies at Athens, 1972) 124.

<sup>163</sup> Thompson and Wycherley, 1972: 124. For further discussion of the archaeological and historical debate surrounding the Theseion in Athens, see Walker, H. J., *Theseus and Athens* (New York; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995) 21-22.

<sup>164</sup> See Forrest, W. G., 'Review of Robert Flacelière: Inscriptions de la terrasse du Temple et de la région nord du Sanctuaire. Nos. 87-275', *Revue Belge de Philologie et d'Histoire* 34 (1956b) 541-542; Podlecki, 1971: 142.

Certainly, it is clear from Plutarch's two accounts that Kimon took up the directive from the Oracle with alacrity and zeal.<sup>165</sup>

Secondly, it can be seen as another example of a *polis* seeking divine ratification for its military foreign policy, which in this case was an expedition to conquer the strategically important island of Skyros for the Athenian Empire.<sup>166</sup> Podlecki argues convincingly that the story of the Dolopian pirates was more than likely used as a pretext for the invasion of Skyros, which Kimon would surely have already decided was an ideal place for an Athenian cleruchy; a fact which is specifically mentioned both by Thucydides and Diodorus.<sup>167</sup> Podlecki also casts further doubt over the Dolopian pirate story in Plutarch's account due to the suspicious fullness of the detail he provides and suggests the story may in fact be *post factum* justification by the Amphictyons, explaining away their relief at getting rid of a disruptive and bothersome branch of their own people.<sup>168</sup>

Thirdly, as well as being an official sanction for prudent foreign policy, the oracle can be interpreted as a piece of shrewd propaganda on both Athens' and Kimon's part. For the newly-confident and imperialistically ambitious Athens of the fifth century B.C., it was still in dire need of a heroic legacy to provide justification and validation for its naval empire in the Aegean. As Wells observes, Athens was poorly equipped for an imperial position due to a paucity of legendary greatness, particularly in comparison with other city-states such as Sparta, who had well-established connections with Herakles, or Argos, who claimed to inherit the rule of the Atreidai.<sup>169</sup> It was for this reason that Athens, from the growth of power under Peisistratos, had begun to consciously attempt to make Theseus a national hero.<sup>170</sup> Therefore, in a similar tactic to the one Sparta had employed with the bones of Orestes in order to gain sovereignty over Arkadia, Athens, in the second year of the Confederacy of Delos, appealed to

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<sup>165</sup> Plutarch states that Kimon 'attacked the task with great enthusiasm' (*Cim.* 8.5-7), and that he 'made it a point of honour to find the spot where Theseus was buried' (*Thes.* 36.2).

<sup>166</sup> For the strategical importance of Skyros, which, along with Karystos, Lemnos, Imbros, and the Chersonese, was crucial in keeping the Hellespontine route open for Athens, see Wells, 1923: 133 and Walker, E. M., 'The Confederacy of Delos, 478-463 B.C.', in Bury, J. B., Cook, S. A., and Adcock, F. E. eds., *The Cambridge Ancient History, Volume V, Athens, 478-401 B.C.* (Cambridge, 1927) 51; Davies, J. K., *Democracy and Classical Greece*, 2nd ed. (London: Fontana, 1993) 46, 77; Oliver, G. J. et al., eds., *The Sea in Antiquity* (Oxford: John and Erica Hedges, 2000) 68; Harrison, T. J., 'The Greek World, 478-432', in Kinzl, K. H. ed., *A Companion to the Classical Greek World* (Malden, MA; Oxford, 2006) 516.

<sup>167</sup> Diod. Sic. 11.60.2; Thuc. 1.98.2. See also Gomme, A. W., *A Historical Commentary on Thucydides*, 5 vols., vol. 2 (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1956) *ap.* 1.98.2; and Hornblower, 1991: *ap.* 1.98.2.

<sup>168</sup> Podlecki, 1971: 142.

<sup>169</sup> Wells, 1923: 134.

<sup>170</sup> See Wells, 1923: 134; and Meyer, E., *Geschichte des Alterthums*, vol. 2 (Stuttgart: 1884) 775.

the Delphic Oracle for help in confirming their connection with Theseus, and, in accordance with the resulting prophecy, the hero's relics were duly found by Kimon and brought back to Athens with great pomp and circumstance.

Kimon, too, had strong personal motivations for conquering the island of Skyros and fulfilling the oracular mandate to discover and retrieve the bones of Theseus. The planned invasion and subsequent oracle presented Kimon with the tantalising opportunity to complete the work of his father, Miltiades, who had already won Lemnos, and possibly Imbros, for Athens,<sup>171</sup> and to help redeem the family name after Miltiades' fall from grace, imprisonment, and fine, whilst at the same time scoring a decisive blow in the popularity contest against his bitter rival, Themistokles.<sup>172</sup> Not only was Kimon able to enhance his reputation with the accolade that he 'freed the Aegean from pirates',<sup>173</sup> a claim that had previously been made for Themistokles,<sup>174</sup> but he also was able to gain enormous popularity in Athens from the discovery and appropriation of Theseus' bones. Plutarch states that 'This affair did more than any other achievement of Kimon's to endear him to the people,'<sup>175</sup> which again might help explain the eagerness with which Kimon attacked the task of finding the hero's grave. Whatever Kimon's primary motivations were, it certainly appears that he made the most of the discovery, as the return of the bones was carried out with great splendour and ostentatious display.<sup>176</sup> Indeed, Kimon seems to have actively celebrated the devastation of Skyros as revenge for Theseus' murder.<sup>177</sup> Thus Kimon's subjugation of Skyros, the discovery of Theseus' bones, and the propaganda which accompanied it, had the desired result of finally and firmly eclipsing Themistokles in popularity.<sup>178</sup>

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<sup>171</sup> For Lemnos, see Hdt. 6.137, and for Imbros, see Hdt. 6.41.

<sup>172</sup> For further discussion on Kimon's motivations to restore his family's reputation and fortunes, see McCauley, 1999: 91.

<sup>173</sup> Plut. *Cim.* 8.5. Podlecki suggests that Kimon may even have been using this achievement to pose as the 'new Theseus': see Podlecki, 1971: 142 n. 12; Barron, J. P., 'Bakchylides, Theseus and a Woolly Cloak', *Bulletin of the Institute of Classical Studies* 27, 1 (1980) 2.

<sup>174</sup> Nep. *Them.* 2.3.

<sup>175</sup> Plut. *Cim.* 8.7.

<sup>176</sup> Plutarch (*Thes.* 36.3) tells us that, 'When Kimon brought these relics home on board his trireme, the Athenians were overjoyed and welcomed them with magnificent processions and sacrifices, as though the hero himself were returning to his city.'

<sup>177</sup> See Paus. 1.17.6. This is also the suggestion in Ephorus (P. Oxy. 2610 *fr.* 6), where Lycomedes is mentioned in *fr.* 7, directly after the account of Kimon's capture of Skyros.

<sup>178</sup> For a further discussion of Kimon's personal interest in Theseus and motivations for discovering his grave, see Garland, 1992: 84-85. Garland makes the prudent point that it was only natural for Kimon to have a vested interest in Theseus' welfare considering the fact that Kimon was the son of Miltiades, the architect of the victory of Marathon, and that a *phasma* of Theseus had joined the Athenian ranks during the battle and helped lead them to victory. See also Sourvinou-Inwood, 1971: 109.



Podlecki also makes the very plausible suggestion that, due to the ongoing siege and obdurate resistance of the Skyreans, Kimon may have solicited a second oracle to supplement the earlier one of 476/5 B.C., and that it may have been the second oracle which explicitly instructed the Athenians to find the bones of Theseus in order to achieve victory.<sup>179</sup> Podlecki also goes further to suggest that this second consultation of the Delphic Oracle may even have been engineered by Kimon to meet his own specific needs. Once again, the enthusiasm and verve which Kimon suddenly appeared to apply to the task perhaps supports this theory. If it is to be believed that there was a second oracular consultation, then it is another important example of how *strategoi* would consult Oracles on matters of military strategy during campaigns.

Taking all of the above into account, the version of events which is perhaps most coherent and convincing is that the Athenians consulted the Delphic Oracle before the expedition to Skyros as custom and protocol demanded and that they obtained the divine sanction needed for the venture. Nevertheless, Kimon himself saw the opportunity to use the expedition and the oracle concerning Theseus' bones to his own advantage and to 'kill two birds with one stone', in that the discovery of the hero's bones would fulfil the words of the prophecy and provide a crucial psychological boost to the Athenian troops' morale in a prolonged siege against a stubborn and tenacious opponent, whilst at the same time striking a telling blow against the popularity of his rival, Themistokles. In addition, it also would have had the added benefit of giving the Athenian people in general a much-needed morale boost considering the fact that they were heavily involved abroad so soon after a victorious but gruelling war against the Persian Empire.

However, whichever of the above theories is accepted as most plausible, the fact remains that whatever the motives of the city-state or the individual *strategos*, be it divine sanction or propaganda, they still felt it necessary to obtain the Oracle's authority to endorse their actions or give power and weight to their propagandist machinations.

The quest to obtain the bones of heroes, and the Delphic Oracle's involvement in such quests, appears, therefore, to have been quite a common occurrence in the ancient Greek world.<sup>180</sup> It is certainly clear that from as early as the last quarter of the eighth century B.C. old graves were

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<sup>179</sup> Podlecki, 1971: 142.

<sup>180</sup> McCauley lists 17 instances of bone transferrals of mythical persons, spanning from the end of the Trojan War c. 1184 B.C. to the fourth century B.C.: see McCauley, B., 'The Transfer of Hippodameia's Bones: A Historical Context', *The Classical Journal* 93, 3 (1998) 238-239.

being discovered and attributed to famous epic heroes; for example, there is evidence of a late eighth-century cult of Agamemnon in Mycenae, a cult of Menelaos and Helen in Sparta, and a cult of the Seven against Thebes in Eleusis.<sup>181</sup> Moreover, as seen above, the Delphic Oracle certainly gave divine guidance to both Sparta and Athens on different occasions on how to achieve victory over their enemies by obtaining the bones of heroes. Indeed, in the fifth century B.C. there appears to have been an explosion of interest in heroes and their cults throughout the Greek-speaking world, which, in addition to the transference of Theseus' bones from Skyros to Athens already discussed, included the transferral of Minos' bones from Minoa in Sicily to Crete c. 488-472 B.C.,<sup>182</sup> Rhesos' remains from Troy to Amphipolis in 437 B.C.,<sup>183</sup> Arkas' bones from Mainalos to Mantinea c. 421-418 B.C., and Hippodameia's bones from Midea to Olympia in 420 B.C.<sup>184</sup> All these incidents, of course, involving the translation of the bones of mythical heroes or heroines, were usually at the command of an Oracle.<sup>185</sup>

Furthermore, numerous epiphanies of ancient heroes were purported to have appeared and joined in the combat on the battlefields of Marathon and Salamis and in defence of Apollo's sanctuary at Delphi during the Persian Wars.<sup>186</sup> It is therefore apparent from the prevalence of

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<sup>181</sup> See Burkert, 1985: 203; Antonaccio, C. M., 'The Archaeology of Ancestors', in Dougherty, C. and Kurke, L. eds., *Cultural Poetics in Archaic Greece: Cult, Performance, Politics* (Cambridge, 1993) 46-72, esp. 54-57; Antonaccio, C. M., 'Contesting the Past: Hero Cult, Tomb Cult, and Epic in Early Greece', *American Journal of Archaeology* 98, 3 (1994) 389-410, esp. 392-396; Alcock, S. E., 'The Heroic Past in a Hellenistic Present', in Cartledge, P., Garnsey, P., and Gruen, E. S. eds., *Hellenistic Constructs: Essays in Culture, History, and Historiography* (Berkeley; London, 1997) 26-27; Coldstream, J. N., *Geometric Greece* (London: Ernest Benn, 1977) 346-348. For the location of the purported graves of the Seven at Eleusis, see Paus. 1.39.2; Plut. *Thes.* 29.4ff.; and Eur. *Supp.* 653ff. & 1213ff.

<sup>182</sup> Diod. Sic. 4.79.3-4.

<sup>183</sup> Polyæn. *Strat.* 6.53; Oracle no. 39, *infra*, p. 316ff.

<sup>184</sup> For the dating of these bones transferrals, see McCauley, 1998: 227-237.

<sup>185</sup> See McCauley, 1998: 229.

<sup>186</sup> Herodotus, for instance, recounts how Epizelos was blinded when he beheld the phantom of a giant hoplite with a huge beard: Hdt. 6.117. Epizelos was also depicted on the painting of the Battle of Marathon in the Stoa Poikile in Athens: see Aelian, *VH.* 7.38. For the phantom of Theseus, see Plut. *Thes.* 35. Cf. Paus. 1.15.4: the painting of the Battle of Marathon in the Stoa Poikile in Athens also depicted the heroes Marathon and Herakles, and Athene as being present and participating in the fighting. See also, Kron, U., 'Patriotic Heroes', in Hägg, R. ed., *Ancient Greek Hero Cult* (Stockholm, 1999) 62-65. For the epiphany of Echetlos, see Paus. 1.15.4 & 1.32.4; Kron, 1999: 63-64. For the heroes Phylakos and Autonoös coming to the aid of the Delphians after the Battle of Thermopylae, see Hdt. 8.38. Cf. Paus. 10.8.4. Similar military epiphanies occurred during the Gaulish invasion of Greece in 279 B.C. when the heroes Hyperochos, Laodokos, Pyrrhos, and Phylakos appeared and fought on Greeks' side against the Gauls: see Paus. 10.23.3-6; Just. *Epit.* 24.8.5-12; Diod. Sic. 22.9.5-10; Cic. *Div.* 1.37.81. For the appearance of a mysterious phantom of a woman at Salamis, who reproached the Hellenic fleet for backing water to beach their ships, and then urged them on to the attack, see Hdt. 8.84.2. Also, according to Pausanias, there was also a sanctuary of Kykhreus on Salamis, for it was said that when the Athenians were fighting the Persians at sea there, a serpent appeared among the ships, and the god in an oracle told the Athenians that it was the hero Kykhreus: Paus. 1.36.1. In later Athenian coinage commemorating the victory at Salamis, a serpent can be seen adorning Themistokles' trireme: see Shear, J. P., 'Athenian Imperial Coinage', *Hesperia* 5 (1936) 299. For a more detailed analysis of the ancient Greeks' belief in the role of the divine and the supernatural in warfare, see *infra*, p. 112ff.

recorded military epiphanies of heroes, the heroisation of prominent and quasi-legendary figures of the age, such as athletes, lawgivers, poets, statesmen, tyrants, and the war dead (particularly after the Persian Wars), and the increase in bones transferrals, that during the fifth century there was a dramatic surge of interest in hero cult.<sup>187</sup> It is perhaps no surprise that the resurgence of interest in hero cult in the fifth century B.C. coincided with a period of great strife in ancient Greece, which saw two major conflicts, the Persian Wars and the Peloponnesian Wars, and the emergence of two rival hegemonies under the leadership of Sparta and Athens.

### 3.1 The role of the Oracle: instigator or enabler

These oracular consultations, concerning the transfer of heroes' bones in times of war by Greek *poleis*, raise important questions about what the Oracle's exact role was in all of this process. In particular, whether the Oracle itself was the driving force behind these bones transferrals, or whether it was being used simply as a rubber stamp by *poleis* for the sanctioning and approval of their foreign policy actions and ambitions, or, indeed, whether the Oracles were actually being cynically used and/or manipulated by *poleis* for political and military gain.

With regards to doubts over the authenticity of the oracular prophecies and suspicions that Athens or Sparta may have bribed the Delphic Oracle with regards to Orestes' or Theseus' bones, or invented the oracles to suit their needs, there is no tangible evidence to suggest that

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<sup>187</sup> For more discussion on the proliferation of hero cult during the fifth century, see Gutzwiller, K. J., 'Heroic Epitaphs of the Classical Age: The Aristotelian Peplos and Beyond', in Baumbach, M., Petrovic, A., and Petrovic, I. eds., *Archaic and Classical Greek Epigram* (Cambridge, 2010) 228; McCauley, 1998: 232-233; Currie, B., *Pindar and the Cult of Heroes* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005) 87-119. For a long list of Attic heroes, many of whom had ties to epic legend, see Kearns, E., *The Heroes of Attica* (London: Institute of Classical Studies, 1989) 139-207. For the cults of poets, see Clay, D., *Archilochos Heros: The Cult of Poets in the Greek Polis* (Washington, D.C.

Cambridge, Mass.; London: Center for Hellenic Studies; distributed by Harvard University Press, 2004) 63-98. For the phenomenon of athletes who became heroes, see Bohringer, F., 'Cultes d'athlètes en Grèce classique: propos politiques, discours mythiques', *REA* 81 (1979) 5-18; Fontenrose, J. E., 'The Hero as Athlete', *California Studies in Classical Antiquity* 1 (1968) 73-104; Currie, 2005: 120-129; Mitchell, L. G., *The Heroic Rulers of Archaic and Classical Greece* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013) 72-73. For the heroisation of the Sicilian tyrants Gelon, Theron, and Hieron, see Diod. Sic. 11.38.5, 11.53.2, 11.49.1-2, 11.66.4; Strab. 6.2.3; Mitchell, 2013: 68. For the heroisation of the tyrant-killers, Harmodios and Aristogeiton, see Calabi-Limentani, I., 'Armodio e Aristogitone, gli uccisi dal tiranno', *Acme* 29 (1976) 9-27; Podlecki, A. J., 'The Political Significance of the Athenian "Tyrannicide"-Cult', *Historia* 15, 2 (1966) 129-141; Fornara, C. W., 'The Cult of Harmodius and Aristogeiton', *Philologus* 114 (1970) 155-180; Foucart, P. F., *Le Culte des héros chez les Grecs* (Paris: 1918) 117-21; Taylor, M. W., *The Tyrant Slayers: The Heroic Image in Fifth Century B.C. Athenian Art and Politics* (New York: Arno Press, 1981) 11-27 (there is, however, some debate over whether the tyrannicides were truly heroised: see McCauley, 1998: 233). For the heroisation of the war dead, see Loraux, N., *The Invention of Athens: The Funeral Oration in the Classical City* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1986) 39-41; Currie, 2005: 89-119.

foul play was being used by either *polis* in these instances. Although the Delphic Oracle is accused of bribery elsewhere on different occasions, such as with the Alkmaionidai and Sparta,<sup>188</sup> there is no such accusation of bribery attached to any of these stories. Indeed, as McCauley quite correctly points out, it is only the modern sceptic's inability to believe otherwise that makes them insist that the Pythia must have been influenced by individuals or *poleis* who had something to gain from it, and that, of course, the bones could not have belonged to Orestes or Theseus because they were mythical characters and therefore, as they did not exist, they could not possibly have any bones.<sup>189</sup> However, this modern sceptical viewpoint regrettably fails to take into account the mindset of the ancient Greeks. There is no indication whatsoever that the Greeks doubted that such an oracle was given, nor does there seem to be any doubt that the bones in both cases were correctly identified as those belonging to Orestes and Theseus. The problem, therefore, with our comprehension of these oracles concerning the transferral of bones lies with the fact that the sceptical modern historian's suspicions are aroused when faced with the Pythia's ability to provide such a politically convenient oracle and the ability of the recipients of the oracle to then subsequently, with relative ease, locate and identify the bones.

The key to the issue lies once more with the interpretation of the oracle. We have seen that it was a common and widespread practice in the ancient world for people and city-states to consult the Oracles in order to seek advice and find solutions to their problems.<sup>190</sup> Roux, indeed, compares the Oracle's function to that of a doctor, in that the Greeks expected it to provide them with a diagnosis of the illness and suggest a cure.<sup>191</sup> It is repeatedly the case also, as we shall see later, that when an enquirer interprets the oracle correctly, it usually and often results in success, whereas when an enquirer interprets the oracle incorrectly and suffers a setback, it is the enquirer's failure to see the true meaning behind the god's words which is always blamed, not the veracity of the Oracle.<sup>192</sup> As the Oracle was expected, as a matter of course, to give a response to an enquiry, which would help the enquirer to solve a problem or embark upon a certain course of action, it therefore follows that it would have only been natural for Sparta, Athens, and Kimon to consult the Oracle on the issue of bones transferral. In the case of Sparta and Orestes' bones, the original oracle only told them to find the bones of Orestes

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<sup>188</sup> *Q.v.* Oracle no. 22, *infra*, p. 203ff.

<sup>189</sup> McCauley, 1999: 92.

<sup>190</sup> *Supra*, p. 36ff.

<sup>191</sup> Roux, G., *Delphi: Orakel Und Kultstätten* (Munich: Hirmer Verlag, 1971) 13.

<sup>192</sup> For further discussion of the misinterpretation of oracles, see *infra*, pp. 244-265; 335-337.

and bring them back to Sparta, and the second oracle, in response to an enquiry asking for further details on the possible location of the bones, provided guidance in obscure riddle form. Therefore, the interpretation of the response and its correct implementation lay, as always, with the enquirer. When viewed in this light, there is nothing unusual, suspicious, or potentially underhanded about the Pythia's response in either case. Furthermore, it is also very possible that the Pythia herself or the priests who interpreted her utterances may have known beforehand what the enquirer wanted, which may have influenced them to produce a response that proffered a possible path to success within the lines of its enigmatic prognostication.<sup>193</sup>

That is not to say that we can completely rule out the possibility that either or both the oracles may have been fabricated, as there certainly was a lot of traffic in prophecies in antiquity and it would not have been inconceivable, or particularly difficult, for someone to create an appropriate oracle and claim that it had been received at some point in the past.<sup>194</sup> The very convenient 'bones of Theseus' oracle, for instance, could quite possibly have been manufactured by Kimon, but there is no concrete evidence to prove to the contrary that the oracles were anything but genuine. Thus, as McCauley succinctly argues, 'The existence of an apt oracle, however, cannot be considered *prima facie* evidence that the whole incident was a cynical attempt by the bone movers to manipulate religious feeling for their political advantage.'<sup>195</sup>

Irrespective of whether or not the oracles were genuine or fabricated by Sparta and/or Kimon, the key factor, when attempting to assess the function and importance of the Oracle in issues of bone transferral, is really how the contemporary ancient Greeks viewed the oracles at the time. From the silence in the sources, it appears for all intents and purposes that everyone involved wholeheartedly believed that the oracles were genuine and would likely have believed consequently that the god was showing his support for their foreign policy ambitions, whilst those who had their doubts, like Thucydides, simply ignored them. In that respect, whether the oracles were faked or not, the stories reveal that the oracular consultations were an indispensable and integral part of the bones transferral process. It was the divine command of

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<sup>193</sup> See McCauley, 1999: 92.

<sup>194</sup> For a discussion of the proliferation of prophecies and oracles in the ancient world, see Burkert, 1985: 117. Burkert suggests that one of the earliest functions of writing would have been for the preservation of oracular responses, which could then have been used at a later date, and that forgery would have doubtless begun as soon as the recording started.

<sup>195</sup> McCauley, 1999: 92.

the Oracle and the subsequent correct interpretation and execution of the Oracle's words which in effect validated the actions of the movers and ensured that the transference of the hero's bones would also result in the successful transfer of the hero's favour.<sup>196</sup>

It is conceivable that the search for and transferral of Orestes' and Theseus' bones was purely instigated by the Oracle and that Sparta and Kimon were merely acting out of a desire to fulfil the command of Apollo. After all, as the moving of the bones of a hero appears to have been a recognised and established method of improving a city-state's situation, the Pythia and her priests may have suggested such a course of action as a positive solution to Sparta's and Athens' respective problems, and the *poleis* may simply have been fulfilling the instructions of the Oracle out of piety and the hope that they would be rewarded into the bargain. However, as we have seen above, the transference of Orestes' and Theseus' bones provided such a political advantage to both Sparta and Athens/Kimon that it seems very likely that the acts of removal were planned by the city-states from the beginning. That being said, it is still of vital importance to acknowledge that the divine sanction of the Oracle was still needed to authorise and validate the transfer of the bones.

Once the *poleis* had received and interpreted the Oracle's prophecy, they were then faced with the seemingly impossible task of locating the hero's grave. This may at first glance seem to be too far-fetched and too much of a stretch of the imagination for a modern sceptic to accept, but it does not necessarily need to be such a difficult concept to comprehend when looked at once more from the perspective of the ancient Greeks. Since the ancient Greeks believed that heroes such as Orestes and Theseus had once been mortals, and had therefore lived and died, they must also have had bones. Furthermore, once a prospective grave had been discovered, they also had two criteria by which the bones of heroes could be identified: gigantic size and bronze weapons. As a result, if the Greeks went in search of a grave of a hero, it was not such a hopeless task as we might imagine.<sup>197</sup> The identification of which hero the bones belonged to, however, was another matter. Yet, it is this issue which helps us to appreciate the importance of the Oracle's key role in the process. If a grave was identified by the Greeks, using the two criteria discussed above, then it would be the Oracle's prognostication that would confirm to whom

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<sup>196</sup> McCauley, 1999: 93.

<sup>197</sup> For a discussion of dinosaur fossils being discovered and interpreted by the ancient Greeks as the bones of mythological beasts and heroes, see Mayor, A., *The First Fossil Hunters: Dinosaurs, Mammoths, and Myth in Greek and Roman Times*, New ed. (Princeton, N.J.; Woodstock: Princeton University Press, 2011) esp. 104-156.

the bones in fact belonged. In the case of Orestes, the bones found were confirmed to be his through the fulfilment of the Pythia's riddle, whilst in the case of Theseus, his bones were verified by the appearance of the bird omen indicating the site of his grave. Thus both Sparta and Athens were able to assert authoritatively that the location of the bones had been divinely revealed and that their subsequent removal of the bones had divine approval.<sup>198</sup>

No matter whether the acquisition of a hero's bones was for political advantage or supernatural protection, the Oracle's role remained absolutely key in the process, for if bones were moved without divine approval, as can be seen in the case of the 'unauthorised' transferral of Alkmene's bones by Sparta in 382 B.C., the *polis* risked the danger of inviting disaster upon itself. In this case the bones of Alkmene were accidentally discovered in Haliartos by the Spartans who were on campaign in Boiotia.<sup>199</sup> When King Agesilaos subsequently decided to bring them home to Sparta without the sanction of an Oracle and against the protestations of the local inhabitants, both Sparta and Haliartos suffered severe natural disasters until they were returned.<sup>200</sup> McCauley rightly concludes from this story that divine approval was vital for the success of a bone transferral. It therefore stands that even if a city-state had the foresight and *nous* to use bone transferral for political purposes to strengthen their hand diplomatically and propagandistically, they still needed the god's approval to do so, and without it all their strategy and scheming would founder, or worse still they would risk calamity by proceeding without it.

As we have seen above, there is a widespread view amongst many modern historians that the reason the ancient Greeks avidly sought after heroes' bones was because they believed that the bones contained a divine power, which protected and provided good fortune to those who possessed them, acting as a Palladion for the city-state.<sup>201</sup> However, McCauley, who agrees

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<sup>198</sup> For a fuller discussion of the issues of bone identification and their assignation to heroes, see McCauley, 1999: 93.

<sup>199</sup> Plut. *Mor.* 577e – 578b; cf. Plut. *Lys.* 28.5.

<sup>200</sup> Plutarch states, for instance, that there was a great failure of crops and an encroachment of the lake.

<sup>201</sup> For instance, see Parke and Wormell, 1956b: 96 f., 182, 348; Delcourt, M., *Légendes et cultes de héros en Grèce* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1942) 73; Fontenrose, 1978: 74; Kearns, 1989: 48; Blomart, A., 'Transferring the Cults of Heroes in Ancient Greece: A Political and Religious Act', in Maclean, J. K. B. and Aitken, E. B. eds., *Philostratus's Heroikos: Religion and Cultural Identity in the third Century C.E.* (Atlanta, 2004) 86; Nagy, G., *Pindar's Homer: The Lyric Possession of an Epic Past* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990) 177; Casey, D. and Nagy, G., 'Illuminating the Classics with the Heroes of Philostratus', in Maclean, J. K. B. and Aitken, E. B. eds., *Philostratus's Heroikos: Religion and Cultural Identity in the third Century C.E.* (Atlanta, 2004) 49-73; Kron, 1999: 61-83. Parke and Wormell, and Kearns compare heroes' bones to the Palladion, whilst Nagy argues that they brought fertility and good fortune to the community. For more on the talismanic power of relics and images, see Faraone, C. A., *Talismans and Trojan Horses: Guardian Statues in Ancient Greek Myth and Ritual* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992).

with Rohde, argues that the bones did not themselves exude magical power but instead were the only physical, tangible proof of the hero's presence; therefore, possessing the hero's bones was the simplest way for *poleis* to overtly show other rival states that the hero was present in their city and that consequently they were availing of his protection.<sup>202</sup> Thus, it was the actual establishment of the hero cult that would in fact guarantee the hero's support and protection to his worshippers, not the ownership of the actual bones. There are, indeed, examples of hero shrines where the bones of the hero were not actually present; for example, according to Pausanias, Iolaos had a *heroon* at Thebes even though the Thebans themselves admitted that he had died at Sardis,<sup>203</sup> whilst Antoninus Liberalis tells us that there was a *heroon* of Alkmene but her bones were not there.<sup>204</sup>

From both cases of Sparta and Orestes' bones and Athens and Theseus' bones it is clear that the act of removing the hero's bones from one city to another was symbolic of the removal of the hero's protection from the first city and its transferral to the second. By possessing the bones of a local hero, Sparta and Athens were able to send out a clear message that the local hero had transferred his allegiance and granted them sovereignty over his previous home.<sup>205</sup> Therefore, McCauley argues that the main thrust of bone transferral was a way to demonstrate a claim to territory. Athens, for instance, had already taken the island of Skyros but it was the oracular command and the divine revelation of Theseus' bones which put a 'heavenly stamp of approval on the whole episode.'<sup>206</sup>

The Spartans appear to have used the same strategy in the latter part of the sixth century, *c.* 550-500 B.C., when their influence was spreading to the northern Peloponnese. Pausanias

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<sup>202</sup> See Rohde, E., *Psyche: The Cult of Souls and Belief in Immortality among the Ancient Greeks*, trans. Hillis, W. B., 8th ed. (Chicago: Ares Publishers, 1925) 121-124, § 5, 430 f. Pfister similarly agrees with this viewpoint, when he argues that the bones possessed no real special power in themselves: see Pfister, F., *Der Reliquienkult im Altertum*, vol. 2 (Giessen: A. Töpelmann, 1909; reprint, 1974) 610. McCauley argues that if the bones were believed to radiate magical power, then one would expect the power to reside in all of the skeleton, and if that were the case then we should expect to see a cult of relics, as we do with saints, but we do not: see McCauley, 1999: 94. Pache, on the other hand, rejects McCauley's analogy with the relics of Christian saints. She argues that, as Greek heroes were tied down to the precise location where their body happened to be, the ancient Greeks did not distinguish between the power of a hero's bones and the power of the hero, because the hero was powerful insofar as he was physically present, which was very different from Christian practices and beliefs about the powers of their saints and their bones: see Pache, C. O., 'Review of Robin Hägg: Ancient Greek Hero Cult. Proceedings of the Fifth International Seminar on Ancient Greek Cult, 21-23 April 1995', *BMCR* 2000.12.17 (2000).

<sup>203</sup> Paus. 9.23.1.

<sup>204</sup> Ant. Lib. *Met.* 33.

<sup>205</sup> McCauley, 1999: 95.

<sup>206</sup> McCauley, 1999: 96.



records that in his day in Sparta there was a tomb of Orestes' son, Tisamenos, and that the bones had been translated from Helike in Akhaia in obedience to a Delphic oracle.<sup>207</sup> According to the legend which Pausanias tells, Tisamenos should have been buried in Akhaia. Parke has accepted that Pausanias' account of the oracle is legitimate, as does Leahy, who argues that despite the paucity of the evidence, the tradition is probably to be regarded as sound.<sup>208</sup> Parke and Wormell believe that this account in Pausanias illustrates how the Spartans once more 'appear to have fabricated with Delphic assistance a lucky talisman which they could remove to their own city, taking with it the sovereignty of the district whence it came.'<sup>209</sup>

That being said, an interesting incident, albeit not connected with warfare, concerning the Boiotian Orchomenians and the transferral of Hesiod's bones, helps shed further light on the issue and suggests perhaps that there was indeed a belief as well that the bones possessed supernatural power. Several sources tell us that the Boiotian Orchomenians consulted the Delphic Oracle regarding deliverance from a plague that was besetting them.<sup>210</sup> The Pythia consequently told them that the remedy for the plague was to bring the poet Hesiod's bones from Naupaktos to Orchomenos. When the envoys asked whereabouts in Naupaktos they could locate Hesiod's remains, the Priestess informed them that a crow would show them.<sup>211</sup> Lo and behold, when the Orchomenians went to Naupaktos they saw a crow perched on a rock and found Hesiod's bones in a hollow under the rock.<sup>212</sup> However, in this case the assimilation of the hero's bones does not appear to have any overt political, territorial, or propagandistic motives behind it. Therefore, the inference is that, in addition to the theories discussed above, there may have been a much more straightforward underlying belief that a hero's bones possessed an innate supernatural power, which had the ability to magically cure pestilence and plague and, by logical extension of that argument, perhaps help bring victory in war.<sup>213</sup> Either way, whether the bones themselves were believed to possess supernatural power or whether it was simply the ownership of the bones that was believed to ensure the aid of the hero in war,

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<sup>207</sup> Paus. 7.1.3. P-W 34; Fontenrose, Q91.

<sup>208</sup> See Parke, H. W., *A History of the Delphic Oracle* (Oxford: B. Blackwell, 1939) 113; Leahy, 1955: 26.

<sup>209</sup> Parke and Wormell, 1956b: 97. For more detail and analysis on the transference of Tisamenos' bones, see Leahy, 1955: 26-38. For the Tegean oracles in general, see Fontenrose, 1978: 123-124; Crahay, 1956: 153-156.

<sup>210</sup> *Cert. Hom. Hes.* 215-254; *Plut. Mor.* 162c-f, 969e, 984d; Paus. 9.38.3-4; Thuc. 3.96.1; *Prokl. Vit. Hes.* 4 = *Tzet. Vit. Hes.* p. 50 Wilam.; *Anth. Pal.* 14.77; P-W607; Fontenrose, p. 73, p. 371, L41 & L42.

<sup>211</sup> Paus. 9.38.3. *Cf.* the eagle guide in Kimon's search for Theseus' bones, *supra*, pp. 70-71.

<sup>212</sup> Paus. 9.38.4.

<sup>213</sup> *Cf.* the transferral of Hektor's bones from Troy to Thebes, where they helped to rid the city of the plague and to restore prosperity: see Paus. 9.18.5; *Lycoph. Alex.* 1204-1205.

the end result was still the same: acquirement of a hero's bones and the establishment of a hero cult, divinely sanctioned by an Oracle, protected the *polis* in times of war.

Returning to the question of whether the Oracles were movers in bones transferrals or whether they were used rather to provide divine validation for *polis* foreign policy, the reality is that it is impossible to be certain either way. The most likely answer, however, is that it was probably a mixture of the two. Whether the command of the Oracle to transfer the bones of a hero was made at the subtle suggestion of the consulting city-state, or simply by the Oracle because of its knowledge of current affairs, granted to it by its unique position in the ancient Greek world as a meeting place and information-gathering centre, either way the fact remains that the ancient Greeks sought the counsel and sanction of the Oracles on such matters and that the commands of the Oracles were obeyed, their conditioned predictions actively fulfilled, and that there were very real psychological benefits from doing so. Even in the case of *post-eventum* fabrications of oracles in order to provide divine justification for foreign policy actions, such inventions would have held no water if the practice was not being legitimately carried out in the present. Furthermore, the act itself of inventing an appropriate oracle to validate a foreign policy move by a city-state demonstrates clearly the influence and political weight the Oracles held in the ancient Greek world.

### **3.2 The importance of the hero in ancient Greek warfare**

Much of the scholarly debate on bones transferral and hero cults in ancient Greece we have been discussing thus far has, to a certain extent, been concentrated on the veracity of the oracles and on the political motives behind such oracular consultations; however, all too often the psychological impact of the translation of heroes' bones and the establishment of hero cults on army and *polis* morale is brushed over too briefly or, worse still, neglected altogether. To understand fully the fervent pursuit by *poleis* to obtain the bones of heroes, we need to examine in more detail the reasons why heroes were so important in the ancient Greek world, particularly in the realm of warfare.

There was a widespread belief in the ancient Greek world that gods and heroes regularly intervened and physically participated in the wars of humans.<sup>214</sup> We have already seen, for

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<sup>214</sup> For further discussion on divine intervention in war, see *infra*, p. 113ff.

instance, numerous references to military epiphanies of gods, goddesses, and heroes on the battlefield.<sup>215</sup> Consequently, there was a conscious and calculated effort by ancient Greek *poleis* to invoke deities in an attempt to harness their power and support, and to bring them with them onto the battlefield.<sup>216</sup> However, although both gods and heroes were invoked by the ancient Greeks to help them in war, it was the heroes in particular who were considered to be the most steadfast allies of men in war. One of the key reasons for this was because, unlike the gods, the hero was always bound to a specific locality, and was therefore particularly important in warfare between Greek *poleis*. Many heroes were indigenous to certain geographical regions and were considered to belong to certain Greek states; for example, Theseus was the great national hero of Attica, particularly in Athens, as was Melampus to Thessaly, Bellerophon to Corinth, and Perseus to Argos, and it was believed that in battle they would come to the aid of their kinsmen or affiliated army, for, as Burkert asserts, the hero ‘acts in the vicinity of his grave for his family, group or city.’<sup>217</sup> The important regional nature of heroes is further illustrated by their worship at a local level. A sacrificial calendar of Thorikos,<sup>218</sup> in southern Attica, for instance, dating from c. 440-420 B.C.,<sup>219</sup> lists no fewer than forty-two separate gods and heroes, including the local deme hero, Thorikos, himself.<sup>220</sup> The important thing to note is that many of these local heroes and heroines are not to be found elsewhere and virtually none of them had their own temples, yet they clearly played a key part in local religion and were highly regarded by the citizens of that specific geographical region.<sup>221</sup> It was because of the regional nature of the hero that, whereas the gods were remote, the heroes were near at hand and were therefore called upon much more and relied heavily upon in war.<sup>222</sup> Indeed, heroes were part of every city-state’s system of divine protection, with heroes’ graves often strategically placed at gateways and entrances to *poleis* as a first line of defence. Pausanias

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<sup>215</sup> *Supra*, p. 76.

<sup>216</sup> See *infra*, pp. 87-89, 123-124.

<sup>217</sup> Burkert, 1985: 206. See also, Kron, 1999: 61-83.

<sup>218</sup> Lupu, *NGSL* 1; *SEG* 33.147.

<sup>219</sup> For the date, see Matthaïou, A. P., ‘Attic Public Inscriptions of the Fifth Century B.C. in Ionic Script’, in Mitchell, L. G. and Rubinstein, L. eds., *Greek History and Epigraphy: Essays in Honour of P.J. Rhodes* (Swansea, 2009) 205-206.

<sup>220</sup> See Hornblower, S., *The Greek World, 479-323 B.C.*, 3rd ed., *Routledge History of the Ancient World* (London; New York: Routledge, 2002) 134; Price, S. R. F., *Religions of the Ancient Greeks* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999) 172-173; Mikalson, J. D., ‘Religion in the Attic Demes’, *The American Journal of Philology* 98, 4 (1977) 424-435; Parker, R., ‘Festivals of the Attic Demes’, *Boreas* 15 (1987a) 134-147; Csapo, E. and Slater, W. J., *The Context of Ancient Drama* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994) 124-132.

<sup>221</sup> Parker, 1996: 33-34.

<sup>222</sup> See Burkert, 1985: 207.

records, for instance, that Melanippos' tomb outside the Proetidian gates at Thebes was strategically placed along the road to Chalkis.<sup>223</sup>

It is certainly clear, therefore, that a primary reason, if not the sole purpose, for obtaining the physical remains of a hero, or sometimes the sacred image or artefact of a god, was to guarantee their presence and assure their help in war. We can see evidence of this belief very early on in Greek prehistory from Greek epic. In the Trojan Saga, for instance, the captured Helenos reveals a series of tasks to the Greeks which must be accomplished before Troy can finally fall and the Akhaian army can be ultimately victorious. These conditions included bringing the bones of Pelops from Greece to Troy, and stealing the sacred image of Pallas from the Trojan sanctuary.<sup>224</sup> Consequently, Agamemnon retrieved the bones of Pelops, whilst Odysseus and Diomedes stole the Palladion. The Palladion ensured the safety of the city, but once it was stolen and taken outside the walls of Troy, the protection it provided went with it. Thus, by carrying out these actions, the Akhaians weakened their enemies by removing their divine protection, whilst at the same time bolstering their own strength by bringing the presence and aid of the giant Pelops to battle. A powerful historical example can also be seen with the Athenians' transportation of Rhesos' bones from Troy to the River Strymon in order to help Athens defeat the Thracians in battle and establish a colony there.<sup>225</sup>

The aid of a hero was evidently considered to be a formidable weapon in warfare, and there was clearly a strong belief amongst Greek city-states that the possession of a hero's bones guaranteed the allegiance and aid of the hero for whichever *polis* owned them. By the fifth century B.C. this was such a firmly held belief that even an enemy of a city-state could become its champion and protector after his death through the possession of his remains. For example, in Euripides' *Herakleidae*, Eurystheus, even though he was an enemy of Athens and a prisoner of war, states just before his execution that if he is interred under Attic soil he will become

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<sup>223</sup> Paus. 9.18.1. See McCauley, 1998: 229. For further discussion on the importance of heroes as guardians and their relationship with gateways, see Nilsson, 1967-74: 1.175; Pfister, 1909: 2.461; Kearns, E., 'Saving the Greek City', in Murray, O. and Price, S. R. F. eds., *The Greek City: From Homer to Alexander* (Oxford, 1990) 323-344.

<sup>224</sup> For the capture and revelations of Helenos see Apollod. *Epit.* 5.9-5.10; Soph. *Phil.* 604ff. & 1337ff.; and *The Little Iliad*: Fragment 1 in Procl. *Chrest.* 2. For the capture of the Palladion, see Paus. 2.23.5; Verg. *Aen.* 2.160-170; and Ov. *Met.* 13.340ff. For the location and retrieval of Pelops' bones see Paus. 5.13.4, 6.22.1.

<sup>225</sup> *Q.v.* Oracle no. 39, *infra*, p. 316ff. Although there are many similarities between the bones transferral episodes involving Rhesos' remains and those of Orestes and Theseus, this particular occurrence will be dealt with in more detail below in the chapter on psychological warfare, as there is a slight, but important, variation in that the bones of Rhesos are brought to the place that the *polis* wishes to conquer, rather than being brought home by the *polis* and a cult being established there.

Athens' guardian and protect her from invaders.<sup>226</sup> Likewise, in Sophocles' *Oedipus Coloneus*, Oedipus asks the Athenians to bury him in Attica as opposed to his native Thebes, where he has been banished from, and declares that his remains will protect Athens from invading armies in the future.<sup>227</sup>

However, it appears that the hero's role in war went much further than just some intangible supernatural protection of the *polis*. Indeed, once the remains were acquired and the hero's protection and aid secured with it, the relics themselves also often played a fundamental role and integral part in the actual mechanics of warfare. There are frequent references to armies consciously and deliberately 'bringing' the gods and heroes with them to war, usually through icons and relics being brought to battle in an attempt to summon the physical form or the aid of the hero on the battlefield.<sup>228</sup> A powerful illustration of this practice can be seen with the Spartans and the Dioskouroi. The twin hero-gods Kastor and Polydeukes were firmly associated with assisting men in battle; however, out of all the Greeks, it was the Spartans who had a particularly close affiliation with the Dioskouroi.<sup>229</sup> Herodotus, when describing how a new law was passed in Sparta that forbade both kings to be away from the capital on a military campaign at the same time, also mentions that the Spartans decided that 'one of the Tyndaridai as well should stay behind – both of whom had hitherto went forth with the army, being summoned to their aid.'<sup>230</sup> Frazer even suggests that the Dioskouroi may have been thought to visibly accompany the Spartan army on the march.<sup>231</sup> The idea that the Dioskouroi physically accompanied the Spartan army into battle and fought alongside her warriors is further illustrated in an account of the Battle of Aigospotamoi by Plutarch, which describes how Kastor and Polydeukes were seen shining like stars on each side of the helm of Lysander's ship as he

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<sup>226</sup> Eur. *Herac.* 1024ff. Cf. the tomb of Kimon in Kition: see Plut. *Cim.* 19.5.

<sup>227</sup> Soph. *O.C.* 1518-41. For further discussion on this phenomenon, see Tzanetou, A., *City of Suppliants: Tragedy and the Athenian Empire*, 1st ed. (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2012) 38-41; Aitken, E. B. and Maclean, J. K. B., eds., *Philostratus's Heroikos: Religion and Cultural Identity in the Third Century C.E.* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2004) 89-90; Hornblower, S., Spawforth, A., and Eidinow, E., eds., *The Oxford Companion to Classical Civilization*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014) 552.

<sup>228</sup> Cf. the bones of Pelops being physically brought from Greece to Troy to aid the Akhaians in battle, *supra*, p. 86.

<sup>229</sup> Their popularity in Sparta may, to a large extent, have been due to the fact that in mythology the twins were native to Sparta, but it may also have been because the brave, swashbuckling, adventure-seeking twins represented everything that was desirable and noble in a young man in a warrior society. This may also help explain their popularity amongst other Greek city-states, particularly in times of war.

<sup>230</sup> Hdt. 5.75.2. This law was enacted c. 507 B.C. following a dispute between the two Spartan commanders, Kleomenes and Demaratos, whilst on campaign in Attica, which resulted in Demaratos withdrawing his troops and consequently the failure of the expedition: see How, W. W. and Wells, J., *A Commentary on Herodotus*, 2 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1912) *ap.* 5.75.2.

<sup>231</sup> Frazer, J. G., *The Golden Bough: A Study in Magic and Religion*, 3rd ed. (New York: Macmillan, 1935) 50. See also Pritchett, 1979: 14-15.

sailed out to engage and destroy the Athenian fleet in 405 B.C.<sup>232</sup> How and Wells, on the other hand, believe that Herodotus was only referring to the δόκανα: two wooden upright supports connected by a cross-beam at the top, which represented the Dioskouroi,<sup>233</sup> whereas Cook suggests that they were sepulchral jars.<sup>234</sup> However, regardless of what form the Dioskouroi took, it still shows a clear attempt by the Spartans to invoke the gods and bring them to battle. Indeed, the Dioskouroi as allies of men in battle appears to have continued into Roman times. Cicero, when discussing the Battle of Lake Regillus during the Latin War c. 496 B.C., records an epiphany of the Dioskouroi, who he claims were seen fighting in the Roman ranks on horseback.<sup>235</sup> Likewise, there are several accounts detailing a similar epiphany of the Dioskouroi at the Battle of Pydna in 168 B.C., when the Romans under L. Aemilius Paulus defeated King Perseus of Macedon.<sup>236</sup>

There has been considerable debate over whether it was simply the icons, relics, or statues of gods and heroes that accompanied the Greek army onto the battlefield, or whether the Greeks, through invocation, actually believed that the deities physically accompanied the army into battle.<sup>237</sup> Pritchett convincingly argues that the presence of the hero on the battlefield was more corporeal than symbolic,<sup>238</sup> and the evidence strongly suggests that the Greeks fervently believed that the gods and heroes physically manifested themselves on the battlefield and actually participated in the combat. This is certainly the view taken by Bowden, too, who argues quite rightly that Greeks in the fifth century, and earlier, genuinely accepted that heroic figures might appear on one side or the other and influence the course of a battle, and that accounts of gods and heroes participating on the battlefield should not be discarded as fanciful tales that do not deserve a place in rational historical explanations, for they are very much part of the way

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<sup>232</sup> Plut. *Lys.* 12.1. Cf. Paus. 10.9.4: following the victory at Aigospotamoi, the Dioskouroi head the list of Spartan dedications from the spoils of the defeated Athenians at Delphi.

<sup>233</sup> See How and Wells, 1912: 41 n. 75.2; and Plut. *Mor.* 478A.

<sup>234</sup> Cook, A. B., *Zeus: A Study in Ancient Religion*, vol. 2 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1925) 436.

<sup>235</sup> Cic. *Nat. D.* 2.2.6. See also Dion. Hal. *Ant. Rom.* 6.13; Plut. *Cor.* 3.4 & *Aem.* 16-23; Cic. *Tusc.* 1.28; Frontin. *Str.* 1.11.8; Flor. 1.5.4; Val. Max. 1.8.1; Min. Fel. *Oct.* 7.3. Marta Sordi argues that the epiphany of the Dioskouroi at the Battle of Lake Regillus is a later literary adaptation and reworking of the epiphany of the Dioskouroi at the Battle of the River Sagra c. 560 B.C.: see Sordi, M., 'La leggenda dei Dioscuri nella battaglia della Sagra e di Lago Regillo', *CISA* 1 (1972) 47-70. However, even if this epiphany is a later fabrication, the accounts still affirm that there was a real and widely held belief in divine epiphanies in warfare.

<sup>236</sup> Cic. *Nat. D.* 2.2.6; Val. Max. 1.8.1; Plin. *H.N.* 7.86; Flor. 1.28.14-15; Plut. *Aem.* 16-23; Min. Fel. *Oct.* 7.3. Cf. also Polyb. 29.17; and Livy, 44.36-43.

<sup>237</sup> For an outline of the key arguments in the debate, see Pritchett, 1979: 14-18. See also Hägg, R., ed., *Ancient Greek Hero Cult: Proceedings of the Fifth International Seminar on Ancient Greek Cult, Organized by the Department of Classical Archaeology and Ancient History, Göteborg University, 21-23 April 1995* (Stockholm: Svenska Institutet i Athen, 1999).

<sup>238</sup> See Pritchett, 1979: 15-17.

in which warfare was understood in ancient Greece.<sup>239</sup> Indeed, he succinctly states: ‘Warfare therefore involved three levels of participants: not merely the common soldier and his human commanders, but also divine beings – heroes and gods.’<sup>240</sup> A powerful illustration of this can be seen in the case of the Lokrian army. According to Konon, the Lokrians always left an empty space in their phalanx for Ajax the Lesser to defend,<sup>241</sup> and Pausanias records how the Krotoniate general, Leonymos, was badly wounded when he deliberately attacked the spot where Ajax was standing in the battle line.<sup>242</sup> The idea that the gods physically participated in battle seems to have been common not only in ancient Greece but throughout the Classical World. Cicero, writing in the first century B.C., for instance, stated that in warfare ‘The gods often manifest their power in bodily presence.’<sup>243</sup>

Burkert states that above all, heroes assisted their tribe, city, or country in battle.<sup>244</sup> Heroes like the Dioskouroi, Telamon, and his sons Ajax the Greater and Teucer, for instance, were considered to be particularly powerful helpers in battle. Both Diodorus and Justin record how the Spartans agreed to lend the Dioskouroi to the Lokrians as their allies in war against Kroton in the middle of the sixth century B.C.<sup>245</sup> Both sources state that after the Lokrian embassy to Sparta had been turned down in their request for Spartan troops to help their cause, and were instead told to seek assistance from Kastor and Polydeukes, the emissaries petitioned the gods at their temple and upon receiving favourable omens prepared a couch (κλίνη) on their ship to bring the Dioskouroi to Italy.<sup>246</sup> The Lokrians subsequently defeated a much larger Krotoniate force,<sup>247</sup> and moreover, according to Justin, during the battle two young men of extraordinary

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<sup>239</sup> Bowden, H., ‘Hoplites and Homer: Warfare, Hero Cult, and the Ideology of the *Polis*’, in Rich, J. and Shipley, G. eds., *War and Society in the Greek World* (Abingdon, 1995) 55-56.

<sup>240</sup> Bowden, 1995: 57.

<sup>241</sup> Konon, *FGrHist* 26 F. 1.18.

<sup>242</sup> Paus. 3.19.12.

<sup>243</sup> Cic. *Nat. D.* 2.2.6.

<sup>244</sup> Burkert, 1985: 207. See also Rohde, who states, ‘But the belief in Heroes rose to still greater heights. Not merely in peaceful athletic contests, but in real need, in struggles when they were fighting to defend the highest possessions of all – the freedom and safety of their country – the Heroes were found on the side of the Greeks.’: Rohde, 1925: 195 § 12.

<sup>245</sup> There is some uncertainty over the date of the war between Lokri Epizephyrii and Kroton that culminated in the Battle of the Sagra, which varies widely from as early as the seventh century to sometime after 510 B.C.: see Bicknell, P., ‘The Date of the Battle of the Sagra River’, *Phoenix* 20, 4 (1966) 294. Bicknell dates the battle more specifically to either 580 or 576 B.C.: see Bicknell, 1966: 296. Most scholars, however, date the battle to the middle of the sixth century: see Wonder, J. W., ‘The Italiote League: South Italian Alliances of the Fifth and Fourth Centuries B.C.’, *Classical Antiquity* 31, 1 (2012) 139 n. 52.

<sup>246</sup> Diod. Sic. 8.32; and Just. *Epit.* 20.2-3. For a similar example of the transportation of supernatural allies, see Timoleon’s expedition to Sicily: Oracle no. 56, *infra*, p. 148.

<sup>247</sup> According to Strabo (6.1.10) the Lokrian army which faced an overwhelming Krotoniate force of 130,000 men only consisted of 10,000 men. It is not clear, however, from Strabo’s account whether his figure of 10,000 for the Greek army included or excluded their Rheginian allies. Justin (20.3), on the other hand, states that the Lokrian

stature on white horses appeared on the Lokrians' wings fighting in scarlet cloaks and armour different from the rest of their army, who then immediately disappeared after the battle was over and the victory was won.<sup>248</sup> It is hugely significant to note that there is evidence of an existence of a cult to the Dioskouroi in Lokri Epizephyrii on the banks of the Sagra by the beginning of the fifth century B.C., which was almost certainly instituted as a result of the battle.<sup>249</sup> Furthermore, it is particularly relevant to note that Justin states that the Lokrian ambassadors, despite the fact that they were returning home without the physical aid of the Lakedaimonians, left Sparta in high spirits, knowing that they were instead bringing with them the formidable help of the twin hero-gods, and that their arrival in Lokri brought great comfort to their fellow countrymen.<sup>250</sup> It is a powerful illustration of the psychological importance of heroes in warfare. It is clear to see that the Lokrians' belief that they had secured the supernatural support and help of the Dioskouroi was a great psychological boost for them in their forthcoming battle with the Krotoniates, and perhaps helped them to overcome the superior numbers that faced them.

Herodotus, too, records similar examples of this practice dating from the late sixth and early fifth centuries. For instance, c. 507 B.C., the Aiginetans, in response to a request for help from the Thebans, agreed to send them the sons of Aiakos to aid them in their struggle against the Athenians. However, after suffering a defeat, the Thebans returned the Aiakidai to Aigina and asked for some men instead.<sup>251</sup> It is the conviction of Grote that the Aiakidai were believed to be physically sent from and returned to Aigina.<sup>252</sup> Similarly, the Athenians, before the Battle of Salamis, summoned Ajax and Telamon in Salamis to help them, and they sent a ship to Aigina to fetch Aiakos and the Aiakidai.<sup>253</sup> The ship that was sent to Aigina to fetch the Aiakidai was furnished with a couch to accommodate the invisible heroes, which suggests that they were considered to be physically present. How and Wells commenting on this passage in

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force numbered 15,000 men and the Krotoniate army 120,000. It is possible to infer, therefore, that the force from Rhegini may have numbered 5,000; indeed, Strabo may have in fact recorded this but the Greek symbol for 5,000 (·ε), might have fallen out of the text over time: see Strabo, *Geography*, translated by Horace Leonard Jones (Cambridge, Mass.; London, 1924) *ap.* 6.1.10 n. 1. The estimates of Kroton's army, of course, must be massively exaggerated: see Krentz, P., 'Casualties in Hoplite Battles', *Greek, Roman and Byzantine Studies* 26, 1 (1985) 14.

<sup>248</sup> Just. *Epit.* 20.3.

<sup>249</sup> See Strab. 6.1.10; Sourvinou-Inwood, C., 'The Votum of 477/6 B.C. and the Foundation Legend of Lokri Epizephyrii', *CQ* 24, 2 (1974) 189-190.

<sup>250</sup> Just. *Epit.* 20.2.

<sup>251</sup> Hdt. 5.80.

<sup>252</sup> He states, 'In the expression of Herodotus, the Aeakid heroes are *really* sent from Aigina and *really* sent back by the Thebans': see Grote, 1846-56: 4.172 n. 1.

<sup>253</sup> Hdt. 8.64. See also Plut. *Them.* 15.



Herodotus state that ‘the idea clearly is that the coming of the image would ensure also the spiritual presence and aid of the heroes,’<sup>254</sup> and Rohde believes too that the actual physical participation of the heroes was expected.<sup>255</sup>

Such examples demonstrate how the Greeks believed that if they possessed the corporeal remains of a hero or the icons of a god, then they would be assured of their assistance and physical participation in the battle. The trouble the Greeks would go to, and the great distances they would travel just to obtain the relics, is testament to how much importance they placed upon the sacred artefacts, and how wholly and completely they believed in their necessity and effectiveness in warfare. The Lokrians, for instance, had to make a round trip of around 800 miles to Sparta from Lokri Epizephyrii in Southern Italy in order to fetch the Dioskouroi. Indeed, Xenophon shows just how vital the heroes were believed to be to the Hellenes when he states that the reason why the Persians were unable to conquer Greece was because of her heroes, and he asserts that it was their aid which made Greece invincible.<sup>256</sup>

At the very least, even if there was not always actual participation in the battle by the hero, the hero would still have had a strong psychological effect on Greek armies. Indeed, Burkert states that: ‘Just as, from about 700, the *polis* army, the hoplite phalanx, becomes the decisive political and military force replacing the aristocratic cavalry, so the cult of the common heroes of the land becomes the expression of group solidarity.’<sup>257</sup> This expression of group solidarity must also have transferred to the army and on to the battlefield. It is easy to imagine that the hero of a *polis* who accompanied the army into war, whether in symbolic form or in an actual manifestation, would become the focal point of their combined efforts. The *polis*’ hero, being a shared national icon and guardian, would have served as a symbol of unity, which encouraged group identity and instilled a sense of pride, camaraderie, and patriotism amongst the citizen troops. In this sense, the hero, serving as a figurehead of the phalanx and state, would have had very positive effects on the morale and psychology of a city’s warriors.<sup>258</sup>

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<sup>254</sup> How and Wells, 1912: 256 n. 64.

<sup>255</sup> Rohde, 1925: 137. For more detailed discussion, see Pritchett, 1979: 16-18; Versnel, H. S., *Coping with the Gods: Wayward Readings in Greek Theology* (Leiden: Brill, 2011) 92-94.

<sup>256</sup> Xen. *Cyn.* 1.17. Cf. Themistokles’ declaration after the defeat of Xerxes: Hdt. 8.109.3.

<sup>257</sup> Burkert, 1985: 204.

<sup>258</sup> Blomart makes the argument that the psychological and political importance of the transfer of a hero’s bones is not confined to ancient history or the Graeco-Roman world either: see Blomart, 2004: 85-98. He cites several modern examples of a nation’s hero’s remains being repatriated back to their native land for reasons of politics and morale; for example: the ashes of Napoleon from the island of Saint Helena to Les Invalides in Paris in 1840; the heroisation and consecration of André Malraux’s ashes in the *Panthéon* in Paris in 1996; the remains of the

It was because of the rich benefits possession of a hero's bones brought to the city-state, in terms of its political significance, and in terms of the protection it provided against attack and, equally, the aid it afforded on the battlefield, that Greek *poleis* held on jealously to the bones of their heroes. There is evidence to show that once these relics had been obtained, the Greek city-states understandably went to considerable lengths to ensure that the relics, and the attendant protection of the hero, remained the property of the *polis*. Cities often kept the location of the grave or tomb of a hero (*heroon*) secret from foreigners who might potentially try to take the sacred bones for their own city.<sup>259</sup> The whereabouts of Dirke's grave, for example, was known only to the cavalry commanders of Thebes. Whenever a *hipparchos* retired from office he would take his successor to the tomb of Dirke at night, make sacrifices without fire, remove all traces of their presence, and then return home separately under cover of darkness. This clandestine rite of military succession ensured the continuity of command, whilst also passing the secret location of the grave onto the next generation of Thebans.<sup>260</sup> We can see a similar example in Sophocles' *Oedipus Coloneus*, when Oedipus reveals to Theseus the location of his grave, which is to be kept secret, and which will in the future form a bulwark against invading armies. Once again this secret is to be passed on from generation to generation through Theseus' descendants, ensuring that Oedipus' grave remains a secret and his protection remains with Athens.<sup>261</sup> Likewise, Pausanias states that in the Aiakeion in Aigina there was a shrine of Aiakos, but the fact that this altar was also the tomb of Aiakos was kept as a holy secret by the Aiginetans.<sup>262</sup>

It is also the reason why there are so few instances recorded of a *polis* willingly handing over the bones of a hero to another *polis*. Indeed, prior to the fourth century there is only one incontrovertible example of a city-state giving away a hero voluntarily, which, according to Diodorus, was when Theron, the tyrant of Akragas, gave away the bones of Minos to the Cretans sometime between 488 and 472 B.C.<sup>263</sup> Even in this instance, Diodorus informs us that the discovery of the bones was accidental and that there was no existing cult of Minos at the

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Armenian hero, General Drastamat Kanayan, from America to Armenia in 2000; and several other examples during the Middle Ages: see Blomart, 2004: 85-86. Although, of course, in such modern examples we do not expect the hero to rise up and join battle like they were expected to do in ancient Greek times, they do illustrate the ongoing powerful impact of heroes as symbols to rouse patriotic ardour and national unity.

<sup>259</sup> See Rohde, 1925: 122.

<sup>260</sup> Plut. *De gen.: Mor.* 578 b-c. See also Burkert, 1985: 212.

<sup>261</sup> Soph. *O.C.* 1518-41.

<sup>262</sup> Paus. 2.29.8.

<sup>263</sup> Diod. Sic. 4.79.3-4.

tomb site. McCauley suggests that Theron's extremely generous act was probably to take advantage of the circumstances for his own purposes, although what motivations lay behind such a move unfortunately remain hidden to us.<sup>264</sup> Moreover, in all other cases prior to the removal of Aristomenes' remains from Rhodes to Messene in the fourth century B.C., the bones of heroes were either removed without the knowledge of the local inhabitants, were forcibly taken from a weaker *polis* by a stronger one, or were discovered in a remote and deserted location.<sup>265</sup>

What is more, in the exceptional instance of the removal of Aristomenes' bones to Messene, there are several reasons, in a quite unique state of affairs, which may help to explain why the Rhodians would have been so uncharacteristically willing to part freely with the precious remains of their hero, particularly the fact that the removal coincided with Epaminondas' foundation of Messene.<sup>266</sup> In 396 B.C. Rhodes had revolted from the Spartans, who had established a naval base under a *nauarchos* on the island, with the aid of a Persian fleet under the command of the Athenian exile, Konon.<sup>267</sup> Then, shortly after, in the summer of 395 B.C., an internal revolution saw the democratic faction overthrow the oligarchic ruling family, the Diagorids, whose exiled followers subsequently fled to Sparta for help.<sup>268</sup> Consequently, c. 378/7 B.C., the Rhodians, no doubt out of fear of Spartan retribution and the restoration of the oligarchs, joined the Second Athenian League.<sup>269</sup> Therefore, in 370/69 B.C., with these recent events still very much fresh in the minds of the Rhodian democrats, the action of sending the bones of Aristomenes to the newly-founded Messene would have had the dual effect of displaying their open hostility towards Sparta and at the same time have shown their contempt for the Diagorids, who traced their descent from Damagetos and Aristomenes' daughter, by brazenly and insouciantly giving away the bones of their ancestors.<sup>270</sup> In addition, the act of

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<sup>264</sup> McCauley, 1998: 230. See also Huxley, G. L., 'Corcyra and the Bones of Minos', *Kretologia* 8 (1979) 76-80; Caputo, G., 'Tradizione e corrente architettonica 'dedalica' nella Σικανία', *Kokalos* 10-11 (1964-65) 99-114; Fontana, M. J., 'Terone e il τάφος di Minosse. Uno squarcio di attività politica siceliota', *Kokalos* 24 (1978) 201-219; Dunbabin, T. J., *The Western Greeks: The History of Sicily and South Italy from the Foundation of the Greek Colonies to 480 B.C.* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1948) 413.

<sup>265</sup> See McCauley, 1998: 231.

<sup>266</sup> See Mastrocinque, A., 'Gli dei protettori della città', in Sordi, M. ed., *Religione e politica nel mondo antico* (Milan, 1981) 12-13.

<sup>267</sup> Diod. Sic. 14.49.4-5; Isoc. 4.142; Paus. 6.7.6; Berthold, R. M., *Rhodes in the Hellenistic Age* (Ithaca; London: Cornell University Press, 1984) 22-23.

<sup>268</sup> Berthold, 1984: 23-24.

<sup>269</sup> Berthold, 1984: 25-29.

<sup>270</sup> See McCauley, 1998: 231-232. It is important to note the continuance of a cult at Aristomenes' empty tomb by the Rhodian democrats after the transfer of his remains, most likely as insurance in case he was upset at having his bones moved.

transferring the remains of Aristomenes to Messene would have been conveniently justified by the fact that Rhodians had apparently received an oracle from Delphi commanding them to do so.<sup>271</sup> In addition, there could also have been a strong ulterior motive of seeking to acquire another powerful ally against Sparta besides Athens, which at this time would most obviously have been the newly ascendant power of Thebes.

### **3.3 Bones transferral: conclusions**

In summary, once more the motivations behind the consultation of Oracles on matters of bones transferral during inter-*polis* warfare were complex and operated simultaneously on various different levels. The sanction of the Oracle to translate the bones of a hero from one territory to another, for instance, provided a divine stamp of approval on a *polis*' foreign policy, and provided city-states with moral justification for the arrogation of enemy territory and a very useful propaganda tool with which to make a bold political statement. Perhaps most importantly, however, the acquisition of the physical remains of a hero was clearly believed to provide practical aid in war in that it would guarantee the hero's support and supernatural assistance in battle; and in this the Oracle's assent to move a hero's remains from one *polis* to another was absolutely essential in ensuring the successful transference of the hero's allegiance and protection. Although all these motivations were most likely at work at the same time and practically inseparable, combined they would have had a truly powerful psychological effect on those city-states involved in a conflict. For the appropriating *polis* the acquirement of a hero's bones from an enemy's territory would have provided them with a valuable psychological boost knowing that they had been given divine mandate to do so, and that they had now obtained the supernatural aid of the hero at the expense of their enemy, whilst the morale of the *polis* that had just been forced to relinquish the heroes' bones would have been severely damaged in light of the disturbing knowledge that it appeared that both the gods and their hero had now deserted them.

## **4. Private consultations by ordinary soldiers and commanders**

The same psychological motivations that we have seen so far with *poleis* and *stratego*i seeking divine sanction and guidance before entering a war can be seen with ordinary rank-and-file

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<sup>271</sup> Paus. 4.32.3; P-W 369; Fontenrose, Q22. Fontenrose, indeed, in this case believes that the oracle was probably genuine.

individuals seeking divine counsel before joining an expedition. One of the most obvious examples, which has already been touched upon above,<sup>272</sup> is that of Xenophon's consultation of the Delphic Oracle on the question of him accompanying the Greek mercenary expedition to Persia to supposedly help Cyrus the Younger against the Pisidians.<sup>273</sup> In the *Anabasis*, Xenophon relates how, after he received an invitation from his Boiotian friend, Proxenos, to join the expedition, he discussed the proposed campaign with Socrates, who advised him to seek the counsel of Delphic Apollo on the issue. Xenophon assented to Socrates' advice, went to Delphi, and asked of the Pythia: 'To what god shall I pray and sacrifice in order that I may best and most honourably go on the journey I have in mind, and return home safe and successful?'<sup>274</sup> The Oracle responded by instructing Xenophon on which gods he should sacrifice to. Socrates, however, upon hearing the question and answer, admonished Xenophon for not asking in the first instance whether or not he should actually go on the expedition in the first place. However, revealingly, Socrates then told Xenophon, that despite the manner in which he put the question to the Oracle, he had to now do what the god had told him to do.<sup>275</sup>

This oracle is one of the relatively small number that Fontenrose classifies as Historical. Indeed, he is quite unequivocal in his belief that the consultation actually took place and that the question asked by Xenophon, and the alternative question posed by Socrates, were very common and conventional questions asked of the Oracle in times of war.<sup>276</sup> However, apart from adding further proof to the body of evidence that individuals regularly consulted the Oracles on matters of war, this oracular episode is particularly illuminating for several reasons. First and foremost is the fact that, from the manner in which Xenophon phrased his question to the Oracle, he had apparently already made up his mind to go on campaign before consulting the god. Therefore, as discussed above, there must have been other psychological reasons behind the consultation.<sup>277</sup> In Xenophon's case, we can be pretty sure that he did so out of sincere belief and piety, and we have seen elsewhere that he genuinely believed that the gods could provide him with guidance and an insight to the future that would help him choose the correct path in a momentous decision. However, we must also assume that he needed to obtain divine sanction in an attempt to help him manage the 'risk'; by being pious and obtaining divine

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<sup>272</sup> *Supra*, p. 43.

<sup>273</sup> Oracle no. 45: Xen. *Anab.* 3.1.5-8, 6.1.22; Cic. *Div.* 1.54.122; Diog. Laert. 2.50; P-W 172; Fontenrose, H11.

<sup>274</sup> Xen. *Anab.* 3.1.6.

<sup>275</sup> Xen. *Anab.* 3.1.7.

<sup>276</sup> Fontenrose, 1978: 43.

<sup>277</sup> *Supra*, p. 50ff.

approval, he was ensuring that he would go to war with the gods on his side, which would obviously help steel his nerves and give him the courage to embark upon the dangerous venture. Furthermore, it would also have the added boon of helping to give him legitimacy of command if he were to later take up a position of authority in the army, as indeed happened.<sup>278</sup>

The exact same motives for an individual seeking divine counsel on going to war can be gleaned from two comparable Dodona oracles. A rare tablet from Dodona dating from *c.* the late fourth to early third century B.C. (or possibly *c.* 190 B.C.) records a consultation made by an anonymous inquirer asking for advice on whether or not it would be wise to set off on an expedition against Antiochos.<sup>279</sup> This could possibly be referring to King Antiochos I Soter, the king of the Hellenistic Seleucid Empire from 281-261 B.C., but it is by no means certain.<sup>280</sup> Although, unfortunately, we do not have the response the Oracle issued, the enquiry states:

Good Fortune. He [Argei...?] asks Zeus Naios and Dione whether it is advantageous to set off on campaign against Antiochos?

It is unclear whether it is simply a mercenary soldier asking for personal advice before embarking upon a campaign against Antiochos, or whether it was a military leader seeking counsel. The influence the Oracle would have in such an instance would obviously depend greatly upon who was asking the question. If it were a *strategos* asking the question, then the Oracle's response could have a significant impact upon the subsequent military decision-making process, whereas if it was just a simple mercenary seeking divine endorsement and validation on whether or not he should go to war it would clearly have a major effect on his own personal decision, but would hardly have an earth-shattering impact upon the rest of the ancient world. Nevertheless, in both cases, irrespective of who the inquirer was, the inherent effect on morale that a positive or negative response would trigger off would still be hugely influential, whether it be at a *polis* or on an individual level. Such a positive prognostication can be seen from another, very similar, Dodona oracular tablet concerning another military

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<sup>278</sup> For Xenophon's ambiguous rank in the army at the very beginning, see Xen. *Anab.* 3.1.4. For him assuming Proxenos' command after the execution of the five generals, see Xen. *Anab.* 3.1.47.

<sup>279</sup> Oracle no. 62: Lhôte, É., *Les Lamelles Oraculaires de Dodone* (Genève: Droz, 2006) 128; *SEG* 15.407; *BE* 1956: 143; Robert, J. and Robert, L., 'Dodone', *Bulletin épigraphique* (1956) 143; Evangelidis, D., 'Ανασκαφή του Ἱεροῦ τῆς Δωδώνης', *Πρακτικά τῆς ἐν Αθήνας Αρχαιολογικῆς Ἐταιρείας* (1952) 304, 15. See also Eidinow, 2007: 115-116.

<sup>280</sup> Evangelidis dates the tablet from the fourth to third century B.C., whereas Lhôte argues that it may refer to King Antiochos III, which would date the text to 190 B.C.

campaign.<sup>281</sup> The tablet, which dates from *c.* 399-375 B.C., records a question put to the god, asking whether the inquirer should campaign by land, to which the Oracle's response was that he should stay on land:

*Side A:*  
*Στρατεύωμαι*  
*κατὰ γᾶι*

‘Shall I serve (as a soldier) on land?’ or ‘Shall I advance on land?’

*Side B:*  
*Ἐπὶ γῆι σκέθεε | τέλεως*

‘Stay on land: completely’

The consultant is unknown, but it must have been an enquiry made by either a soldier or a military commander. The consultant's question of whether he should campaign by land, could be asking for advice on whether to embark upon the expedition at all, whether he should join an existing land expedition, or whether he should launch an attack by land as opposed to sea. The ambiguity lies with the different possible meanings of *στρατεύωμαι*, which can mean either to serve as a soldier in the army or to advance with, or wage war with, an army or fleet.<sup>282</sup> However, since the other side of the tablet records the response from the Oracle directing the consultant to ‘stay on land’, it seems more likely to be the case that he was asking about the route for the campaign. This would therefore suggest that it was more likely a commander asking the question, for it would be highly unlikely that an ordinary soldier would have any choice over whether he should campaign by land or by sea. If it was in fact then a military leader who was asking this question, then the Oracle's advice could clearly have had a strong influence on the military strategy of that particular *strategos* and *polis*. Either way, the affirmation from the Oracle of Zeus that the consultant ‘should stay on land’ would surely have emboldened the inquirer that their intended course of action was indeed the correct path. What is more, the consultant would have gained even more heart and confidence by the fact that the straightforward, simple pronouncement from the Oracle would have carried with it the belief that they had obtained divine approval and support for the campaign and the inference that it

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<sup>281</sup> Oracle no. 46: Robert and Robert, 1956: 202; Lhôte, 2006: 127; Christidis, A. P., Dakaris, S., and Vokotopoulou, J., ‘Oracular Tablets from Dodona’, in Brixhe, C. ed., *Poikila Epigraphika* (Paris, 1997) no. 2; *SEG* 47.820; M-96. See also Eidinow, 2007: 115. Vokotopoulou dates the tablet to the first quarter of the fourth century, whereas Lhôte dates it to 400-390 B.C.

<sup>282</sup> See LSJ, *s.v.* *στρατεύω*.

would also be successful.<sup>283</sup> At the very least the consultation would have provided the inquirer with comfort knowing that they had not risked incurring the wrath of the gods as a result of neglect and disrespect. Of course, if the soldiers who were consulting Dodona were more than mere rank-and-file troops, then the positive affirmation from the Oracle would once again have provided them with additional legitimacy of command. In these regards, the motivations behind this oracular consultation can be seen to be very similar to that of Xenophon's before his expedition to Persia.

## 5. Consultation for advice on military command by *poleis* and *strategoï*

Closely related to the psychological motivations for *poleis* and *strategoï* to obtain divine sanction for their respective foreign policy and strategic decisions, is the custom of city-states to consult Oracles for advice on the conferment of military command, and accordingly for individuals to seek divine approval and guidance on whether or not they should take up such an offer.

Although there is limited evidence for such practice taking place, it is nevertheless still recorded in several of our sources, and as such, it is important and worthwhile to explore the possibility further. In the corpus of war oracles in this study we see several examples of city-states asking the Oracles who they should put in command of a military expedition, as well as the Oracles delivering unsolicited dicta on whom *poleis* should take as their commanders, and in turn we also see individuals querying whether or not they should accept the military command proffered. Regrettably, the evidence we possess comes from one problematic historical episode and several legendary accounts.

The strongest demonstration we have of this in action is in the case of the Dolonkoi consulting the Delphic Oracle concerning their war with Apsinthians *c.* 550 B.C., where we see examples of both the Oracle delivering an unprompted pronouncement on military command, as well as an individual seeking counsel on whether or not to accept the honour.<sup>284</sup> According to Herodotus, the Thracian Dolonkoi of the Chersonese, who were under pressure in their war

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<sup>283</sup> Intriguingly, according to Professor Christidis there are still a number of questions regarding mercenary service in the thus far unpublished Dodona material: see Eidinow, 2007: 113.

<sup>284</sup> Oracle no. 18: Hdt. 6.34-37; Nep. *Milt.* 1.3; Schol. on Aristeides 46.168; P-W 60, 61 & 62; Fontenrose, Q109, Q110 & Q111.



with the Apsinthians, sent their chiefs to Delphi to seek advice on what to do. The Priestess instructed them to take home with them the first man who offered them friendship and hospitality after they left the temple, and that this man would aid them in their struggle. This man turned out to be the Athenian, Miltiades the Elder, son of Cypselus. Upon hearing the story of their predicament, Miltiades went himself to the Oracle at Delphi and asked whether he should take up the offer to help the Dolonkoi in their war against the Apsinthians.<sup>285</sup> The Oracle replied in the affirmative and gave divine assent to the undertaking, whereupon Miltiades accepted the commission and subsequently led the Dolonkoi to victory.

There are a couple of variations on this oracular story from our sources, which are very revealing in that they show us the variety of ways in which an Oracle could potentially have a significant influence over military command in ancient Greek warfare. Herodotus' version states clearly that it was the Dolonkoi who consulted the Oracle and were told that they should 'Take to your country as founder [οἰκιστῆς] the man who first invites you to the hospitality of his house as you go from the temple',<sup>286</sup> and that subsequently Miltiades consulted the Oracle personally to ask whether he should do what the Dolonkoi asked of him.<sup>287</sup> The Scholiast on Aristeides, on the other hand, records that it was the Apsinthians who consulted the Oracle, albeit regarding the same issue of war with the Dolonkoi, but were told the same thing regarding bringing to their land as founder the first man who offered them hospitality after they left the sacred precinct.<sup>288</sup> However, the Scholiast states also that the Apsinthians subsequently consulted the Pythia again to ask specifically whether Miltiades was the man whom Apollo meant to lead their army, which the god confirmed.<sup>289</sup> In Nepos' version, the Athenians, who were planning an expedition to colonise the Thracian Chersonese, consulted the Delphic Oracle in order to determine who they should choose to lead the enterprise. In response to the question, the Pythia expressly directed them to appoint Miltiades as their commander, as, if they did so, their undertaking would be successful. Upon this answer from the Oracle, Miltiades set out for the Chersonese with a fleet and chosen body of men.<sup>290</sup> Although Nepos is our only authority on this alternate version, Fontenrose argues that Nepos' account may be accepted as authentic,

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<sup>285</sup> In Nepos' version Miltiades asks whether he should take up the command of a colonisation expedition to the Chersonese: see *Nep. Milt.* 1.3. On the first two oracles (P-W 60 & 61), see Crahay, 1956: 263-266.

<sup>286</sup> *Hdt.* 6.34.2.

<sup>287</sup> *Hdt.* 6.35.3-36.1.

<sup>288</sup> Schol. on Aristeides 46.168, p. 551 Dind.

<sup>289</sup> Schol. on Aristeides 46.168, p. 551 Dind.

<sup>290</sup> *Nep. Milt.* 1.3.

as it is 'clear and simple in mode, topic, and expression'.<sup>291</sup> However, Fontenrose does acknowledge the possibility that Nepos' account may not be exact and that in fact originally it may well have been a sanction of an Athenian project of founding a colony in the Chersonese under Miltiades.<sup>292</sup> Fontenrose further argues that Herodotus' version of the oracle of the 'first-met' *oikistês* is improbable, as it is highly unlikely that the Thracians would have travelled all the way from Delphi to Athens without anyone inviting them into their houses. Parke and Wormell, on the other hand, argue that there is no need to rationalise the legend as completely as we find it transformed in Nepos. Indeed, they argue that Delphi may have been well aware that Miltiades would have been open to such a proposition and therefore the route of the Dolonkoi's journey may not have been entirely left down to Fate after all. This is made even more plausible when one considers the fact that the family of Miltiades the Elder may have maintained very good relations with Delphi.<sup>293</sup>

However, whatever version of the events is correct is not really important here. What is important is the fact that the sources reveal several different ways in which an Oracle could potentially influence the selection of military commanders in the ancient Greek world, and, once again, the need for *poleis* to receive divine endorsement and authority for their foreign policy decisions. From the one episode, we can see the practice of Greek *poleis* asking the Oracle for direct advice on who they should appoint as military commander, individuals asking the Oracle for divine approval to accept a command, and the Oracle itself issuing specific and non-specific directives, bidden and unbidden, on who *poleis* should select as their *strategoï*. In each of the various modes, it is clearly evident that the Oracle could be heavily involved in a *polis*' decision-making process of appointing a commander, which, as a result, would have given the Oracle substantial sway over the selection of military commanders, and potentially, in turn, the outcome of military conflicts in the ancient Greek world.

However, similar to the multilayered reasons discussed above why *poleis* needed to obtain divine sanction for going to war in the first place,<sup>294</sup> there are deeper psychological motivations at work behind the oracular consultations regarding military command. Although we cannot and must not discount the possibility that a *polis* or an individual would seek divine guidance

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<sup>291</sup> Fontenrose, 1978: 305.

<sup>292</sup> Fontenrose, 1978: 305.

<sup>293</sup> See Parke and Wormell, 1956b: 145.

<sup>294</sup> *Supra*, p. 36ff.

and approval of the gods to accept a military command purely out of piousness and devout faith, there were also hugely significant psychological benefits for a military command to be given divine endorsement. Crowley, in his analysis of the compliance relationships and pressures which compelled the ancient Athenian hoplite to go to war, argues that for a military leader to be legitimate, he must be considered militarily competent by the men under his command, he must associate positively with them, and he must exercise a recognised right to command.<sup>295</sup> It is here, once more, with the legitimacy of command, that the divine sanction of the Oracles becomes absolutely vital. Although Crowley contends that this legitimacy was achieved by various means, such as the *demos*' deference to the Law, the commander's socio-economic status, his concern for the wellbeing of his subordinates, and him fighting shoulder to shoulder with his men in the phalanx,<sup>296</sup> he neglects to take into account religious legitimacy, which would have helped solidify the commander's authority and added another powerful psychological reason to follow that leader into war. It is something which has already been inferred from Xenophon's advice to military commanders in the *Hipparchikos*, that a good *strategos*' first duty is to overtly seek through sacrifice the good will of the gods for both himself, his friends, and the *polis* before going on to recruit soldiers for his campaign.<sup>297</sup> Indeed, the affirmation of the Oracle would also have aided a potential *strategos* in Athens to pass the *dokimasia* examination with flying colours. It has been increasingly argued by scholars that the *dokimasia* procedure scrutinised not just the candidate's legal qualifications and eligibility for public office, but also his whole career as a citizen and his personal character.<sup>298</sup> Adeleye, for example, argues convincingly that the *dokimasia* was 'a comprehensive enquiry, covering not only the candidate's legal qualification but also the probity of his life, both public

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<sup>295</sup> Crowley, 2012: 109.

<sup>296</sup> Crowley, 2012: 121-125.

<sup>297</sup> Xen. *Eq. Mag.* 1.1-2; *supra*, p. 48.

<sup>298</sup> For a discussion of the *dokimasia* procedure, see Hansen, M. H., *The Athenian Democracy in the Age of Demosthenes: Structure, Principles and Ideology* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991) 218-220; Farenga, V., *Citizen and Self in Ancient Greece: Individuals Performing Justice and the Law* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006) 357-365. For advocates of the *dokimasia* being solely to weed out unsuitable candidates appointed by sortition, see Busolt, G., Swoboda, H., and Jandebaur, F., *Griechische Staatskunde*, vol. 2 (München: C. H. Beck'sche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1920) 1072-73; Bonner, R. J., *Aspects of Athenian Democracy* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1933) 12. For those of the school that believe it was originally introduced only to question a candidate's legal qualifications, both as a citizen and for the office in question, but that through abuse it came to scrutinise the citizen's entire life and character, see Headlam, J. W., *Election by Lot at Athens*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1933) 96-102; Hignett, C., *A History of the Athenian Constitution to the End of the Fifth Century B.C.* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1952) 205, 232; Harrison, A. R. W., *The Law of Athens*, vol. 2 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971) 201 & n. 2; MacDowell, D. M., *The Law in Classical Athens* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1978) 168; Rhodes, P. J., *A Commentary on the Aristotelian Athenaion Politeia* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981) 542; Adeleye, G., 'The Purpose of the Dokimasia', *GRBS* 24 (1983) 295-306; Hunter, V., 'Gossip and the Politics of Reputation in Classical Athens', *Phoenix* 44, 4 (1990) 299-325, esp. 311-315.

and private.<sup>299</sup> Traditional values and religious piety no doubt played a big part in proving one's nobility of character, as can be seen in a speech of Deinarchos, where the plaintiff says:

'Moreover, when choosing a man for public office they used to ask what his personal character was, whether he treated his parents well, whether he had served the city in the field, whether he had an ancestral cult or paid taxes.'<sup>300</sup>

Furthermore, the questions elected or allotted officials were asked specifically included matters of religious cult, such as whether they observed the worship of Apollo Patroös and Zeus Herkeios, and once in office they had to swear religious oaths (*horkoi*).<sup>301</sup> Consequently, demonstrable religious piety for a potential military commander would have been a very valuable endorsement.

Thus, along with the divine sanction for going to war, which provided the ancient Greek *polis* with the justification and strength of mind needed to execute a war successfully, the divine endorsement of the military commander provided the army with a legitimate leader, capable of commanding great respect and loyalty. Moreover, as Crowley emphasises, an Athenian general had to lead primarily through persuasion,<sup>302</sup> therefore being marked out by Heaven as the man to lead his city-state and its army to victory must have given a commander a great advantage and generated great belief in his men.

The use of religion and divine endorsement to maintain troop loyalty and boost morale was certainly not lost upon ancient Greek generals either. This is particularly evident in the generals' pre-battle exhortations. Alexander, for instance, according to Plutarch, deliberately referred to the fact that he was a son of Zeus (supported by the prophecy he received on his prior trip to the Oracle of Ammon) in his battlefield address to his troops before the Battle of Gaugamela.<sup>303</sup> Whilst Xenophon, on the other hand, points out to his troops on several occasions that he is a good leader because he shows due respect and care to the gods on their behalf. For instance, in the *Anabasis* he defends himself to his soldiers by reminding them how he regularly makes both collective and private sacrifices to the gods for their benefit and to

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<sup>299</sup> Adeleye, 1983: 296.

<sup>300</sup> Din. 2.17 (trans. J. O. Burt) quoted in Adeleye, 1983: 298.

<sup>301</sup> See Zaidman, L. B. and Schmitt Pantel, P., *Religion in the Ancient Greek City* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992) 94; Hansen, 1991: 219.

<sup>302</sup> Crowley, 2012: 116; 125.

<sup>303</sup> Plut. *Alex.* 33.1; *infra*, p. 158.

help him make the right strategic decisions for the good of the group,<sup>304</sup> and later on informs them that the reason why he is not accepting the role of supreme commander is because the omens he received from his divinatory sacrifice on the issue were unequivocally against it.<sup>305</sup> Indeed, Pritchett identifies eleven common *topoi* in a number of generals' speeches taken from Herodotus, Thucydides, Xenophon, and Polybius, which include such themes as obedience to orders, the rewards of victory, achievements of the past, the consequences of defeat, and the evils of the enemy, etc., but most pertinent for our purposes, professions of the gods being on their side and affirmations that the auspices are favourable.<sup>306</sup> With regards to the latter, there is a considerable number of examples where a Greek military commander addressing his troops before battle explicitly refers to their piety, the gods fighting on their side, and the omens being favourable for victory.<sup>307</sup> Pritchett's classification of generals' speeches into *topoi* is based to a large extent on Burgess' extensive work on epideictic literature, who, going beyond the four ancient authors chosen by Pritchett, lists twelve separate, but very similar common *topoi*, including once more the theme of the auspices (i.e. the gods) being favourable.<sup>308</sup> Burgess claims that the same also applies to military speeches from the time of the Crusades and later medieval literature.<sup>309</sup>

It is apparent from Greek military writers such as Xenophon, Onasander, and later Roman writers such as Vegetius, that it was the responsibility of the commander to inculcate courage in his troops before battle, especially if they were downhearted and dejected due to reverses and defeat.<sup>310</sup> Accordingly, the use of oracular prophecies and divine endorsement would have certainly made that duty much easier for the *strategos* to achieve. Indeed, in his *Cyropaedia*, Xenophon writes that 'With respect to putting spirit into soldiers nothing seems to be more effectual than to be able to give the men great hopes of advantage.'<sup>311</sup> There could surely be

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<sup>304</sup> Xen. *Anab.* 5.6.28.

<sup>305</sup> Xen. *Anab.* 6.1.31. For more discussion on the general's battle exhortation in ancient Greek warfare, see: Hansen, M. H., 'The Battle Exhortation in Ancient Historiography. Fact or Fiction?', *Historia* 42, 2 (1993) 161-180; Pritchett, W. K., 'The General's Exhortations in Greek Warfare', in Pritchett, W. K. ed., *Essays in Greek History* (Amsterdam, 1994) 27-109; Bliese, 1994: 105-130; Anson, E., 'The General's Pre-Battle Exhortation in Graeco-Roman Warfare', *Greece & Rome* 57, 2 (2010) 304-318; Zoido, J. C. I., 'The Battle Exhortation in Ancient Rhetoric', *Rhetorica* 25, 2 (2007) 141-158; Ehrhardt, C. T. H. R., 'Speeches before Battle?', *Historia* 44, 1 (1995) 120-121; Clark, M., 'Did Thucydides Invent the Battle Exhortation?', *Historia* 44, 3 (1995) 375-376.

<sup>306</sup> See Pritchett, 1994: 101-105. For a more detailed discussion on the twelve *topoi* in ancient Greek military speeches, see pp. 105-108. See also Crowley, 2012: 115.

<sup>307</sup> For example: Hdt. 7.53, Thuc. 4.92.7, 7.77.4; Xen. *Anab.* 3.2.9-10; Xen. *Cyr.* 3.3.35-39; Polyb. 11.12.1-3.

<sup>308</sup> Burgess, T. C., *Epideictic Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1902) 212-213.

<sup>309</sup> Burgess, 1902: 213.

<sup>310</sup> See Xen. *Cyr.* 2.1.11, 3.3.19; Xen *Anab.* 3.1.42; Onas. *Strat.* 1.13-16; Veg. *Mil.* 3.9, 3.12. Cf. also Cic. *Phil.* 4.5; Caes. *B Gall.* 2.21.1-2; Caes. *B Civ.* 1.7, 2.32, 3.6, 3.9.

<sup>311</sup> Xen. *Cyr.* 1.6.19.

few things more inspiring and invigorating to the ancient Greek warrior than to know that they had the advantage of having the gods on their side against their enemies and that their commander had been chosen by the gods to accomplish the task. This is certainly the stance of Onasander when he is discussing the importance of rhetoric in military command, where he declares that soldiers must believe that they are fighting for a just cause in order to ensure that the gods will be on their side and against their enemies, and that, as a consequence, the general must assure his men, by speeches among other means, that their war is a righteous one.<sup>312</sup>

In addition, returning to the oracles concerning the Dolonkoi and Miltiades, if we are to accept Herodotus' account of Miltiades' individual consultation seeking counsel and authorisation to embark upon the mission, it also raises the compelling possibility that he may have done so in order to publicise the expedition and to mobilise volunteers for the colony.<sup>313</sup> Similarly, if we are to accept Nepos' account as being historically accurate, as Fontenrose is disposed to believe, then the Oracle's command that the Athenians should appoint Miltiades as commander, and the assurance that if they did so the enterprise would succeed, would have undoubtedly generated positive public support for the planned enterprise to colonise the Chersonese and helped recruit volunteers to join the expedition. Indeed, taking into consideration the psychological benefits involved, it is not beyond the realm of possibility that *poleis* may have even attempted to engineer appropriate responses from an Oracle to ensure that their chosen man for a military campaign got the divine seal of approval, thereby making it easier to rally support from the *demos* for the proposed venture and to win their confidence in its divinely-chosen leader.

We have therefore seen thus far how divine sanction played a crucial role in establishing the moral rectitude of the cause in war and in the appointment of a worthy military commander. Indeed, the two are closely interrelated: it would have been a great psychological boost for the *polis* and the army knowing that they had a divinely-appointed leader to lead a divinely-sanctioned war against an impious enemy.

The rest of the war oracles that reveal the practice of consulting Oracles for counsel on military command, or the Oracle issuing advice on the selection of commanders in response to a general

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<sup>312</sup> Onas. *Strat.* 4.1-3. See Bliese, 1994: 109.

<sup>313</sup> See Parke and Wormell, 1956b: 145.

request for advice during war, come from several legendary oracular tales. However, they do add further support for the historical example of the Dolonkoi and Miltiades just discussed. We see, for instance, the Epigonoï consulting an Oracle before their attack against Thebes, and being told that they would be victorious if they chose Alkmaion as their commander, and, consequently, Alkmaion once approached about leading the campaign, consulting Delphi to see whether or not he should accept the proposed command and undertake the expedition.<sup>314</sup> Likewise, when the Herakleidai consult the Delphic Oracle at Naupaktos before their invasion of the Peloponnese, they are told that they should take ‘the Three-Eyed One’ as a guide for their expedition, who turns out to be the Aetolian exile, Oxylos.<sup>315</sup> Subsequently, Oxylos himself then consults Delphi on whether he should accept the proposed offer to lead the Herakleidai into the Peloponnese.<sup>316</sup> Although these are legendary episodes they are, once more, as in the case of all non-historical and legendary war oracles, still illuminating in that they reveal what the ancient Greek audience accepted and expected, or indeed depicted what they considered to be ideal custom and practice.

However, that being said, the fact that our examples only come from a problematic historical episode and several legendary oracular tales suggests that the selection of military command was, in reality, a decision to be made by the citizen bodies of *poleis* themselves, without direct advice from an Oracle. One might safely postulate, therefore, that once the Oracle or Oracles had been consulted on the much more weighty issue of whether or not to go to war or battle in the first place, the nitty-gritty management and preparations for the war were left very much down to the realm of mortals. That being said, it could very possibly be the case that when it was a particularly hazardous or potentially unpopular military venture, the Oracle was used to provide divine endorsement for the expedition leader in order to generate support and confidence in both the mission and its commander. It is also possible that, although only five of the war oracles in this study ask an Oracle directly on this issue, it could have been a much wider practice if we take into account the plethora of examples we have of both *poleis* and individuals consulting the Oracles before engaging in war, many of which we do not have the exact question posed to the Oracle. The private consultation of Oracles, however, by

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<sup>314</sup> Oracle no. N8: Apollod. 3.7.2; Diod. Sic. 4.66.1; P-W 203; Fontenrose, L38; & Oracle no. N9: Apollod. 3.7.5; Diod. Sic. 4.66.2-3; P-W 204; Fontenrose, L39.

<sup>315</sup> Oracle no. N18: Apollod. 2.8.2; Oinomaos *ap.* Euseb. *Praep. Evang.* 5.20, p. 210d; Aristeides, 46.215; Schol. on Aristeides, p. 652 Dind.; Tryphon, *de Trop.* 4.8.738 Walz.; P-W 290; Fontenrose, L63; *infra*, p. 259.

<sup>316</sup> Oracle no. N19: Paus. 5.4.3; P-W 294; Fontenrose, L66; *infra*, p. 260.

individuals on personal matters of their military command is something altogether different, as we have already seen.<sup>317</sup>

## 6. Requests for divine protection and aid

The last and least frequent focus of oracular consultation we see from the war oracles in this study is that of a direct request from a *polis* for divine aid and protection in war. There are only four explicit cases where we see *poleis* specifically and overtly asking the god for his help in warfare, and it is worthwhile to note that two of these come from the tales of the Messenian Wars and two from the legendary oracular tales. With regards to the Messenian saga, Pausanias tells us that during the Second Messenian War the Messenians consulted the Oracle at Delphi to ask Apollo to deliver them from the Spartans,<sup>318</sup> and that five years later, after they had suffered another disastrous defeat at the Great Trench, Aristomenes and Theoklos consulted the Pythia a second time to petition the god for deliverance once again.<sup>319</sup>

The first instance from the non-historical war oracles is that of the Delphians consulting the *promantis*, Phenomoe, at Delphi and asking for Apollo's protection against Python.<sup>320</sup> In a rationalistic version of the Delphic myth of Apollo and the dragon, Pausanias relates how Delphians supplicated Apollo for protection from Krios' son, Python, a violent man who had apparently been pillaging the sanctuary and countryside, and was about to launch a second expedition against them.<sup>321</sup> Phenomoe, who was prophetess at that time, responded in hexameter verse:

Phoibos will let go his heavy arrow  
close range at the robber of Parnassos;  
Kretans shall purify his hands from blood,  
And his glory shall never die away.<sup>322</sup>

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<sup>317</sup> *Supra*, pp. 94-98.

<sup>318</sup> Oracle no. 6, *infra*, p. 231ff.

<sup>319</sup> Oracle no. 8, *infra*, p. 286ff.

<sup>320</sup> Oracle no. N1: Paus. 10.6.5-7; Ephorus 31b, 2.53 J, *ap.* Strab. 9.3.12; P-W 492; Fontenrose, L121.

<sup>321</sup> *Cf.* Strab. 9.3.12.

<sup>322</sup> Paus. 10.6.7, trans. Peter Levi (*Guide to Greece*). Phenomoe was Apollo's daughter, the prophetess who was attributed with inventing hexameter verses.



Although Pausanias does not go on to tell us the ensuing events, we know from various other sources that Apollo clearly protected the shrine and slew Python with his arrows.<sup>323</sup>

The second occasion is that of the Athenians consulting the Delphic Oracle before their war with the Amazons.<sup>324</sup> The early fifth-century A.D. writer Macrobius tells us that in the reign of Theseus, the Athenians approached the Delphic Oracle on the eve of the war with the Amazons and requested Apollo's help in the impending conflict.<sup>325</sup> The Pythia informed them that just before entering battle they should invoke Apollo himself to be their helper with the cry 'ἔε Παῖάν'.

Despite the sparsity of such explicit requests for divine aid and their confinement to the Messenian Wars and Greek myth, the inference once more from these oracular stories is that, to the ancient Greek audience, it must surely have been a natural and unremarkable request to make of the gods before going to war. Indeed, as we have seen above, a request for divine ratification of a military venture and an Oracle's subsequent approval must have carried with it the belief that the god's support had also been obtained for the undertaking. In fact, on several occasions we see Apollo's protection and aid in warfare being offered, unsolicited, by the god himself. For instance, in the case of Sparta's consultation of the Delphic Oracle on the eve of the Peloponnesian War, the Pythia proclaimed that the Lakedaimonians would be victorious and that Apollo would be on their side whether they invoked him or not.<sup>326</sup> In a similar vein, when the Delphians consulted the Delphic Oracle during the Gallic invasion c. 279 B.C. regarding the proposed evacuation of the women, children, and the removal of the shrine's treasures, Apollo responded by commanding the Delphians to leave the dedications where they were and that he and the White Maidens would protect them all.<sup>327</sup>

Furthermore, the practice of dedicating a share of the spoils of victory to Apollo after the end of a conflict intimates further that the god's protection and aid were secured implicitly along

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<sup>323</sup> For the various versions of the myth of Apollo and the Dragon, see: Homeric Hymn 3 to Apollo 300 ff., 356 ff.; Simonides, fr. 573 (from Julian, *Ep.*); Melanippides, fr. 5 (from Plut., *De musica* 15); Apollod. *Bibl.* 1.22; Ap. Rhod. *Argon.* 2.703 ff.; Callim. *Hymn* 4 91; Strab. 9.3.10, 9.3.12; Paus. 2.7.7, 2.30.3; Ael. *NA* 11.2. For further discussion of the myth and its origins, see Fontenrose, J. E., *Python: a Study of Delphic Myth and its Origins*, California Library Reprint Series ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980) 19-21.

<sup>324</sup> Oracle no. N3: Macrobius, *Sat.* 1.17.18; P-W 533; Fontenrose, L129; *infra*, p. 162.

<sup>325</sup> According to the legend, the Attic War was supposedly caused by Theseus' abduction of Antiope during Herakles' ninth labour to bring Eurystheus the girdle of Hippolyte. For the story and several variations of the myth, see: Apollod. *Bibl. Epit.* 4.1.16; Diod. Sic. 4.16; Hyg. *Fab.* 30; Paus. 1.2.1; Plut. *Theseus*, 26-27; Hyg. *Fab.* 241; Ov. *Her.* 117-120; Eur. *Hipp.*; Athenaeus, *Deipnosophistae*, 13.557; Just. *Epit.* 2.4.

<sup>326</sup> Oracle no. 41, *supra*, p. 59.

<sup>327</sup> Oracle no. 63, *infra*, p. 143.

with his sanction of a military venture in the first place. For instance, when the Phokians were faced with an imminent invasion by the Thessalians and consulted Delphi for advice on how to be victorious in the forthcoming war, the Pythia responded by telling the Phokians that Apollo would give victory to both mortal and immortal, but more to the mortal.<sup>328</sup> This, of course, turned out to mean victory to the hero Phokos over Itonian Athene. The fact, however, that the Phokians subsequently sent splendid dedications to Delphi in gratefulness for their triumph suggests that the Phokians believed Apollo had done a lot more than just prophesy their victory and that he had in fact been on their side in the battle and had aided their victory, for the oracle by itself did nothing to help them strategically in the clash. The same sentiment is echoed in the aftermath of the Battle of Plataea, when the allied Greeks dedicated a tenth of the spoils of victory to Apollo at Delphi, a tenth to Zeus at Olympia, and a tenth to Poseidon at the Isthmus.<sup>329</sup> The dedication of spoils to Apollo may have been in gratitude for all the advice Apollo had given the Greeks prior to and during the Persian invasion,<sup>330</sup> but the dedication of such grand spoils to all three gods suggests that the Greeks believed that they had more than just granted them victory and that they had actually physically aided them in their triumph over the Persians. For instance, the dedications to Zeus and Poseidon were most likely in appreciation for their apparent intervention at Casthanea and at the Hollows off Euboea, where so many Persian ships were destroyed through storms.<sup>331</sup> Moreover, we should not forget that Greek legend frequently portrayed the gods as actively participating in human warfare, none more so than Apollo himself.<sup>332</sup>

It therefore follows that an Oracle's endorsement of a *polis'* foreign policy was likely to have been believed to also comprise the aid and protection of the god in the ensuing conflict. Consequently, although it may be an *argumentum ex silentio*, this may be why the request for divine aid from the god is not explicitly recorded as frequently by the sources as one might expect, as the writers perhaps simply assumed that supplication of the god for his aid was part and parcel of the consultation in the first place and was therefore something that needed to go unsaid.

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<sup>328</sup> Oracle no. 26, *infra*, p. 142.

<sup>329</sup> Hdt. 9.81.1.

<sup>330</sup> *Q.v.* Oracle nos. 29, 31, 34, & 36, *infra*, pp. 178ff., 275ff., 140ff., & 169ff. respectively.

<sup>331</sup> Hdt. 7.188-190, 7.192, 8.13.

<sup>332</sup> For example, see Apollo's assault on the Akhaian camp at Troy with pestilence-carrying arrows: Hom. *Il.* 1.450-455; and also the gods as participants in the combat: Hom. *Il.* 21.437ff. Cf. *infra*, p. 123ff.

## 7. Conclusions

From looking at the plethora of consultations of the Oracles by *poleis* and *strategoï* concerning the issue of going to war, it becomes abundantly clear that the motivations behind the consultations were manifold and often inextricably linked. However, the picture that emerges reveals that the Oracles and divine sanction played an absolutely vital role in ancient Greek warfare, particularly with regards to the psychological impact it had upon both the *polis* and the army. The motives and desires that drove the ancient Greeks to consult the gods on questions of war, although often inseparable and frequently acting concurrently, varied from genuine belief in the gods and their ability to give the consultant a glimpse into the future; a superstitious fear of being punished for neglect and irreligiosity; a need to manage risk and gain some degree of control over one's fate; and an attempt to obtain divine approval and ensure that the gods were on their side in the conflict (or in the case of bones transference, ensure the protection and aid of heroes, and obtain divine validation for their foreign policies). The various different motivations were all crucial in psychological terms for both the *polis*' citizenry and its army in that the divine sanction of the Oracle provided reassurance that the life-and-death decisions they were about to make in a time of great danger and uncertainty were the right ones; and the warm, comforting affirmation from the god helped massively to assuage their fears and provide hope and courage for the difficult time ahead.

However, it is perhaps the final motivation identified, that of obtaining the support and assistance of the gods, that was most important in terms of psychology in ancient Greek warfare. From reading the works of ancient historians such as Thucydides and Xenophon, who were once generals themselves, and ancient military experts such as Onasander, it seems abundantly clear that there was a vital need for city-states and generals to obtain divine sanction for their military ventures from the very beginning in order to take the moral high ground in the conflict and ensure that their soldiers were psychologically prepared for the struggle which lay ahead for them. The endorsement of the gods served to provide a crucial means of rallying the *polis* and boosting the morale and mettle of its soldiers. For, as Case states, 'All wars are usually holy wars, from the belligerent's own point of view. When men deliberately hazard their lives in behalf of a cause they naturally believe they are doing God's service.'<sup>333</sup>

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<sup>333</sup> Case, S. J., 'Religion and War in the Graeco-Roman World', *The American Journal of Theology* 19, 2 (1915) 181.

Moreover, Case also argues rightly that as a consequence, ‘each combatant affirms, and truly believes, that he is fighting on behalf of the deity; and the deity, in turn, is expected to ensure victory.’<sup>334</sup> Indeed, she goes on to argue that ‘In Graeco-Roman times this same disposition was widely prevalent. The promoters of war sought diligently, and usually sincerely, to obtain the highest possible religious sanctions for all military activities.’<sup>335</sup>

This fundamental belief was something which was not confined to the ancient Greeks and Romans – it was common to all civilisations throughout the ancient Mediterranean world and beyond, and indeed down through the ages. The belief and practice is certainly closely mirrored in ancient Palestine and Syria from ‘early times’ down to the reign of King Zedekiah during the early sixth century B.C. and that of King Jehoshaphat during the war with the Edomites at the end of the third century B.C.<sup>336</sup> For instance, Jeffers reveals how the ancient Israelite leaders consulted the Ark during times of war to ascertain God’s will and gain religious approval.<sup>337</sup> Indeed, there is a remarkable similarity between ancient Greece and ancient Palestine. Jeffers states that ‘war is begun at the command of the god, or at least with his approval, manifested by omens; it is also accompanied by sacrifices and conducted with the help of the god who ensures victory, for which he is thanked with an offering of a part of the booty.’<sup>338</sup> To the ancient mind, therefore, the idea of not seeking the endorsement of the gods for entering into war would have been deemed imprudent and reckless, and would have most certainly foreordained defeat. Eidinow is quite correct in her assertion that in the ancient Greek world there was a pervasive belief that the gods possessed knowledge about the future and that mortals had to therefore try to engage with them if they were to work out the right course of action, either in response to imminent misfortune, or to gain an advantage.<sup>339</sup> This was never truer than in gaining an advantage over one’s enemies in warfare. Consequently, ancient Greek *poleis* and *strategoí* consulted Oracles both pre-war and intra-war to ensure that they got the gods on their side before the start of a war or before engaging in a battle; to not do so would have been to enter

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<sup>334</sup> Case, 1915: 181.

<sup>335</sup> Case, 1915: 181. From an early date in Rome’s history, for instance, religious observance was inextricably woven into how war was declared and the manner in which it was conducted: see Livy, 1.32. Indeed, the religious scrupulousness with which the Romans conducted all affairs of state is well-attested to. As Appian Claudius Crassus is reported to have once said, when complaining about those who showed contempt and neglect for the gods and the sacred rites, ‘Who is there who does not know that this city was built by auspices, that all things are conducted by auspices during war and peace, at home and abroad?’: see Livy, 6.41.4.

<sup>336</sup> Jeffers, A., *Magic and Divination in Ancient Palestine and Syria, Studies in the History of the Ancient Near East* (Leiden: Brill, 1996) 237 nn. 13-14.

<sup>337</sup> Jeffers, 1996: 197-200; 236-237.

<sup>338</sup> Jeffers, 1996: 236.

<sup>339</sup> Eidinow, 2007: 12.

the fray at a disadvantage from the very outset, invite disaster upon themselves, and gift their opponents a crucial psychological and supernatural edge in the forthcoming conflict. In short, the divine sanction of the Oracle provided the ancient Greek *polis* and army with the moral justification for war and the courage to execute it effectively, knowing the gods were with them and against their foes; for to the ancient Greek hoplite, “Gott mit uns” was no mere metaphor.<sup>340</sup>

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<sup>340</sup> Crowley, 2012: 98.

## CHAPTER TWO

### THE ROLE AND INFLUENCE OF THE DIVINE AND THE SUPERNATURAL IN ANCIENT GREEK WARFARE

#### 1. Introduction

The key to understanding just how influential the Oracles and their prophecies could be on the psychology of *poleis*, *strategoi*, and the rank and file, and the consequent impact upon foreign policy and military decision-making, lies with the ancient Greeks' belief in the divine and the supernatural. This chapter will therefore seek to establish the widespread and deeply ingrained beliefs of the ancient Greeks in the role of the gods and heroes in the sphere of human warfare. It is only when we have a thorough appreciation of the ancient Greeks' sincere and earnest belief in the role of divine intervention and participation in warfare, that we can fully comprehend the substantial influence of the Oracles on psychology and strategy in the ancient Greek world.

The ancient Greeks were, in the main, extremely superstitious and deeply religious, and never more so than in a time of crisis or in the realm of warfare when uncertainty, danger, and the threat of death were closest to one's side. Traditionally there has been a robust reluctance by many historians to accept the idea that the 'intelligent' Greeks could possibly have believed in the irrational and given too much credence to such things as ghosts, magic, and oracles. Nock, for instance, confidently asserts that 'the Greeks were not dominated by any fear of ghosts' but rather describes their religion as one of 'joyous festivals'.<sup>1</sup> Nilsson, the hugely influential scholar and one of the foremost experts of his generation on Greek religion, on the other hand, does concede that the Greeks did believe in such irrational things as ghosts returning to the land of the living, yet he does so with considerable regret:

The general opinion is that the Greeks of the classical age were happily free from superstition. I am sorry that I am obliged to refute this opinion. There was a great deal of superstition in Greece, even when Greek culture was at its height and even in the centre of that culture, Athens. Superstition is very seldom mentioned in the literature of the period simply because great writers found such base things not worth mentioning.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Nock, A. D., 'The Cult of Heroes', in Stewart, Z. ed., *Essays on Religion and the Ancient World* (Oxford, 1972) 582.

<sup>2</sup> Nilsson, 1940: 111.

Admittedly there were some voices of dissent, such as Dodds and Rohde,<sup>3</sup> but they were the exception rather than the rule, and few historians in the succeeding generations have paid much attention to topics such as afterlife beliefs and ghosts, and those who have done so have only given it cursory analysis. There have been more recently, however, more and more voices challenging that long-held stance. Scholars such as Graf, Ogden, Gager, Parker, Dickie, Obbink, Faraone, Luck, Eidinow, Johnston, Collins, Fowler, Kindt, and Bowden have convincingly challenged the orthodox view, arguing that belief in the divine and the irrational was a pervasive force in the ancient Greek world and an intrinsic part of daily life.<sup>4</sup>

Indeed, a deep-rooted belief in the supernatural in ancient Greek warfare, and the superstitious nature of the common soldier, can be seen in many places, such as accounts of divine intervention in battle, impromptu epiphanies of gods and heroes on the battlefield, invocations of deities in battle, *magoi* and *manteis* accompanying armies on campaign, and the use of wards, curses, and personal magic by soldiers. It is in this wider context of belief in the divine and the supernatural in war that we must place oracular prophecy in order to fully appreciate its impact on the mind of the ancient Greek citizen and soldier.

## 2. Divine intervention

There is a commonly held belief among many of our ancient sources that the gods habitually intervened in and affected the outcomes of wars in the human realm.<sup>5</sup> Their intervention is often attributed to divine jealousy (*phthonos*) and a desire to cut down those individuals and states that had risen to great heights and prosperity, particularly those guilty of *hybris*. Divine

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<sup>3</sup> See Dodds, 1951; Rohde, 1925.

<sup>4</sup> See Graf, F., *Magic in the Ancient World* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1997); Ogden, D., *Greek and Roman Necromancy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001); Ogden, 2007; Ankarloo, B. and Clark, S., eds., *The Athlone History of Witchcraft and Magic in Europe: Vol. 2 Ancient Greece and Rome* (London: Athlone Press, 1999); Gager, J. G., ed., *Curse Tablets and Binding Spells from the Ancient World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992); Parker, 2011; Dickie, 2001; Faraone, C. A. and Obbink, D., eds., *Magika Hiera: Ancient Greek Magic and Religion* (New York; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991); Luck, G., *Arcana Mundi: Magic and the Occult in the Greek and Roman Worlds* (Baltimore; London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985); Eidinow, 2007; Johnston, S. I., *Restless Dead: Encounters Between the Living and the Dead in Ancient Greece* (Berkeley; London: University of California Press, 1999); Johnston, S. I., *Religions of the Ancient World: A Guide* (Cambridge, Mass.; London: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2004); Johnston, 2008; Collins, D., *Magic in the Ancient Greek World* (Malden, Mass.; Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2008); Fowler, R. L., 'Greek Magic, Greek Religion', in Buxton, R. G. A. ed., *Oxford Readings in Greek Religion* (Oxford, 2000) 314-344; Kindt, 2012; Bowden, 2005.

<sup>5</sup> B. Jordan convincingly argues that even Thucydides makes frequent connections between the supernatural and mundane events and political actions: see Jordan, 1986: 119-147.

intervention in war frequently serves as the catalyst for the reversal of fortunes and the rise and fall of the great: it is certainly a common theme in both Herodotus and Xenophon. In Artabanus' argumentation to Xerxes not to proceed with his plans to invade Greece, for instance, he warns the king that: 'amongst living creatures it is the great ones that God smites with his thunder, out of envy of their pride...It is God's way to bring the lofty low. Often a great army is destroyed by a little one.'<sup>6</sup> Indeed, Themistokles' comment after the allied Greek victory at Salamis clearly confirms that the reason for Xerxes' defeat was not due to the earthly endeavours of the Greek alliance but rather because the gods and heroes 'were jealous that one man in his godless pride should be king of Asia and of Europe too.'<sup>7</sup>

Similarly, Herodotus ascribes the misfortune which befalls Croesus, in the shape of the untimely death of his son, Atys, and his own subsequent defeat and demise at the hands of Cyrus the Great, to divine resentment over the fact that he had supposed himself the happiest man above all others.<sup>8</sup> Solon's words to Croesus prior to the tragedy certainly confirm this belief, when he states: 'Often God gives a man a glimpse of happiness, and then utterly ruins him.'<sup>9</sup> A similar fate happens to Polykrates of Samos, who is warned by Amasis, the king of Egypt, that his remarkable recent military successes and increased power is certain to end in disaster, 'for I have never yet heard of a man who after an unbroken run of luck was not finally brought to complete ruin.'<sup>10</sup> His prophetic warning of course comes true when Polykrates is assassinated and his dead body is hung on a cross by Oroetes, the satrap of Lydia.<sup>11</sup> The same idea of the gods intervening in war in order to humble the great and champion the underdog is echoed strongly by Xenophon. In the *Anabasis*, for example, he states: 'it is reasonable to suppose that the gods will be against our enemies, but will fight on our side; and they are capable of quickly making even the strong weak, and of saving the weak easily, when such is their will, even if they are in the midst of danger.'<sup>12</sup> Likewise, in the *Hellenica*, when Jason of Pherae is attempting to dissuade the Thebans from destroying Sparta after the Battle of Leuktra, he states: 'Besides, it seems that the deity often takes pleasure in making the small great and the great small.'<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Hdt. 7.10e.

<sup>7</sup> Hdt. 8.109.3.

<sup>8</sup> Hdt. 1.34.1.

<sup>9</sup> Hdt. 1.32.9.

<sup>10</sup> Hdt. 3.40.3.

<sup>11</sup> Hdt. 3.125.

<sup>12</sup> Xen. *Anab.* 3.2.10.

<sup>13</sup> Xen. *Hell.* 6.4.23. The same idea can also be seen in the biblical world: see Luke 1: 51-52 ('He hath brought down the mighty and hath exalted the humble').



Although this divine intervention could, and often did, take the form of actual physical involvement on the field of battle, it appears for the most part that intervention by the Olympian gods and goddesses generally took the form of non-specific divine power or supernatural force, quite often the manipulation of the weather and the elements, or the propagation of disease and pestilence, whereas intervention by a demigod or hero was usually on the battlefield in combat alongside Greek soldiers.<sup>14</sup> The gods could, of course, also influence human affairs of war through phenomena such as portents, omens, and dreams.<sup>15</sup>

Nevertheless, the profusion of references in literature and in inscriptions to the actual direct participation of the gods in warfare and to the manifestation of divine beings in human form on the battlefield is quite remarkable. Herodotus, for instance, unreservedly refers many times to the intervention of the gods in warfare; for example, suggesting that Boreas, the god of the north wind, may have been responsible for the losses the Persian fleet experienced at Artemisium,<sup>16</sup> or that, during the Battle of Plataea no dead Persian soldiers were found dead on the sacred ground around the holy precinct of Demeter, yet there were great numbers killed on the unconsecrated ground around the temple; Herodotus attributes this marvel to the intervention of the goddess Demeter herself.<sup>17</sup> Thucydides, too, records a case of perceived divine intervention during Brasidas' siege of Lekythos in 424/3 B.C. Just as Brasidas was about to assault the Athenian fortifications, a defensive tower that the Athenians had erected collapsed, and thinking that their fortifications had been breached, they fled to their ships. According to Thucydides, Brasidas believed that the collapse of the tower and capture of the city had been caused by Athena, whose temple was nearby.<sup>18</sup> Pausanias records, similarly, how Boreas came to the aid of the Arkadians against the Lakedaimonians *c.* 235 B.C., and saved the city of Megalopolis from being captured by stirring up a violent gale which destroyed the Spartan siege engine.<sup>19</sup> Pausanias also records how the Mantineans proclaimed that Poseidon

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<sup>14</sup> We have already seen above the frequent and recurring reports in our sources of battlefield epiphanies of ancient heroes, such as those of Epizelos, Theseus, and Echetlos at Marathon; Phylakos and Autonoös at Delphi during the Persian invasion; Kykhreus at Salamis; and Aristomenes at Leuktra to name but a few: *supra*, p. 76. For a fuller list, see Wheeler, G., 'Battlefield Epiphanies in Ancient Greece: A Survey', *Digressus* 4 (2004)1-4.

<sup>15</sup> For a very recent thorough and insightful study of divine intervention and epiphany in ancient Greece, see Petridou, G., *Divine Epiphany in Greek Literature and Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).

<sup>16</sup> See Hdt. 7.189; Oracle no. 34, *infra*, p. 140ff.

<sup>17</sup> Hdt. 9.65.2. *Cf.* also Xenophon's account of Epaminondas' battle with the Spartans in 362 B.C., which refers to a line drawn from heaven beyond which victory was not permitted: Xen. *Hell.* 7.5.13.

<sup>18</sup> Thuc. 4.115-116.

<sup>19</sup> Paus. 8.27.13-14; 8.36.6.

had appeared and helped them to victory over the Lakedaimonians under Agis IV, c. 243 B.C., hence why they had subsequently erected a trophy consecrated to Poseidon at the site of their triumph.<sup>20</sup>

However, Herodotus relates a particularly interesting episode of divine intervention in war, which took place during the Persian invasion of Attica in 480 B.C. According to Herodotus, while the Persians were devastating the Attic countryside after the sack of Athens, Dikaios, a valued Athenian exile in the service of the Persians, was standing in the plain of Thria with the exiled Spartan king, Demaratos, when they espied a cloud of dust, of such a size as might have been raised by an army of thirty thousand men on the march, coming from the direction of Eleusis.<sup>21</sup> While the two exiles were wondering what troops they could be, they suddenly heard the sound of voices, which Dikaios recognised as the *Iakkhos* song, sung at the Dionysiac mysteries.<sup>22</sup> Demaratos, who was unfamiliar with the rites of Eleusis, asked Dikaios whose voices were making this song. Dikaios replied that:

‘without any doubt some dreadful disaster is about to happen to the king’s army. There is not a man left in Attica; so the voice we heard must clearly be a divine voice, coming from Eleusis to bring help to the Athenians and their friends. If it descends upon the Peloponnese, there will be danger for the king and for his army; if it moves towards the ships at Salamis, Xerxes may well lose his fleet.’<sup>23</sup>

The cloud of dust, from which the mysterious voice had issued, then rose high into the air and drifted off towards Salamis, where the allied Greek navy was stationed.<sup>24</sup> Consequently, Dikaios and Demaratos knew that Xerxes’ fleet was going to be destroyed.<sup>25</sup>

Apart from the automatic and nonchalant assumption on both men’s parts that the voice had to be divine and that it thus portended that the Greeks at Salamis would be receiving divine aid in their naval battle against the Medes, Demaratos’ reaction to Dikaios’ explanation is particularly

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<sup>20</sup> Paus. 8.10.5-8. This battle is not mentioned by anyone else besides Pausanias. Indeed, Pausanias claims that Agis was killed in the battle, whereas Plutarch states that he was killed at Sparta after a revolution: see Plut. *Agis*. 19ff. If the battle did in fact take place, then it is possible that Agis was simply wounded during the combat.

<sup>21</sup> Hdt. 8.65.

<sup>22</sup> The *Iakkhos* song was sung by initiates to the Eleusinian Mysteries on their procession from Athens to Eleusis: see Clinton, K., *Myth and Cult: The Iconography of the Eleusinian Mysteries*, *Skrifter utgivna av Svenska institutet i Athen 80* (Stockholm: Svenska institutet i Athen, 1992) 64-71.

<sup>23</sup> Hdt. 8.65.2-3, trans. Aubrey De Sélincourt (*Herodotus: The Histories*).

<sup>24</sup> Cf. Plut. *Them.* 15.

<sup>25</sup> Cf. the destruction of the army sent by Cambyses against the Ammonians by a sand-storm: see Sen. *Q Nat.* 2.30.2; Hdt. 3.25-27.

illuminating and pertinent with regard to the focus of this thesis. Upon hearing that the cry was in fact the *Iakkhos* song, Demaratos tells Dikaios not to breathe a word of it to anyone because if it reached the ears of the king, Dikaios would lose his head, and that, besides, ‘the gods will see to the king’s army.’<sup>26</sup> The clear inference is that if word leaked out about the omen of disaster they had just witnessed it would have had serious psychological ramifications for the Persian army’s morale. Moreover, it is also interesting to note Demaratos’ fatalistic view of the Persian navy’s chances in the face of the supernatural aid arriving to Salamis, conceding that it is out of their hands for they are now at the mercy of the gods.<sup>27</sup>

The manipulation of the weather by a deity did not necessarily have to be used as a destructive force, however, as can be seen by the epiphany of Athena during the siege of Lindos on Rhodes by Darius in 490 B.C. An inscription preserved on a stele from the temple of Athena at Lindos details how Athena, when the Lindians were close to surrendering due to a shortage of water, came to their aid by making copious amounts of rain fall over the city in such a way that ensured that the besieged Greeks in the Akropolis received relief but the Persians did not.<sup>28</sup> As a result of this, the previously cynical and sceptical Persian admiral, Datis, became ‘dismayed at this apparition of the goddess’ and subsequently made terms with the Lindians and offered dedications to Athena in the temple.

Furthermore, intervention by the gods did not necessarily have to take the form of tangible physical actions: they could have a direct impact on strategy during a campaign, or even on the field of battle, through more subtle means, such as the revelation of their will or the transmission of dreams to military commanders.<sup>29</sup> Pausanias, for example, tells how the god Ammon appeared to Lysander during his siege of Aphytis in Macedonia and told him to give up the war with the city, which Lysander immediately did.<sup>30</sup> While, in the third epiphany listed on the stele from the temple of Athena at Lindos, the goddess is said to have appeared

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<sup>26</sup> Hdt. 8.65.5.

<sup>27</sup> For further discussion of the episode, see How and Wells, 1912: *ap.* 8.65; Mikalson, 2003: 75-76; Carrière, J.-C., ‘Oracles et prodiges de Salamine: Hérodote et Athènes’, *Dialogues d’histoire ancienne* 14 (1988) 220-230.

<sup>28</sup> For details of the stone inscription containing the Chronicle of the Temple of Athena at Lindos and a translation of the ‘Epiphanies’ (Ἐπιφάνειαι) inventory recorded on it, see Blinkenberg, C., *Lindos II (Inscriptions)*, vol. 1 (Copenhagen: 1941) 182-187; Richards, G. C., ‘Timachidas: The Chronicle of the Temple of Athena at Lindus in Rhodes’, in Powell, J. U. and Barber, E. A. eds., *New Chapters in the History of Greek Literature 2* (Oxford, 1929) 78-79. For further discussion of siege epiphanies, including that of Lindos, see Petridou, 2015: 125-141.

<sup>29</sup> There was widespread belief amongst the ancient Greeks that the gods communicated with humans through dreams: see Dodds, 1951: 102-111, & 117-121; Johnston, 2008: 14-16, 134-137, 161; Eidinow, 2011: 100-101.

<sup>30</sup> Paus. 3.18.3. *Cf.* Arimnestos’ dream before Plataea: see Oracle no. 36, *infra*, p. 169.

repeatedly in dreams to an ex-priest, Kallikles, during the siege of Rhodes by Demetrios Poliorketes in 305 B.C., commanding the Rhodians to seek help from Ptolemy Soter. After receiving the same dream for six consecutive nights, Kallikles informed the *bouleutai* of the city who then dispatched an envoy to Ptolemy. Although the stone breaks off at this point, Diodorus tells us that Ptolemy subsequently sent provisions and reinforcements to the city.<sup>31</sup> Pausanias also records a similar account of how Herakles, Apollo, and Hermes appeared in dreams to the local magistrates of the Phrygian town of Themisonion in Asia Minor during a Gallic invasion of Ionia in 278/7 B.C., and revealed to them a cave, thirty stades away, where the entire population was able to take safe refuge from the marauding Gauls.<sup>32</sup>

Perhaps one of the most famous instances of celestial intervention in warfare through dreams is that of the visions delivered to Xerxes and Artabanus before the Persian invasion of Greece. According to Herodotus, Xerxes, who after listening to the advice of his uncle was on the verge of changing his mind about invading Hellas altogether, was subsequently visited on two consecutive nights in his dreams by a phantom of a tall man of noble aspect, admonishing him for not going ahead with the invasion plans and threatening him with disaster if he did not proceed.<sup>33</sup> Xerxes, clearly perturbed by the dream-visions, subsequently asked Artabanus to sleep in his bed, and he too received the visitation from the phantom while he slept and received a similar threat and rebuke to that given to Xerxes. Consequently, both Xerxes and Artabanus concurred that they must invade Greece for God willed it and it appeared that heaven had marked Greece for destruction.<sup>34</sup> What is particularly interesting to note about this episode, however, is the fact that after Artabanus receives the dream, he instructs Xerxes to inform the entire Persian army of the vision sent by God; once again, in a similar but converse way to Demaratos and Dikaios' revelation discussed above,<sup>35</sup> the inference is that this dream-vision when revealed to the Persian forces will have a positive effect upon their morale and

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<sup>31</sup> Diod. Sic. 20.82.21; 20.88.9; 20.94.3; 20.96.1. Pausanias (1.8.6) states that the Rhodians first gave Ptolemy I the title of Soter, while Diodorus (20.100.3-4) states that the Rhodians declared him a god and dedicated a *temenos* to him; the general supposition is that this occurred after the siege of Rhodes in 304 B.C.: see Tarn, W. W., *Antigonos Gonatas* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1913) 438; Berthold, 1984: 72-78; Buraselis, K., Stefanou, M., and Thompson, D. J., eds., *The Ptolemies, the Sea and the Nile: Studies in Waterborne Power* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013) 13; Hölbl, G., *A History of the Ptolemaic Empire*, trans. Saavedra, T. (London: Routledge, 2001) 20-34, 116 n. 79. Hazzard, on the other hand, challenges Pausanias' claim that the Rhodians gave Ptolemy the title Soter, mainly due to the silence in the other sources and the documents of the Rhodian priests: Hazzard, R. A., 'Did Ptolemy I Get his Surname from the Rhodians in 304?', *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik* 93 (1992) 52-56.

<sup>32</sup> Paus. 10.32.4-5.

<sup>33</sup> Hdt. 7.12-14.

<sup>34</sup> Hdt. 7.18.

<sup>35</sup> *Supra*, p. 116.

confidence. However, it is also important to note in Herodotus' narrative as it unfolds that the dream visitations appear to have secretly unnerved both Xerxes and Artabanus, and the gnawing feeling, which is silently and steadily eating at them, is that they have been pushed into a disastrous undertaking by the gods against their will and better judgement.<sup>36</sup>

Similar modes of divine intervention are preserved in epic poetry. For instance, in the *Iliad* we see how Zeus, in order to cause the slaughter of 'hordes of Akhaians', sends Agamemnon a deceitful dream, which urges him to attack the Trojans at once,<sup>37</sup> while Athena, although not physically participating in the battle, affects the ensuing combat by careening through the Akhaian ranks, whipping up their rage and valour.<sup>38</sup> It is through actions of these kinds that the gods are able to influence and change the course of battle without being directly involved in the fighting.

One of the best recorded examples of divine intervention in battle, which takes the form of both supernatural force by the gods as well as the actual participation in battle of heroes, is the destruction of the Gaulish army by the Greeks at Delphi in 279 B.C.<sup>39</sup> According to Pausanias, the invading Gauls were faced with 'swift and conspicuous' hostile portents of Apollo to a degree that was unparalleled in the ancient world. Indeed, he comments elsewhere that the most obvious case of divine intervention in war was, 'when the Gaulish army was destroyed by the god at Delphi: openly, visibly destroyed by daemonic powers.' (ἐκδηλότατα δὲ ὁ Γαλατῶν στρατὸς ἀπόλετο ἐν Δελφοῖς ὑπὸ τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ ἐναργῶς ὑπὸ δαιμόνων).<sup>40</sup> Pausanias describes how the land which the Gaulish army occupied was shaken violently with continuous thunder and lightning throughout the day, which prevented the Gauls from hearing orders when they were given, and lightning bolts struck soldiers down and set fire to men and shields in close proximity. At this stage in the battle, the divine heroes, Hyperochos, Laodokos, Pyrrhos, and Phylakos appeared and fought against the Gauls. That night a snow storm caused enormous rocks to tumble down from Mount Parnassos, and cliff-faces broke away and came crashing

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<sup>36</sup> Hdt. 7.47. For further discussion on this dream-vision episode and its repercussions, see Eidinow, 2011: 99-101; Pelling, 1991: 120-142.

<sup>37</sup> Hom. *Il.* 2.5ff.

<sup>38</sup> Hom. *Il.* 2.440. Cf. the siege of Lindos by Darius, where Athena appeared to one of the Lindian magistrates in a dream, encouraging him to remain positive and reassuring him that she would deliver the water they were so badly in need of: *supra*, p. 117. For more examples of divine military epiphanies, including gods appearing in dreams and advising *poleis* on strategy, see Pritchett, 1979: 11-46; and Wheeler, 2004: 1-14.

<sup>39</sup> Paus. 10.23.3-6; Oracle no. 63, *infra*, p. 143ff. See also Just. *Epit.* 24.8.5-12; Diod. Sic. 22.9.5-10; and Cic. *Div.* 1.37.81 for their accounts of the battle, which also report the epiphanies of Apollo, Artemis, and Athena.

<sup>40</sup> Paus. 8.10.9.

down upon the Gauls' camp, killing thousands of soldiers. The following night as the retreating Gauls were at camp once again, they were seized by 'the Panic terror', which Pausanias attributed to the god Pan.<sup>41</sup> Driven out of their minds by the god, the Gauls thought that they heard an enemy attack and the sound of horses' hooves coming for them, and in their madness began to kill each other.

Similar misfortunes befell the Persians when they attacked Delphi in 480 B.C. Herodotus records how the Persians, when they were approaching the shrine of Athene Pronaea, were struck by thunderbolts, and how two pinnacles of rock torn from Mount Parnassos came crashing down upon them, killing large numbers, and a battle-cry issued forth from the shrine.<sup>42</sup> As above, these events conspired to cause panic amongst the Persian troops who then fled, only to be pursued and slayed by the local heroes Phylakos and Autonoös.<sup>43</sup>

Indeed, many of these military epiphanies were recorded officially by Greek states. In 447 B.C., for example, an epiphany of an unnamed demi-god who helped the Boiotian army to victory against the Athenians was recorded in an officially commissioned inscription on the base of a polyandron.<sup>44</sup> Likewise, an official decree passed by the *boule* and *demos* of Stratonikeia in Asia Minor records a series of miraculous phenomena of a similar nature that occurred when the Parthian troops, commanded by Labienus, attacked the sanctuary of Zeus Panamaros in 40 B.C.<sup>45</sup> When a large detachment of cavalry and infantry made a night sortie they were forced back by a lance of flame sent by Zeus, the divine protector of the shrine. The following day Zeus sent a violent storm with thunder and lightning, followed by a dense fog which engulfed the terrified attackers, forcing them to flee in disarray with heavy losses, whilst the defenders remained unharmed.<sup>46</sup> During the third and final assault on the sanctuary, the attackers, as well as being thrown from the walls, were further panicked and perturbed by hearing the clamour of a relieving force which never appeared, and the sound of snarling dogs attacking them. The fact that many of these military epiphanies and divine military interventions were recorded officially by Greek states shows the credence, reverence, and importance that were given to them.

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<sup>41</sup> Paus. 10.23.5: 'It is said that terror without a reason comes from Pan.'

<sup>42</sup> Hdt. 8.37.3.

<sup>43</sup> Hdt. 8.38.1.

<sup>44</sup> See Peek, W., *Griechische Vers-Inschriften*, vol. 1 (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1955) no. 17.

<sup>45</sup> See Roussel, P., 'Le miracle de Zeus Panamaros', *Bulletin de Correspondance Hellénique* 55 (1931) 70-116 for text and commentary on the fragments.

<sup>46</sup> For similar meteorological acts of God, see Joseph. *AJ.* 2.308; and *Exodus* 10:21-23.

Similar manifestations of the Dioskouroi, who were considered saviours in battle, are recorded by several ancient writers. The electrical discharge from a ship's mast and rigging during a thunderstorm, which later came to be known as St. Elmo's fire, was regarded by the Greeks to be the corporeal manifestation of the Dioskouroi, and as a result of this they came to be seen as rescuers from distress at sea and were therefore popular amongst seamen of ancient navies.<sup>47</sup> Alkaios and the *Homeric Hymn to the Dioskouroi* describe vividly how the Dioskouroi appeared as electrical light to rescue sailors in their hour of need.<sup>48</sup> Pliny describes the lights as stars that appeared on both sea and land, and when two of these lights appeared on a ship they were invoked by sailors as the gods Castor and Pollux.<sup>49</sup> The phenomenon of St. Elmo's fire supposedly also appeared on the tops of spears, which once again helps to explain why the Dioskouroi were seen as saviours in times of danger and in battle.<sup>50</sup>

The same idea of divine intervention in warfare is ingrained throughout Greek myth and legend also. One only has to look as far as the *Iliad* to see that the Greeks believed that the gods could interfere in battle and have an immense influence on its outcome; for example, Apollo's assault on the Akhaian camp with arrows representing plague; Athena sweeping through the Greek ranks, spurring the warriors on by inflaming their bloodlust and swelling their courage; Apollo striking Patroklos on the battlefield with the back of his divine hand, stunning him and knocking his armour off; divine intervention during the combat between Hektor and Achilles; and the Olympians participating themselves in the combat at Troy.<sup>51</sup>

### 3. Invocation of gods and heroes in war

Although there are many references in our sources that describe the sudden and unexpected appearance or intervention of a deity during a battle, such as the appearance of Theseus at the

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<sup>47</sup> See Burkert, 1985: 213.

<sup>48</sup> See Alc. 76D & 112P; *Hom. Hymn* 33, *passim*.

<sup>49</sup> Plin. *HN*. 2.37. Cf. Plutarch's account of the Dioskouroi seen shining like stars on the steering paddles of Lysander's ship as he sailed out to attack the Athenian fleet at the Battle of Aigospotamoi in 405 B.C.: Plut. *Lys.* 12.1; *supra*, p. 88.

<sup>50</sup> Seneca (*Sen. QN.* 1.1) states that a star settled on the lance of Gylippus as he was sailing to Syracuse and that spears seemed to be on fire in the Roman camp, while Livy (*Liv.* 22.1.8) recounts how spears of some soldiers in Sicily, and the staff which a mounted officer in Sardinia held in his hand during his rounds of the night-watch, also appeared to be on fire. The phenomenon is also recorded by Caesar, when he states that during a storm at night the spear-points of the men of the Fifth Legion spontaneously caught fire: see *Caes. B. Afr.* 47.

<sup>51</sup> See *Hom. Il.* 1.450-455; 2.440; 16.787-828; 22.131-366; 21.437 ff. For a fuller discussion of the gods fighting in the *Iliad*, see Lendon, 2005: 20-38.

battle of Marathon in 490 B.C., or that of Artemis and Athena at Delphi in 279 B.C., there are also, as already discussed above,<sup>52</sup> frequent references to armies purposefully attempting to bring the gods and heroes with them to battle; for example, and perhaps most obviously, the Spartans and the Dioskouroi,<sup>53</sup> or the Lokrians and Ajax.<sup>54</sup>

An explicit example of an invocation of the gods on the battlefield comes from the beginning of the *Iliad*. In this instance, the Trojan priest Chryses, following his failure to ransom his daughter from Agamemnon, invokes Apollo to ‘Pay the Danaans back – your arrows for my tears!’ to which Apollo responds directly by shooting pestilence-carrying arrows into the Greek army, killing hundreds of Akhaian animals and men.<sup>55</sup> Herodotus, moreover, records the theory that the disaster that befell the Persian fleet anchored off the Magnesian coast, near Cape Sepias, before the Battle of Artemisium, was due to the divine intervention of Boreas at the behest of the Athenians. Herodotus states that when the Athenians saw that a storm was coming they sacrificed and begged Boreas and Orithyia to come to their aid against the invading Medes.<sup>56</sup> The subsequent storm that ensued lasted three days, and according to Herodotus, destroyed at least 400 Persian ships.<sup>57</sup>

Occasionally, in accounts of particular battles, it is sometimes difficult to ascertain from the sources whether divine aid was consciously invoked by an army or whether it was provided by the god unasked for. We have already seen, for instance, several non-historical examples where *poleis* explicitly ask for the help of the gods in a war.<sup>58</sup> Whereas, in the instance of the Spartans consulting the Delphic Oracle in 432 B.C., for example, the Pythia declared that Apollo would be on their side whether they invoked him or not.<sup>59</sup> Regardless of whether the god’s intervention on behalf of Sparta on this occasion was invited or uninvited, what is crucially important about this prophecy is that it distinctly infers that the gods were indeed invoked in times of war to provide their aid, whilst at other times they were believed to provide unsolicited help.

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<sup>52</sup> *Supra*, pp. 85-91.

<sup>53</sup> Hdt. 5.75.2; q.v. *supra*, p. 87.

<sup>54</sup> Q.v. *supra*, p. 89.

<sup>55</sup> Hom. *Il.* 1.35-43

<sup>56</sup> Hdt. 7.189.2.

<sup>57</sup> Hdt. 7.190.1. Cf. Boreas’ intervention at Megalopolis (*supra*, p. 115).

<sup>58</sup> *Supra*, p. 106ff.

<sup>59</sup> Thuc. 1.118; 2.54; Cf. Plut. *De Pyth. Or: Mor.* 403A; and Suidas, s.v. Aklêton; Oracle no. 41, *supra*, p. 59.



### 3.1 Hero Invocation: the use of the hero in battle

Although specific gods could be invoked and petitioned for help in war by *poleis*, the more common means of obtaining supernatural aid on the battlefield was to summon the help of a dead hero. Although the distinction between gods and heroes is somewhat blurred at times and the boundaries between the two are often fluid, for our purposes it does not really matter, as both gods and heroes are often invoked together for their aid,<sup>60</sup> and both are frequently given joint credit and thanked collectively for victories.<sup>61</sup>

We have already seen that there was a conscious effort on the part of the ancient Greeks to invoke heroes and bring them to battle with them as powerful allies.<sup>62</sup> However, there are also several clear examples of where ancient Greek *poleis* explicitly invoke and petition heroes to come to their aid before battle. For instance, Herodotus tells us that before the Battle of Salamis the Greeks offered prayers to the gods and called upon the sons of Aiakos to fight at their side.<sup>63</sup> Furthermore, they also summoned the heroes of Salamis, Ajax and Telamon to be their allies, and also sent a ship to Aigina to bring back Aiakos himself and the other Aiakidai, Peleus and Phokos. Plutarch also records the story that during the actual naval engagement at Salamis, some Greeks supposedly saw phantoms and shapes of armed men coming from Aigina with their hands stretched out to protect the Hellenic triremes. He states that: ‘These, they conjectured, were the Aiakidai, who had been prayerfully invoked before the battle to come to their aid.’<sup>64</sup> Similarly, Diodorus tells us that there was a cult of the epic heroes Idomeneus and Meriones on Crete, who had joined with the Akhaians against Ilium during the Trojan War, and that the Cretans used to invoke them with prayer to come to their aid in times of war.<sup>65</sup>

Another important example is provided by the prayer of King Archidamos before his subjugation of the city of Plataea in 429 B.C. According to Thucydides, Archidamos, before he laid siege to the city, called upon the gods and heroes of the land to bear witness, to apologise

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<sup>60</sup> For example, Thuc. 2.74.2 & 4.87.2.

<sup>61</sup> Hdt. 8.109.3; Xen. *Cyn.* 1.17.

<sup>62</sup> For example, the Spartans bringing the *dokana* with them to battle: *supra*, p. 87; the Aiakidai being furnished with a couch for their transportation from Aigina before both the Battle of Salamis and during Thebes’ war with Athens c. 507 B.C.: *supra*, p. 90; the similar act by the Lokrians, transporting the Dioskouroi on cushions from Sparta to aid them in their war with Kroton: *supra*, p. 89; the Lokrians leaving a space in their phalanx for Ajax the Lesser: *supra*, p. 89; and the actual transport of a hero’s relics to the battlefield, such as with Pelops and Rhesos: *supra*, pp. 76, 86; Oracle no. 39, *infra*, p. 316ff.

<sup>63</sup> Hdt. 8.64.2.

<sup>64</sup> Plut. *Them.* 15.2.

<sup>65</sup> Diod. Sic. 5.79.4.

to them for invading the land they protected, and to ask for their aid in the forthcoming battle.<sup>66</sup> Although in this instance Archidamos' prayer to the gods and heroes is slightly different in that he was mainly seeking to avoid their anger and to gain their assent for the attack on Plataean territory, he still clearly asks for their aid in combat, and, moreover, we can see the custom of doing so still strong and enduring from his reference to the Hellenes' invocation of the same gods and heroes of the land during the Persian Wars fifty years earlier.<sup>67</sup>

#### 4. Military epiphanies

Tied closely to the ancient Greeks' pervasive belief in divine intervention and participation in warfare, the invocation of gods and heroes before and during battle, and the practice of bones transferral and hero cult, is the phenomenon of the battlefield epiphany. Pritchett identifies thirty-nine episodes, involving forty-nine separate instances of apparitions of gods and heroes on the field of battle in the ancient Greek world, which is clearly a substantial body of evidence.<sup>68</sup> The prevalence of the military epiphanies recorded in the ancient sources, therefore, raises the question of whether or not these military epiphanies were simply fictitious literary conceits by the ancient authors or whether they were believed to have actually happened.

It is possible, at first glance, to dismiss these battlefield epiphanies as literary constructs employed by ancient historians to lend their narratives a heroic and Homeric tone, or as fanciful tales concocted by soldiers to impress their comrades or by commanders to bolster morale, or, indeed, as Wheeler suggests, fantasies created 'by a jubilant and grateful community suffused with triumphalistic and patriotic sentiment after a major victory.'<sup>69</sup> The latter explanation in particular may be applied to the supposed appearance of the Messenian hero Aristomenes at the Battle of Leuktra, for example, which was perhaps an invention as a result of Messenian nationalistic sentiment, while certain suspicious elements in the accounts of the military epiphanies of the Dioskouroi during the Battle of the River Sagra may suggest some artistic licence on the part of the historians.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> Thuc. 2.74.2-3. Cf. Brasidas at Akanthos: Thuc. 4.87.2.

<sup>67</sup> For more discussion of prayers of petition to both gods and heroes in war, see Blomart, 2004: 97-98; Burkert, 1985: 205, 430 n. 26; Hornblower, 1991: *ap.* 2.74.2; and on the *epitheiasmos* or 'appeal to the gods', see Pritchett, 1979: 322-323. Cf. the psychological need for *poleis* to establish a *ius ad bellum* to convince their citizens that their war is just: q.v. *supra*, p. 54ff.

<sup>68</sup> Pritchett, 1979: 11-46.

<sup>69</sup> Wheeler, 2004: 6.

<sup>70</sup> See Wheeler, 2004: 1-3. Wheeler suggests, for instance, that the triumphal associations of the white horses is suspicious, while the technical term Justin uses to describe the scarlet colour of the Dioskouroi's cloaks (*coccineis*)

These sorts of explanations, of course, may account for *some* of the military epiphanies recorded; however, they do not satisfactorily explain the majority of the reports we possess. For instance, many of the epiphanies reported are of anonymous or relatively unknown gods and heroes, not the major deities one would expect to find if a writer was using divine epiphanies on the battlefield for effect. Moreover, it must be remembered that a considerable number of the military epiphanies we have come from public documents, which cannot be so easily explained away as literary conceits, and, indeed, several of the epiphanies are cited as the occasion for the foundation of cults and festivals in honour of the deities concerned: for instance, an epiphany of Artemis Hyakinthotrophos at Knidos c. 201 B.C., an epiphany of Zeus Tropaios at Pergamon in 144 B.C., and an epiphany of Artemis Kindyas at Bargylia in the second century B.C.<sup>71</sup>

Instead, Wheeler argues persuasively that most of the battlefield epiphanies of gods, goddesses, and heroes in the accounts of ancient Greek battles do not necessarily need to be dismissed as narrative devices or fabrications *ex nihilo*, but rather can be explained as real battlefield hallucinations by troops, caused by pathological mental states brought on by the stress and strain of combat.<sup>72</sup> Likewise, Pritchett argues: ‘It would be a mistake to assume that all reports of hallucinations and prodigies are later embroidery. On the contrary, it is during periods of intense excitement such as occur in warfare that the mind, both individual and collective, is liable to believe anything extraordinary.’<sup>73</sup> This is certainly in keeping with the explanation proposed by Hanson, who argues that the epiphanies of gods and heroes on the ancient Greek battlefield were very possibly hallucinatory images caused by battle shock, citing the appearances of Epizelos and Theseus at the Battle of Marathon as prime examples.<sup>74</sup>

Although there is obviously no specific ancient information available on the extreme physical and psychological conditions that ancient Greek hoplites endured before and during combat, Hanson convincingly demonstrates just how severe the physiological and mental strain of

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suggests that his description is based on his (or that of Pompeius’, or Pompeius’ source’s) own recollection of the red cloaks worn by contemporary Roman generals.

<sup>71</sup> See Pritchett, 1979: 36-37.

<sup>72</sup> Wheeler, 2004: 5-14.

<sup>73</sup> Pritchett, 1979: 39.

<sup>74</sup> Hanson, V. D., *The Western Way of War: Infantry Battle in Classical Greece* (London: University of California Press, 1989) 192-193.

hoplite warfare would have been.<sup>75</sup> Indeed, Hanson argues that hoplites in a phalanx would have been both physically and psychologically exhausted in perhaps under little less than an hour.<sup>76</sup> Accordingly, Wheeler points to numerous modern psychological studies of warfare, which show that high combat stress reactions (CSRs), battle fatigue, and sleep deprivation frequently can cause hallucinations on the field of battle, both individually and collectively, particularly of natural and supernatural means of escape from the predicament combatants find themselves in; for instance, shipwrecked sailors floating at sea imagining non-existent ships or aeroplanes on the horizon, or trapped miners seeing visions of doorways, stairs, and the Pope.<sup>77</sup> Significantly, for our purposes, modern research has shown that both individual and collective hallucinations in warfare are most likely to happen when the soldiers are anticipating, or have been prepared for, a predicted event – in particular the appearance or aid of supernatural allies or foes.<sup>78</sup> In terms of modern psychiatry the phenomenon of a simultaneously shared hallucination is explained as the collective preparation and recall of a ‘perceptual template’. As West explains:

It may be that the psychophysiological basis for recognition requires the subconscious preparation of a perceptual template (e.g., a previously seen object) against which to match the incoming information for identification, significance, and meaning in terms of past experience. If some real but unrecognized object is present, the perceptual template emerges as an illusion. In the absence of a reality object, it is perceived as an hallucination. This accounts for the specificity of collective visions when they occur.<sup>79</sup>

In terms of ancient Greek warfare this ‘perceptual template’ would have been readily provided by an oracle promising supernatural aid to a *polis*, the act of transferring the bones of a hero and the subsequent establishment of a hero cult, and the invocation of both gods and heroes before going to war and before engaging in battle. This can, of course, be applied explicitly to several episodes of military epiphanies. For instance, during the Gallic invasion of Greece in 279 B.C., the Pythia promised the Delphians that Apollo and the ‘White Maidens’ would protect them all from Brennos’ invasion force.<sup>80</sup> The Delphians assumed accordingly that the ‘White Maidens’ referred to the goddesses Athena and Artemis, who each had a temple in the sacred

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<sup>75</sup> Hanson, 1989: 185-218. For discussion of the psychological stress faced by the amateur Athenian hoplite and the terrifying ordeal of close combat, see Crowley, 2012: *passim*.

<sup>76</sup> Hanson, 1989: 191.

<sup>77</sup> Wheeler, 2004: 7, 10-11.

<sup>78</sup> Wheeler, 2004: 10.

<sup>79</sup> West, L. J., ‘A Clinical and Theoretical Overview of Hallucinatory Phenomena’, in Siegel, R. K. and West, L. J. eds., *Hallucinations: Behavior, Experience, and Theory* (New York, 1975) 306, cited in Wheeler, 2004: 10.

<sup>80</sup> See Oracle no. 63, *infra*, p. 143; *supra*, p. 119-120.

precinct.<sup>81</sup> Subsequently, according to Justin, in the ensuing battle Apollo was seen to descend into his temple through the openings in the roof and then an extraordinarily beautiful youth exited with two armed virgins (*duas armatas virgines*) and led the Greeks into combat.<sup>82</sup> Cicero, too, states that the ‘white maidens’ (*albae virgines*) were seen fighting against the Gauls, and that their army was overwhelmed by a snowstorm.<sup>83</sup> However, even more pertinent is the fact that when Cicero states, ‘Frequently, too, apparitions present themselves and, though they have no real substance, they seem to have’, he clearly believes that the Delphians’ expectation of divine intervention, instigated by the oracle, was the cause of this perceived epiphany. Furthermore, although Justin’s account does not explicitly corroborate Cicero’s evaluation of the events, it does detail a great deal of hysteria and agitation among the Delphians at that time, which could have created the mental state conducive to battlefield hallucinations. Similar arguments can be made for the epiphany of the Dioskouroi at the Battle of the River Sagra, with the Lokrians purposely and overtly bringing the twin hero-gods to Italy from Sparta beforehand,<sup>84</sup> which must have been very much at the forefront of the Lokrian soldiers’ minds; or, similarly, with the Lokrians invoking Ajax the Lesser before battle and deliberately leaving an empty space in their ranks for him in battle.<sup>85</sup> The same can also be said for the Athenians invoking the Aiakidai before Salamis and their subsequent appearance during the naval combat.<sup>86</sup>

Keeping this in mind then, the instances where *poleis* are promised supernatural aid by an Oracle, or are advised to obtain the bones of heroes, take on an even greater significance in terms of their psychological impact on ancient Greek warfare and may indeed help explain the phenomenon of military epiphanies experienced collectively by the ancient Greeks on the field of battle.

Furthermore, Wallis, when discussing the psychology of hallucinations, argues: ‘There are critical moments when the mind, group and individual, is especially liable to harbour hallucinations and to magnify the ordinary into something prodigious. Intense expectancy gives exaggerated proportions to every event which is extraordinary, and heightened anticipation

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<sup>81</sup> Diod. Sic. 22.9.5-10.

<sup>82</sup> Just. *Epit.* 24.8.5-12.

<sup>83</sup> Cic. *Div.* 1.37.81.

<sup>84</sup> Q.v. *supra*, p. 89.

<sup>85</sup> Q.v. *supra*, p. 89.

<sup>86</sup> Q.v. *supra*, p. 90.

leaps forward into supposititious realization.<sup>87</sup> Wallis goes on to list examples from the eve of the revolt in Judaea in 66 A.D., which included imagined omens such as swords in the sky, battles in the clouds, light emanating from the depths of the Temple, and ominous portents such as comets, sacrificial victims giving birth to deformed offspring at the moment of their death, and the Temple gates flinging open by themselves, *et cetera*.<sup>88</sup> A similar profusion of prodigies and portents can be seen before the Sicilian expedition and the Battle of Leuktra.<sup>89</sup> It is in this milieu of collective hysteria that Oracles, divination, omens, and portents take on a much more powerful role.

Wheeler also goes on to suggest, very plausibly, that soldiers under immense psychological strain, coupled with an expectation to see a god or hero, may be more likely to interpret natural phenomena, such as unusual meteorological conditions, as manifestations of divine intervention and epiphanies of deities.<sup>90</sup> This type of hallucinatory phenomenon is referred to in the medical literature as ‘illusion’.<sup>91</sup> With regards to this, Wheeler cites a modern example of the retreat from Mons during WWI, where many soldiers, including the Lieutenant-Colonel in command and some of his officers, in a state of fatigue claimed to have seen a large body of horsemen riding across the fields alongside them.<sup>92</sup> Wheeler suggests that this illusion could have been triggered by such a thing as a row of bushes in the distance in dim light, for instance. Similarly, Winter in his history of trench warfare during the First World War records a firsthand account of a Household Battalion guardsman, F.E. Noakes, who relates the feelings of anxiety and fear that engulfed soldiers in the trenches at night time and the tricks that played on one’s mind. He states:

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<sup>87</sup> Wallis, W. D., ‘Prodigies and Portents’, in Hastings, J., Selbie, J. A., and Gray, L. H. eds., *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics* (New York, 1919) 363.

<sup>88</sup> Wallis, 1919: 363; Joseph. *BJ*. 6.5.3 288-309; cf. also Joseph. *BJ*. 2.22.1.

<sup>89</sup> *Q.v.* Oracle no. 43, *infra*, p. 246ff.; & Oracle no. 52, *infra*, p. 297ff.

<sup>90</sup> Wheeler, 2004: 12.

<sup>91</sup> Gelder, M. G., López-Ibor, J. J., and Andreasen, N. C., eds., *New Oxford Textbook of Psychiatry*, 2 vols. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000) 8ff.

<sup>92</sup> Wheeler, 2004: 13. See also Terraine, J., *The Smoke and the Fire: Myths and Anti-myths of War, 1861-1945* (London: Sidgwick & Jackson, 1980) 18ff.; Fussell, P., *The Great War and Modern Memory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013) 125; Bremmer, J. N., ‘Close Encounters of the Third Kind: Heliodorus in the Temple and Paul on the Road to Damascus’, in Bremmer, J. N. ed., *Greek Religion and Culture, the Bible, and the Ancient Near East* (Leiden, 2008) 215-216. For debate over whether the Angel of Mons story was merely journalistic myth-making, see: Clarke, D., ‘Rumours of Angels: A Legend of the First World War’, *Folklore* 113, 2 (2002) 151-173. Clarke argues that the Angels of Mons story had its origins in a piece of patriotic fiction called ‘The Bowmen’, which was published by an Arthur Machen in the *London Evening News* in September 1914. However, Wheeler contends that, in fact, weeks before Machen’s story appeared, a British Brigadier-General had reported that many soldiers of the 2nd Corps were already eagerly telling each other how an angel of the Lord had appeared at Mons and delivered them from the advancing Germans: see Wheeler, 2004: 5; Terraine, 1980: 18.

‘I shall not easily forget those long winter nights in the front line... These sixteen hours of blackness were broken by gun flashes, the gleam of star shells and punctuated by the scream of a shell or the heart-stopping rattle of a machine-gun... In the darkness we were prey to all sorts of unreasoning fancies. A tree stump, a hummock of earth, a coil of wire took on new and menacing forms and in the light of a star shell, could seem to be moving towards us.’<sup>93</sup>

That being said, in the examples from Mons and Noakes’ eye witness account, these particular illusions were both seen at night time, which does not really square with our accounts of ancient Greek hoplite warfare. Nevertheless, the idea that a combination of expectation, stress, and fatigue could provide the ideal conditions for ‘contagious’ hallucinations on the battlefield is an attractive rationalistic explanation for military epiphanies that does not detract from the veracity and credibility of our sources. In terms of ancient Greek and Roman warfare such an explanation could be used to explain away the interpretation of natural phenomena such as St. Elmo’s fire by soldiers and sailors as epiphanies of the Dioskouroi.<sup>94</sup>

This would also help explain the attempts by *stratego*i to stage military epiphanies of gods and heroes as stratagems in war, in order to inspire their own troops and/or wreak terror in their opponents. The most blatant example we possess is that of Perikles choreographing a striking coup de théâtre on the battlefield, whereby a man dressed up as Hades burst forth in a chariot from a copse of trees sacred to the god, causing the enemy troops to flee in wild panic.<sup>95</sup> In a similar vein, King Archidamos inspired his soldiers with courage by convincing them that the Dioskouroi had visited the Spartan camp the previous night by setting up new suits of armour on an altar and leaving two sets of horses’ hoof prints around them.<sup>96</sup> The same strategy can be seen with Epaminondas and his staged epiphany of Herakles before the Battle of Leuktra, where he arranged for the arms in the Herakleion to be removed in order to make his troops believe that Herakles had gone forth to battle against the Spartans.<sup>97</sup>

A key epiphanic episode which sheds a great deal of light on the phenomenon of divine apparitions in the ancient Greek world concerns Peisistratos and Megakles’ stratagem of using

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<sup>93</sup> Winter, D., *Death's Men: Soldiers of the Great War*, 3rd ed. (London: Penguin, 2014) 86.

<sup>94</sup> Q.v. *supra*, p. 87.

<sup>95</sup> Front. *Strat.* 1.11.10; Latimer, J., *Deception in War* (London: John Murray, 2003) 72; *infra*, p. 306.

<sup>96</sup> Front. *Strat.* 1.11.9; Polyæn. *Strat.* 1.41.1; *infra*, p. 299.

<sup>97</sup> Q.v. *infra*, p. 299; Xen. *Hell.* 6.4.7; Diod. Sic. 15.53.4; Polyæn. *Strat.* 2.3.8. Polyænus’ version differs slightly in that he says that Epaminondas had the rusty arms from the Herakleion polished and laid at the foot of the statue of the god in order to make the Thebans believe that they would be fighting under the auspices of Herakles, but the same manipulation of the divine is still clearly at work in both instances. For further discussion of stratagematic epiphanies, see Petridou, 2015: 142ff.

a phoney epiphany of Athena to regain power in 558/7 B.C.<sup>98</sup> Although it is not a true battlefield epiphany in the strictest sense of the term, the incident provides us with a crucial insight into the ancient Greeks' belief in divine epiphanies. Herodotus records the remarkable story of how, in order to restore Peisistratos to his second tyranny in Athens, Megakles and Peisistratos contrived together a stratagem to dress up a woman of remarkable stature and beauty, called Phya, as the goddess Athena by fitting her out in a full suit of armour and mounting her in a chariot.<sup>99</sup> Peisistratos then rode beside her into Athens, with heralds ahead of them proclaiming that Athena in person was bringing back Peisistratos to the Akropolis. Apparently as a result of this ruse the Athenians were completely fooled and welcomed Peisistratos back with open arms.<sup>100</sup> However, as How and Wells point out, although Herodotus is clearly annoyed that the intelligent Athenians would fall for such a ridiculous trick, the crucial thing to note is that he does, nevertheless, completely believe the story.<sup>101</sup> Busolt certainly considers the episode to be genuine and, moreover, avers that there is little doubt that the ordinary citizenry of Athens at that time would have been more than capable of being deceived by such artifice.<sup>102</sup> Grote, Curtius, and Adcock all believe the episode to be true too.<sup>103</sup>

A mistaken epiphany of Artemis (or according to Polyaeus, Athena) at Pellene in 241 B.C. provides further proof that such misidentifications and delusions were common among the

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<sup>98</sup> Hdt. 1.60; Arist. *Ath. Pol.* 14.4; Kleidemos, *ap.* Athenaios 13.89.609C = Jacoby, F., *Die Fragmente der griechischen Historiker* (Berlin: Leiden, 1923-58) 323, fr. 15; Polyaeus. 1.21.

<sup>99</sup> Hdt. 1.60.3-5.

<sup>100</sup> Hdt. 1.60.5. For further discussion of the episode, see Rose, H. J., 'Some Herodotean Rationalisms', *The Classical Quarterly* 34, 1/2 (1940) 81-82; Nock, A. D., 'Religious Attitudes of the Ancient Greeks', *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 85, 5 (1942) 478; Connor, W. R., 'Tribes, Festivals and Processions: Civic Ceremonial and Political Manipulation in Archaic Greece', *The Journal of Hellenic Studies* 107 (1987) 40-50; Sinos, R. H., 'Divine Selection: Epiphany and Politics in Archaic Greece', in Dougherty, C. and Kurke, L. eds., *Cultural Poetics in Archaic Greece: Cult, Performance, Politics* (Cambridge, 1993) 73-91; Georges, P., *Barbarian Asia and the Greek Experience: From the Archaic Period to the Age of Xenophon* (Baltimore; London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994) 44-45; Parker, 1996: 83-84; Mikalson, 2003: 123-124.

<sup>101</sup> How and Wells, 1912: *ap.* 1.60.4.

<sup>102</sup> Busolt, 1885-1904: 2.321. Parker suggests that the Athenians were perhaps not as naïve as Herodotus presumed, and that rather than being a trick, Peisistratos' entry back to the Akropolis was simply a piece of theatre, which the Athenian *demos* went along with, believing he was the man of the hour for Athens: Parker, 1996: 84.

<sup>103</sup> See Grote, 1846-56: 4.32; Curtius, E., *The History of Greece, translated by Adolphus William Ward*, 5 vols. (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1883) 378; Adcock, F. E., 'The Exiles of Peisistratos', *CQ* 18, 3/4 (1924) 174-181. Beloch and Meyer both reject the story as a poetic variation of the historic tradition of the victory at Pallene. They argue that as Peisistratos' victory was gained at the temple of Athene Pallenis, Athene was seen to have metaphorically restored Peisistratos, and that this metaphorical restoration grew into myth and then finally found its way into history: see Beloch, J., 'Die Dorische Wanderung', *Rh. Mus.* 45 (1890) 555-598; Meyer, 1884: 2.248. However, their stance is effectively refuted by Adcock and How and Wells, who argue that it is highly improbable that history and myth could become so inextricably linked within two generations. Furthermore, Herodotus had carefully sifted the traditions about the Peisistratidai and had most likely met the sons and grandsons who had actually seen the restoration; it was certainly the accepted version in Athens when Aristotle recorded it in the fourth century: see Adcock, 1924: 176; How and Wells, 1912: *ap.* 1.60.4; Pritchett, 1979: 20-21, 41.



ancient Greek masses. Plutarch relates how during a battle between the Aitolians and Aratos, the Aitolians fled the town after they witnessed a divine apparition of Artemis.<sup>104</sup> Plutarch records two accounts: in one version the Aitolians apparently saw a stately woman wearing a three-crested helmet, sitting in the temple of Artemis, who they mistook for the goddess;<sup>105</sup> while the Pellenians themselves stated that the image of Artemis was being carried from her sanctuary, which the Aitolians took to be the actual goddess herself.<sup>106</sup> In Polyaeus' slightly different version, the priestess of Athena came out of her temple in full armour and was consequently mistaken for the goddess.<sup>107</sup> Similarly, Plutarch relates how during Epaminondas' attack on the city of Sparta itself in 362 B.C., Isidas, son of Phoibidas, showed extreme bravery in the defence of his *polis* when he fought in the streets of the city naked, armed only with a spear and sword against the Theban invaders.<sup>108</sup> Remarkably, however, despite wearing no armour or clothing, Isidas was unharmed. Plutarch, revealingly, makes the comment that the reason he was able to escape the combat unscathed was because either the gods protected him or because the enemy thought him taller and mightier than a mere man could be.<sup>109</sup> Once more, it is important to note how a warrior of unusual stature could be mistaken for a god or hero in battle.<sup>110</sup>

Furthermore, it should be noted that the phenomenon of the battlefield epiphany was not confined to ancient Greece alone. Striking comparisons can be made with ancient Judea, for instance, with the angelophanies recorded in *2 Maccabees*, when, c. 163 B.C. during the Maccabean Revolt against the Seleucid Empire, in the midst of battle five resplendent men on horses with golden bridles apparently appeared from Heaven, surrounded Maccabeus, and showered arrows and thunderbolts upon the enemy, confusing and blinding them and throwing them into disarray, thus enabling the Jews to cut them down.<sup>111</sup> Moreover, Cornell, in the course of his discussion of the alleged appearance of Castor and Pollux in the Roman ranks at the Battle of Lake Regillus c. 496 B.C. asserts that 'reported sightings of divine beings at great

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<sup>104</sup> Plut. *Arat.* 32.

<sup>105</sup> Plut. *Arat.* 32.1-2.

<sup>106</sup> Plut. *Arat.* 32.3.

<sup>107</sup> Polyaeus. *Strat.* 8.59. J.G. Frazer infers from Polyaeus' passage that, 'It would have been customary for the priestess of Athena at Pellene to attire herself on a certain day as the goddess, wearing her panoply and a helmet with a triple crest.': see Frazer, 1898: 187; Pritchett, 1979: 35.

<sup>108</sup> Plut. *Ages.* 34.6-7. See also Cartledge, P., *The Spartans: An Epic History* (London: Channel Four Books, 2002b) 237-239.

<sup>109</sup> Plut. *Ages.* 34.8.

<sup>110</sup> Cf. the epiphanic stratagems of Peisistratos and Phya, and Perikles and Hades: *supra*, pp. 129-130.

<sup>111</sup> *2 Maccabees*, 10.28-31. See Michalak, A. R., *Angels as Warriors in Late Second Temple Jewish Literature, Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament 2 Reihe* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2012) 192-210.

battles – gods, angels, the Virgin Mary, etc. – are copiously documented, from remote antiquity to the First World War and beyond.<sup>112</sup> In an example taken from the sixteenth century, for instance, during the Battle of Otumba between the Spaniards and the Aztec Indians on 7 July 1520 A.D., several serious historians refer to the preservation of the Spanish by their patron apostle, Saint James, who apparently was seen leading the Christian squadrons on a white steed with lightning flashing from his sword, and with the Virgin Mary at his side, throwing dust into the eyes of the Mexicans.<sup>113</sup> With regards to WWI, of course, one can point to the infamous ‘Angels of Mons’ episode, in which retreating soldiers of the British Expeditionary Force supposedly saw visions of angels guarding their retreat from Le Cateau.<sup>114</sup>

## 5. Wider belief of the supernatural in war

Thus far we have looked at the ancient Greeks’ belief in the divine and the part they were believed to play in ancient Greek warfare. However, there was also a wider belief in the supernatural throughout the Graeco-Roman world, revealed to us through a vast array of superstitious practices recorded in the ancient literary sources and archaeological evidence such as curse tablets, amulets, magical texts, and other magical paraphernalia.<sup>115</sup> It is clear that for many ancient Greeks it was a steadfast conviction that the world was ruled and controlled by invisible presences. Gager states that in ancient Mediterranean culture ‘the cosmos literally teemed, at every level and in every location, with supernatural beings.’<sup>116</sup> As the existence of these supernatural beings was accepted as a matter of fact, it is therefore only natural that we find the Greeks attempting to control and channel these forces for their own ends through the use of magic. According to Luck ‘Magic and Witchcraft, the fear of daemons and ghosts, the wish to manipulate invisible powers – all were very much a part of life in the ancient world.’<sup>117</sup>

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<sup>112</sup> Cornell, T., *The Beginnings of Rome: Italy and Rome from the Bronze Age to the Punic Wars (c. 1000-264 B.C.)*, Routledge History of the Ancient World (London: Routledge, 1995) 294.

<sup>113</sup> See Pritchett, 1979: 40.

<sup>114</sup> See Wheeler, 2004: 5, 8, 11; *supra*, p. 128. For further examples of battlefield epiphanies from different nations across the centuries, such as: the vision of the Holy Cross to Emperor Constantine I before the Battle of the Milvian Bridge in 312 A.D.; the legends of King Arthur and Frederick Barbarossa, who, according to folklore lie sleeping in caves awaiting the call to come and defend their countries; St. George’s appearance at Antioch in 1098 A.D. and at the Siege of Jerusalem the following year; the Russian folk-hero, General Skobelev, leading the Tsar’s forces against the Turks during the Russo-Turkish war of 1877-8; and the Serbian hero Marko Kraljevic appearing at the Battle of Prilep in 1912 and leading the Serb forces to victory against the Turks: see Clarke, 2002: 167-168; Temperley, H., ‘On the Supernatural Element in History, with Two Examples from the Present Day’, *The Contemporary Review* (1916) 188-189, 193-195; Hole, C., *Saints in Folklore* (London: Bell, 1966) 23-24; Hayward, L., ‘Correspondence’, *Folklore* 55 (1944) 48; Shirley, R., *The Angel Warriors at Mons: An Authentic Record* (London: Newspaper Publicity Co., 1915) 10.

<sup>115</sup> For a more detailed discussion on sources for magic, see Luck, 1985: 3-53.

<sup>116</sup> Gager, 1992: 12.

<sup>117</sup> Luck, 1985: *Preface* xiii.

However, the belief in magic was not, as one might expect, simply confined to the ignorant masses. On the contrary, it was fervently believed and practised also by the elite in society. As Luck explains ‘Not only the lower classes, the ignorant and uneducated, believed in it, but the “intellectuals” down to the end of antiquity were convinced that dangerous supernatural powers operated around them and that these powers could be controlled by certain means.’<sup>118</sup>

Acknowledging the reality that belief in the supernatural and the practising of magic was very prevalent throughout the ancient world in every facet of daily life, it is unsurprising to discover that it also permeated the domain of warfare. Consequently, it is important to recognise the role that superstitious practices of ancient Greek soldiers played in ancient Greek warfare, as it further deepens our understanding of the mindset of the ancient Greek hoplite and his propensity to rely upon, obey, and be swayed by the supernatural realm and the oracular utterances of the gods.

From the extant descriptions recorded by our ancient sources it appears that the ancient Greek army on campaign was surrounded by all kinds of characters who dabbled in the supernatural and pedalled their services and wares to the travelling soldiers. Dickie states that, aside from the official *manteis* employed in the army proper, *magoi* of all kinds could also be found in the large train of camp-followers that followed armies in the ancient world; itinerant magicians, seers, and prophetesses were a characteristic feature of the entourages that accompanied armies on campaign, and it was a common occurrence for military camps to be visited by wandering mendicant holy men-cum-magicians (*agyrtai*), proffering their skills and divinations.<sup>119</sup> The phenomenon appears to have been a feature of later Roman armies as well. Appian describes how Scipio Aemilianus, when he was faced with the undisciplined and demoralised troops besieging Numantia in 134 B.C., expelled all the traders, prostitutes, soothsayers, and diviners from the military camp, and forbade anyone from performing sacrifices for the purposes of divination.<sup>120</sup> According to Appian, Scipio did so because his men were continually consulting

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<sup>118</sup> Luck, 1985: 9.

<sup>119</sup> Dickie, 2001: 112, 229-233. For instance, according to Aristoboulos of Cassandreia, a Syrian woman, who was subject to divine possession, used to follow Alexander about whilst on campaign. At first she was the source of amusement for Alexander and his courtiers, but when her utterances under inspiration began to be borne out, Alexander began to take an interest in her and granted her free access to him at all times, even standing vigil beside him when he was asleep: see Arr. *Anab.* 4.13.5-6; Curt. 8.6.16. Cf. the Roman general Marius who also had a Syrian prophetess, Martha, with him in his retinue on campaign against the Germanic tribes of the Cimbri and Teutones in 102 B.C.: see Plut. *Mar.* 17.1-5; Val. Max. 1.3.4; Frontin. *Strat.* 1.11.12.

<sup>120</sup> App. *Hisp.* §85.

the soothsayers and diviners as a result of being disheartened by repeated defeats, once again illustrating the powerful influence of divination on the psychology of ancient soldiers.

Dickie further argues that Plutarch's account of the atypical army of King Kleomenes of Sparta c. 235 B.C., in which he draws attention to its unusual sobriety and virtuousness, gives us an insight into what a typical train of a Greek army must have been like and what type of characters it would have contained.<sup>121</sup> Plutarch states that among Greek and royal armies, Kleomenes' army was the only that did not have a train of players, wonderworkers, singers, and dancers, of both sexes, and that the camp was free from intemperance, frivolity, public shows, and feasts.<sup>122</sup>

We are faced then with a picture of a Greek army being followed by a train of people resembling a travelling fair. Amongst these camp-followers, there were magicians, sorcerers (*goetes*), and prophets of all shapes and guises, including holy men (*agyrtai*), wonderworkers (*thaumatopoi*) and purifiers (*kathartai*), as well as all manner of sorceresses, prophetesses, prostitutes, and holy women (*agyrtriai* and *hierieiai*). As we have seen in the examples of the camps of Kleomenes and Scipio Aemilianus, there was obviously close contact and interaction between the soldiers and the itinerant followers of the army. Bearing this in mind, it must surely have been the case that the *magoi* would have provided services and performed feats for the army which they followed. Although it appears that many of these followers were made up of 'lesser' subcategories of magician, such as beggar-prophets, thaumaturgists, or even the inevitable fraudsters and charlatans (*alazones*), who would have performed these functions for a fee, the fact remains that the common soldier had such confidence and conviction in the power and ability of these *magoi* that they were willing to pay for their services, and that the demand for their services must have been great enough to make it worthwhile for itinerant *magoi* to follow these armies about wherever they roamed.<sup>123</sup>

One simple but essential service that would have been provided, for example, was healing, especially when one considers the presence of prostitutes in the train. There was a strong association between prostitution and sorcery in the ancient Greek world, and procuresses and prostitutes were considered to be powerful magic-workers. Inherent in this conviction was also the widely-held belief that prostitutes were powerful magical healers.<sup>124</sup> It follows naturally,

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<sup>121</sup> Dickie, 2001: 112.

<sup>122</sup> Plut. *Cleom.* 12.4.

<sup>123</sup> For further discussion on the various types of mendicant magician, see Dickie, 2001: 61-78.

<sup>124</sup> On the connection between prostitutes and sorcery, see Dickie, 2001: 79-107, *passim*.

therefore, that these prostitutes-cum-sorceresses would have been the ideal people to help cure soldiers of their wounds from the battlefield through their craft.

We can also assume that these *magoi* would have provided the army with the plethora of other magical services we find being used by soldiers on campaign and on the battlefield, such as casting protective or victory spells over individuals, enchantments over weapons and armour, or offensive spells against the enemy, as well as providing amulets, wards, curse tablets (*katadesmoi*), and enchanted 'lucky' items to take with them onto the battlefield.<sup>125</sup>

Although all this digresses slightly from the focus on the religiosity of the ancient Greeks, it is nevertheless useful to illustrate the pervasive belief of the supernatural in the ancient Greek world and the superstitious nature of the ancient Greek soldier. Perhaps more importantly, however, it also demonstrates how both commander and hoplite soldier in the ancient Greek army attempted to harness and use the supernatural to their advantage in battle against their

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<sup>125</sup> For discussion and examples of healing magic in warfare, see Hom. *Od.* 19.456; Hom. *Il.* 4.189-219, 5.401-2, 11.828-47; Helioid. *Aeth.* 1.16, 9.277-8; Kotansky, R., 'Incantations and Prayers for Salvation on Inscribed Greek Amulets', in Faraone, C. A. and Obbink, D. eds., *Magika Hiera: Ancient Greek Magic and Religion* (New York; Oxford, 1991) 107-137; Renehan, R., 'The Staunching of Odysseus' Blood: The Healing Power of Magic', *The American Journal of Philology* 113, 1 (1992) 1-4; Scarborough, J., 'The Pharmacology of Sacred Plants, Herbs, and Roots', in Faraone, C. A. and Obbink, D. eds., *Magika Hiera: Ancient Greek Magic and Religion* (New York; Oxford, 1991) 138-174. For protective magical amulets in general, see Kotansky, 1991: 110-116; Gager, 1992: 219; Dickie, 2001: 109. For Socrates describing a spell recipe for a headache amulet, which he learned from the Thracians during military operations in Potidaea, see Pl. *Chrm.* 155e-156e. For amulets inscribed with certain words of power, the *ephesia grammata*, which were particularly popular with fighters and soldiers, see Gager, 1992: 6; Kotansky, 1991: 111-112; McCown, C. C., 'The Ephesia Grammata in Popular Belief', *TAPA* 54 (1923) 128-140. For a range of amulets that would afford the wearer all manner of powers and protection, such as preventing fright and panic, ensuring victory over one's enemies, arresting haemorrhaging from a wound, or ensuring the blows of one's spears would never miss their target, see Plin. *HN.* 28.27-29, 28.99; Kotansky, 1991: 121; Gager, 1992: 218; cf. the dead soldiers found to be wearing forbidden protective amulets in the aftermath of a battle during the Maccabean revolt against Antiochos IV c. 166-165 B.C.: 2 *Maccabees*, 13.34-39. For a gemstone (blood-red haematite), in the hands of magicians, that could be used to expose the stratagems of enemy troops, see Plin. *HN.* 37.60. For the use of Herakles as a talisman to ward off evil and for protection in war, see Burkert, 1985: 211; Dickie, 2001: 109. For a similar apotropaic function of the Gorgon on armour and shields, see Hurwit, J. M., 'Reading the Chigi Vase', *Hesperia* 71, 1 (2002) 16; Howe, T. P., 'The Origin and Function of the Gorgon-Head', *American Journal of Archaeology* 58, 3 (1954) 213. For the use of amulets that contained aggressive magic designed to fetter, maim or kill opponents, see Bonner, C., *Studies in Magical Amulets, Chiefly Graeco-Egyptian, University of Michigan Studies Humanistic Series* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1950) 107-115; Gager, 1992: 220. For the use of aggressive curses and binding spells (*κατάδεσμοι*, Gk.; *defixiones*, Lat.) in warfare, see Gager, 1992: 158, 26; Faraone, C. A., 'The Agonistic Context of Early Greek Binding Spells', in Faraone, C. A. and Obbink, D. eds., *Magika Hiera: Ancient Greek Magic and Religion* (New York; Oxford, 1991a) 4. For examples of victory charms and spells from the *Papyri Graecae Magicae*, see Betz, H. D., ed., *The Greek Magical Papyri in Translation, including the Demotic Spells*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992) *PGM* XXXV. 1-42; *PGM* LXIX. 1-3; *PGM* VII. 186-90; *PGM* VII. 390-93; *PGM* VII. 528-39; *PGM* XXXVI. 211-30; *PGM* CXXIIIa. 69-72. For the use of civic magic by *poleis* to protect against attack (particularly the use of *χολοσοί* along territorial borders), see Faraone, 1991a: 9; Faraone, C. A., 'Binding and Burying the Forces of Evil: The Defensive Use of "Voodoo Dolls" in Ancient Greece', *Classical Antiquity* 10, 2 (1991b) 169-170; Gager, 1992: 11; cf. similar practices in ancient Egypt: see Budge, E. A. W., *Egyptian Magic* (New York: Dover, 1971) 21-23, 75-77, 79-84.

enemies, once again illustrating how deeply immeshed the divine and the supernatural were in ancient Greek warfare.

## 6. Conclusions

When we take into account the profusion of references from ancient Greek histories, literature, poetry, drama, and epigraphy, to the gods perpetually intervening in the affairs of humans, it is abundantly clear that there was, undeniably, a pervasive belief among the ancient Greeks that divine intervention and manifestation in warfare was a routine, anticipated, and common phenomenon; hence Cicero's emphatic statement that: 'Deities have appeared in forms so visible that they have compelled everyone who is not senseless, or hardened in impiety, to confess the presence of the Gods.'<sup>126</sup>

Although the gods intervened in all manner of shapes and forms in all spheres of human endeavours in the ancient world, it is when danger is nearest and life is at its most precarious that the gods most often make their appearances. This, of course, was never more so than in times of war, hence why there are so many recorded instances of military epiphanies. As Petridou states:

'Potentially life-threatening situations, such as fighting on the battlefield, being besieged by the enemy, and confined within the walls of a city with a minimum of food and water supplies, or suffering from a chronic or *prima facie* incurable disease, invite divine epiphanies. These are exceptional times and places in one's life, wherein the notions of the familiar, expected, and ordinary get severely tested. This disruption of the familiar world order opens the way for the crossing of boundaries...and invites the "other".'<sup>127</sup>

The plethora of examples recorded by our ancient sources of the gods and goddesses intervening in warfare, either through supernatural or natural means, or by directly participating in the combat themselves, or of heroes suddenly appearing in the midst of the combat and turning the tide of battle, clearly demonstrates the strength of belief that existed in the role played by the supernatural in ancient Greek warfare. To the ancient Greeks their belief in the divine and their expected involvement on the battlefield was an intrinsic and fundamental part

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<sup>126</sup> Cic. *Nat. D.* 2.2.6.

<sup>127</sup> Petridou, 2015: 107-108.

of warfare: through piety, respect, and invocation, the Greeks hoped for not only divine favour and protection, but also tangible, physical aid on the field of battle against their foes.

This truth is, of course, of crucial importance to this study. The oracles that promise, for instance, the support and aid of the god, or direct *poleis* to petition certain deities and heroes, or promise victory to a *polis* if they obtain the bones of a hero, subsequently have a huge psychological impact upon the *polis* citizenry and the mindset of the ancient Greek soldier. So often, therefore, the consultation of the Oracle itself is geared towards fulfilling the requisite religious duty and protocol in order to obtain divine sanction and favour (and with that hopefully assistance), whilst the oracular prophecy delivered by the shrine provides the consultant with a vital psychological boost and frequently as well with the ‘perceptual template’, which, as argued above, regularly provides the conditions conducive to producing military epiphanies on the battlefield. Indeed, these military epiphanies can be seen as manifest proof of the psychological impact of oracular prognostications in ancient Greek warfare.

Furthermore, the abundance of evidence demonstrating the rank-and-file belief in the supernatural and the superstitious nature of the ancient hoplite soldier further reveals their susceptibility to, and their dependence upon, the divine and the otherworldly in warfare, particularly the continual consultation of prophets, prophetesses, soothsayers, and diviners in the army trains, which illustrates the ongoing need of soldiers to seek reassurance and encouragement, and some sense of control over their fate. It was this firmly-embedded belief in the divine and the supernatural which compelled the ancient Greeks to consult the Oracles on matters of war, and gave the prophetic utterances of the gods real significance in the world of ancient Greek warfare.

## CHAPTER THREE

### THE EFFECTS OF ORACULAR PROGNOSTICATIONS ON CITIZEN AND ARMY MORALE AND MILITARY DECISION-MAKING

#### 1. Introduction

Having established the ancient Greeks' psychological reasons for consulting the Oracles on matters of war in the first place, and their innate belief in the role of the divine in warfare, we now need to examine the impact of the resultant oracular prophecies on *polis* and army psychology, and on foreign policy and military decision-making. The two things, of course, are inextricably linked and are virtually impossible to separate: a boost or blow to army morale will invariably affect subsequent strategic and tactical military decisions. However, that being said, there are a number of war oracles that show more explicitly distinct psychological effects of oracular prognostications on military commanders or on troop morale, and in other cases a more profound impact upon military strategy and tactics, with the implication being that the mindset and thought processes of *strategoi* and *poleis* have been significantly affected by the god's pronouncements. Consequently, for structural purposes more than any real distinction in categorisation, I shall deal first of all with those oracles illustrating marked and manifest psychological effects of oracular prophecy in warfare, before moving on to deal with those oracles which demonstrate a significant influence on military decision-making.

I have also divided the chapter into two sections. The first section deals with those oracular consultations and responses, which provided the consultant *polis* or *strategos* with a positive prophecy and psychological boost before or during a war, and examines the impact of those prophecies on the consultants' subsequent foreign policy and decision-making processes, as well as that of their enemies. The second section is still concerned with the psychological impact of oracular prophecy on both citizens and soldiers, but will deal with the other side of the coin, in that it will focus more specifically on those oracular prognostications which led *poleis* and *strategoi* into making erroneous military decisions, and also, inversely, those consultations which delivered negative as opposed to favourable pronouncements to the consultant *polis* or *strategos*.



The most common focus of oracular consultations in times of war are those seeking advice and guidance on how to achieve victory over their enemies. Forty-five of the ninety-one war oracles in this study, either directly or implicitly, ask the Oracle for divine guidance to aid them in their wars. This includes direct requests from *poleis* and individuals on how best to achieve victory, requests for guidance on what to do next, as well as requests ascertaining their prospects of success in a conflict. Indeed, Plutarch lists the question, ‘if they shall conquer’, as the most common question put to the Delphic Oracle.<sup>1</sup> This should surely come as no surprise, as it was undoubtedly the anxiety, trepidation, and fear of the unknown that would have driven *poleis* and individuals to turn to Oracles and divination in times of war, in the hope of mollifying their fears and gleaning some solace from the god’s words, or better still, obtaining some tangible and practical advice on how to achieve victory, which is very often the case.

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<sup>1</sup> Plut. *De E apud Delphos* (Mor. 386C).

## SECTION ONE: POSITIVE ORACULAR RESPONSES AND THE FULFILMENT OF ORACULAR COMMANDS

### 2. Positive affirmation leading to positive effects on morale

On many occasions the Oracle, in response to an enquiry by a *polis* or *strategos* looking for divine sanction for a military venture or seeking guidance during a war, provides a positive and optimistic prognostication, which gives the consultants a welcome and very beneficial morale boost, and plays a significant role in persuading a *polis* to enter a war or to adopt a certain strategy during the war.

We have already seen, for instance, the prophecy delivered to the Spartans on the eve of the Peloponnesian War by Delphic Apollo, which declared that if the Spartans fought with all their strength, they would be granted victory, and that Apollo himself would aid them regardless of whether they invoked him or not.<sup>2</sup> This must have been of great encouragement and comfort to the Spartans before and during the war, and at the same time been disconcerting for the Athenians and her allies - a fact well attested later by Athens' open resentment at Apollo's partisanship during the Great Plague.<sup>3</sup>

#### 2.1 Delphi and the Persian invasion

Another famous oracular episode, which demonstrates a significant boost to *polis* and army morale, can be seen with the Delphians' consultation of the Delphic Oracle on the eve of the Persian invasion.<sup>4</sup> Herodotus recounts how, when news came that Xerxes' invasion force had arrived at Pieria, the allied Greeks left the Isthmus and took up their positions at Thermopylae and Artemisium. The Delphians, fearing for their own safety, consequently consulted Apollo and were advised to 'Pray to the winds, for they will be good allies to Greece.'<sup>5</sup> The Delphians subsequently passed on the Oracle's directive to all of the allied Greek *poleis*, which Herodotus states earned the Delphians the everlasting gratitude of Hellas.<sup>6</sup> According to Herodotus, the subsequent storm that hit the Persian fleet anchored off the Magnesian coast, near Cape Sepias,

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<sup>2</sup> Oracle no. 41, *supra*, p. 59ff.

<sup>3</sup> Thuc. 2.54.4; *supra*, p. 60.

<sup>4</sup> Oracle no. 34: Hdt. 7.178; Clem. Alex. *Strom.* 6.3, 753P; P-W 96, Fontenrose, Q148.

<sup>5</sup> Hdt. 7.178.1.

<sup>6</sup> Hdt. 7.178.2.

lasted three days and destroyed at least 400 Persian ships,<sup>7</sup> whilst another storm off the coast of Euboea utterly wrecked the squadron of 200 ships that had been sent by the Persians to cut the Greek fleet off in the Euripos strait.<sup>8</sup> As a result the Greeks after the Battle of Artemisium consecrated an altar to the winds at Thyia.<sup>9</sup>

Herodotus also records the congruent theory that the disaster that befell the Persian fleet was due to the divine intervention of Boreas, the god of the north wind. Herodotus states that the Athenians, in response to a different oracle they had received, which had advised them to ‘ask the assistance of their son-in-law’, begged Boreas to come to their aid against the invading Medes and repeat the former disaster at Athos once again by destroying the Persian fleet.<sup>10</sup> On their return home, the Athenians dedicated a shrine to Boreas by the river Ilissus out of gratitude for his aid at Sepias.<sup>11</sup>

In terms of the historicity of the oracle, Fontenrose argues that the verse ‘and they were told to pray to the Winds; for they would be great allies for Hellas’, which is quoted directly by Clement of Alexandria, is authentic as it is ‘no more than the versification of an ordinary command or sanction to pray to specified deities.’<sup>12</sup> How and Wells provide further evidence of its authenticity when they point out that there is a hexameter in Herodotus’ narrative, which suggests that it came from a poetical narrative of the event or from a dedicatory inscription on a thank-offering at Delphi to the winds.<sup>13</sup>

The inference, however, from Herodotus’ account of this episode is that this prognostication delivered to the allied Greek *poleis* on the eve of their first encounter with the massive Persian invasion force had a powerful psychological impact and played an extremely important role in helping to bolster Greek morale and assuage anxiety, and perhaps even more crucially, give

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<sup>7</sup> Hdt. 7.190-191.

<sup>8</sup> Hdt. 8.7.1; 8.13.

<sup>9</sup> Hdt. 1.178.2.

<sup>10</sup> Hdt. 7.189. The Athenians considered Boreas to be their son-in-law as, according to legend, Boreas had an Attic wife, Orithyia, the daughter of King Erechtheus. For the Persian disaster at Athos in 492 B.C., see Hdt. 6.44. Cf. Boreas’ intervention at Megalopolis (*supra*, p. 115.). Cf. also I Samuel 7:3.12 for analogous empyreal divine intervention in the Bible: when the Israelites were in danger of being overwhelmed and slaughtered by the Philistine army at Mizpah, Samuel prayed and sacrificed a lamb to God. In answer to Samuel’s entreaties, God stirred up a huge thunderstorm over the Philistine troops and threw them into disarray, enabling the Israelites to pursue and cut them down.

<sup>11</sup> Hdt. 7.189.3.

<sup>12</sup> Fontenrose, 1978: 193.

<sup>13</sup> How and Wells, 1912: *ap.* 7.178.

the allied Hellenes hope.<sup>14</sup> Herodotus was only too aware of the impact the oracle had when he clearly explains that the reason why the whole of Hellas was eternally grateful to the Delphians and the Delphic Oracle was because of the Greeks' 'dread of the barbarian' and the imminent invasion. An oracle of this sort, even if it contained the smallest hint of success or hope, could be enough to buoy up morale and give an army the mental edge it needed in battle. Indeed, in this instance the allied Greeks were given hope at the possibility of supernatural aid to supplement their earthly military endeavours against their foes.<sup>15</sup> Of course, the boost to Greek morale would have been multiplied immeasurably when the subsequent storms at Cape Sepias and at the Hollows off the coast of Euboea destroyed hundreds of Persian ships, for it would have appeared that the gods were indeed on their side against Xerxes. It helps explain also why the allied Greeks consecrated an altar to the winds at Thyia after Artemisium, and the Athenians dedicated a shrine to Boreas at the River Ilissus. The strengthening of resolve and the kindling of hope that such an oracle would have ignited cannot be underrated. Herodotus certainly seems to believe that it provided a timely injection of steel to jangly Greek nerves on the eve of their first real confrontation with the barbarian horde.

## 2.2 Phokis and Thessaly

A similarly illuminating oracular episode concerns the Phokians' consultation of the Pythia regarding their war with Thessaly *c.* 500 B.C.<sup>16</sup> In his description of Phokis, Pausanias records how the Phokians, facing an imminent invasion by the Thessalians, sent to Delphi to ask the Oracle for a way to escape the approaching disaster. In response to their request, the Priestess gave the following reply:

I put mortal and immortal to fight  
I give both victory but more to mortal.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Immerwahr argues that Herodotus not only absolves the Delphic Oracle from any possibility of medising, but believes that the Oracle in fact collaborated with other gods to bring about the Persian defeat and Greek victory: see Immerwahr, H. R., *Form and Thought in Herodotus, Monographs - American Philological Association* (Cleveland: Published for the American Philological Association by the Press of Western Reserve University, 1966) 236.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. Oracle no. 41, *supra*, p. 59; Oracle no. 63, *infra*, p. 143; Oracle no. N3, *supra*, p. 162.

<sup>16</sup> Oracle no. 26: Paus. 10.1.4; P-W 68; Fontenrose, Q117.

<sup>17</sup> It should be noted that Pausanias is the only evidence for this oracle, and that it is not recorded in Herodotus: see Levi in Pausanias, *Guide to Greece, Volume 1: Central Greece*, translated with an introduction by Peter Levi (London, 1979a) 406 n. 3.

Pausanias goes on to tell us that in the ensuing battle the Phokians, by the favour of the gods, won a great victory and the prophecy was fulfilled, as the Thessalian commanders always shouted the same signal in battle, 'Itonian Athene', whilst the Phokians always shouted 'Phokos', the name of their eponymous hero. The Phokians subsequently sent magnificent dedications to Delphi in gratitude for this triumph.<sup>18</sup>

Pausanias' account provides us with another straightforward reference to the Greek *polis*' custom of consulting an Oracle before war in the hope of obtaining divine guidance, which could perhaps aid them militarily, or, at the very least, provide encouragement and reassurance that they would fare well in the ensuing conflict. In this case, in addition to the motivation already generated by the knowledge that defeat would lead to all the Phokian women and children being burnt alive on a pyre of all of their possessions,<sup>19</sup> the oracle appears to have acted as a boost to the nerve and morale of the Phokian troops. Pausanias' statement that 'The Phokian oracle [concerning the battle signals of both sides] from Apollo was recognised by all Greece'<sup>20</sup> implies that the Phokians had understood this inference from the Pythia, and therefore this knowledge would have surely bolstered their mettle and resolve and helped drive them on to courageous deeds in the battle. Furthermore, the Phokians' subsequent act of sending splendid dedications to Apollo for their victory carries with it the implication that the oracular consultation before the battle was believed to have aided their efforts against the Thessalians and brought with it divine intervention on the Phokian side.<sup>21</sup>

### 2.3 Delphi and the Gallic invasion

An equally positive boost to *polis* and army morale was conjured up by the Pythia's extremely heartening pronouncement to the Delphians during the Gallic invasion of Greece in 279 B.C., which assured the citizens that they would receive the divine aid and protection of Apollo, Athena, and Artemis.<sup>22</sup> According to Diodorus, in 279 B.C., when King Brennos had advanced into Greece after subduing Macedonia, and was approaching Delphi, the Delphians asked the Oracle if they should remove the women, children, and treasures from the shrine to the most

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<sup>18</sup> Paus. 10.1.9-10.

<sup>19</sup> Paus. 10.1.7.

<sup>20</sup> Paus. 10.1.10.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. Oracle no. N4, *infra*, p. 168.

<sup>22</sup> Oracle no. 63: Aristeides 26.339; Tzetz. *Chil.* 2.394; Diod. Sic. 22.9.5; Cic. *Div.* 1.37.81; Paus. 10.23.1-6; Val. Max. 1.1 ext. 9; Just. *Epit.* 24.7.6; P-W 329; Fontenrose, Q231.

strongly fortified of the neighbouring cities. The god commanded the Delphians to leave the dedications where they were and gave them an assurance that he and the ‘White Maidens’ (λευκάς κόρας) would protect them all. The Delphians naturally interpreted the ‘White Maidens’ to mean Athena and Artemis, who both had temples in the sacred precinct.<sup>23</sup>

The account of the ensuing battle between the Gauls and the Greeks can be compiled from the two extant narratives in Pausanias and Justin, which certainly agree to a large extent on the supernatural elements involved in the episode. When the Celts approached, the only army that could be mustered to the defence of Delphi was a small force of several thousand, consisting of Phokians, a regiment of infantrymen from Amphissa, a small garrison of Aetolians, and the remaining Delphians and any other Greeks who happened to be at the shrine at that time.<sup>24</sup> However, the invading Gauls, although far superior in numbers, were soon met with a series of supernatural phenomena directed against them, such as earthquakes, thunder and lightning, landslides and snowstorms, as well as the epiphanies of Apollo, Artemis, Athena, and, according to Pausanias, the heroes, Hyperochos, Laodokos, Pyrrhos, and Phylakos, who appeared and fought alongside the Greek ranks; all of which terrified the Gauls, inflicted substantial losses on them, and helped the Greeks to repel the invasion.<sup>25</sup>

Fontenrose clearly believes that the oracle is not genuine and places it into the category of Quasi-historical, but at the same time provides no explanation for doing so. Although he does, however, doubt that an attack took place on Delphi by Brennos.<sup>26</sup> Parke and Wormell, on the other hand, discuss in detail the historicity of whether a sack of Delphi actually took place or not, and in doing so suggest that the oracle is authentic.<sup>27</sup> Pausanias and Justin’s accounts agree through their silence that the temple was never entered by the Gauls, nor were its offerings plundered. Yet, Diodorus states that Brennos entered Apollo’s temple and laughed at the fact that the images inside were only made of wood and stone.<sup>28</sup> Furthermore, there was also the

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<sup>23</sup> Diod. Sic. 22.9.5-10. Cf. Just. *Epit.* 24.8.5-12; Cic. *Div.* 1.37.81; *supra*, p. 127.

<sup>24</sup> Paus. 10.23.2.

<sup>25</sup> Cf. *supra*, pp. 119-120.

<sup>26</sup> See Fontenrose, J. E., *The Cult and Myth of Pyrrhos at Delphi* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1960) 198 n. 2.

<sup>27</sup> Parke and Wormell, 1956b: 255-259.

<sup>28</sup> Diod. Sic. 22.9.4. Cf. also Livy, 40.58.3; Val. Max. 1.1 ext. 9; Strab. 4.1.13; Dio Cass. *fr.* 88; and Posidon. *Fr. Gr. Hist.* 87 f 48, all of whom record the tradition that the Celts had carried off spoils from the temple at Delphi. On the other hand, Mario Segre argues that these accounts of the sack of Delphi cannot be traced any further back than the second century B.C.: see Segre, M., ‘Il sacco di Delfi e la leggenda dell’aurum tolosanum’, *Historia* VIII, 4 (1929); see also Flacelière, R., *Les Aitoliens à Delphes* (Paris: E. de Boccard, 1937) pp. 98ff. However, there is an inscription dating from 278 B.C., the year after the attack, which clearly refers to the saving of Delphi: see *SIG.*

tradition that the stolen booty from Delphi had made its way into the treasures of the city of Tolosa and that the stolen gold had brought a curse upon the Scordisci tribe when it came into their possession.<sup>29</sup> Parke and Wormell add further weight to this tradition by highlighting a series of at least seven decrees from the years 275 to 271 B.C., voting awards and honours to individuals who had given information leading to the recovery of sacred monies to Apollo. They suggest, persuasively, that these monies may in fact have been the spoils of the Celtic raid that had fallen into the hands of various unscrupulous Greeks.<sup>30</sup> A convincing compromise hypothesis is therefore put forward by Parke and Wormell that Brennos and the Gauls may have forced their way into the sacred precinct on the first day, but then returned to their camp at night, only to be driven off the next day by the surprise attack of the Phokians, who had just obtained reinforcements.<sup>31</sup> The archaeological evidence proves beyond doubt that the temple was not freely pillaged, but there is no concrete proof to confute the possibility that some of the Celts broke into some part of the sacred precinct and stole some of the sacred offerings.

If we are, therefore, to accept that the Gallic raiders did indeed plunder Delphi to some degree, then it is also harmonious with that supposition that the oracle given by the god was indeed authentic. If the Pythia had given the assurance that Apollo would protect his own, then it seems almost certain that the priests, being heavily constrained by the prophecy, would have been compelled to play down the extent of any plundering of the sacred precinct that had taken place, so as long as it was on a small enough scale to cover up.<sup>32</sup> Moreover, as Parke and Wormell state: ‘The general escape of the temple would have been sufficient justification for the immediate proclamation of its “Saving”.’<sup>33</sup>

Further strength is given to the authenticity of the oracle by the existence of two official interpretations of the Pythia’s response. As the snowstorm recorded in the sources is to be taken as historic, it must have been ample enough reason for the ancients to believe that the prophecy of the protection of the ‘White Maidens’ had been fulfilled, and thus it became the first official interpretation of the prophecy. However, within a reasonably short space of time, an official attempt was made to replace this interpretation with another that associated the ‘Maidens’ with

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398. Cary also argues that the sanctuary was entered by the Gauls: see Cary, M., *A History of the Greek World, 323 to 146 B.C.*, Methuen's History of the Greek and Roman World (London: Methuen, 1968) 61.

<sup>29</sup> Parke and Wormell, 1956b: 257.

<sup>30</sup> Parke and Wormell, 1956b: 258-9.

<sup>31</sup> Parke and Wormell, 1956b: 257.

<sup>32</sup> Parke and Wormell, 1956b: 257.

<sup>33</sup> Parke and Wormell, 1956b: 257.

Athena and Artemis. The tale that Apollo had manifested himself at Delphi had emerged within six months of the Gallic invasion, but it was only after some thirty years later that the legend had grown to also include the epiphanies of the two goddesses, Athena and Artemis.<sup>34</sup> The second and later interpretation, however, ignored the epithet 'White', which had no significant meaning when applied to Athena and Artemis.<sup>35</sup> The fact that the ancient authorities provided two different interpretations of the prophecy suggests, therefore, that the oracular response with its reference to the 'White Maidens' was genuinely issued before the attack. Moreover, Parke and Wormell suppose that another reason why such an oracle was likely to have been given before the attack was because it was late autumn and therefore probable that a snowfall would thwart the Gallic invasion.

The interesting thing to note from this incident, apart from the routine consultation of the Oracle by a *polis* for advice on what to do in the face of an impending invasion, was that the prophecy received from the Oracle for the Delphians to remain, combined with the promise of divine protection, obviously had a significant impact on their decision to either flee or stand against the Gauls. If we can trust Justin, the Oracle went even further than just instructing the Delphians to leave the sacred treasures where they lay and in fact forbade the country people from carrying away their corn and wine from their houses.<sup>36</sup> The sagacity and benefit of this prohibition was not understood until the invading Gauls were diverted from their main objective of attacking the sanctuary by plundering the spoils of the countryside. This then halted the advance of the Gauls, gave the Delphians time to secure the city and receive reinforcements, and caused the Gauls to attack in disorder the next day, suffering from the effects of the wine they had drunk the day before. Furthermore, the oracle also appears to have had a considerable impact on the psychology of the Delphians and their allies in battle. Justin describes how 'The Delphians, on the other hand, placing more confidence in the god than in their own strength, resisted the enemy with contempt.'<sup>37</sup> The Greeks' zeal and resilience in battle was further steeled by the priests and priestesses of the temples rushing into their front ranks and urging them to attack the enemy with extra vigour and all their might, for Apollo, Athena, and Artemis had appeared

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<sup>34</sup> Flacelière suggests that this was due to the influence of the Aetolians, who vaunted and amplified their role in the saving of Delphi, and attributed a share of the glory to Athena and Artemis, who were their special deities: see Flacelière, 1937: 110ff.; 154.

<sup>35</sup> See Parke and Wormell, 1956b: 258.

<sup>36</sup> Just. *Epit.* 24.7.

<sup>37</sup> Just. *Epit.* 24.8.



and were leading them on to victory. Consequently, the Greeks incited by these exhortations, all rushed eagerly to the field of battle.

It must be noted that a very similar consultation of the Delphic Oracle by the Delphians took place *c.* 480 B.C. when they were facing the Persian invasion.<sup>38</sup> Herodotus tells us that the Delphians asked the god whether they should bury the sacred treasures or move them out of the country, to which he replied that they should not move them for he was well capable of guarding his own.<sup>39</sup> Herodotus then goes on to recount very similar supernatural phenomena to the ones just discussed that befell the Persians when they approached Delphi and how, as a result, the terrified Persians fled.<sup>40</sup> Parke is indeed quite correct in advocating caution about the narrative surrounding the Gallic invasion of 279 B.C. due to a desire in the sources to emphasise the parallelism between the attack of Xerxes and that of Brennos, which has led to an inflation of the Celts' numbers and virtually identical supernatural phenomena appearing in both cases.<sup>41</sup> However, that does not detract from the historicity or the importance of the oracle itself. Besides, supernatural phenomena aside, it seems only natural that the Delphians under threat of any invasion would want to consult the god on what to do with his treasures.

The key importance of this incident remains that the god's assurance of his protection clearly must have had a profound positive effect on the morale of the Greek defenders facing their Gallic invaders: had the Pythia not commanded the Delphians to remain, they would not have been there to defend the sanctuary in the first place or to take advantage of the phenomena, be it natural or perceived supernatural, that frightened and damaged the invaders and enabled them to repulse the attack. Furthermore, the deluge of omens and marvels that apparently took place must have been interpreted by the Delphians as conclusive proof that Apollo was defending his shrine as promised. It was certainly Pausanias' view that Delphic Apollo was true to his word

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<sup>38</sup> Hdt. 8.36.1-8.38.1; P-W 97; Fontenrose, Q149. See also Crahay, 1956: 333-336; Fontenrose, 1960: 198. Fontenrose states that, 'It is possible that contingents of both Persians and Gauls marched against Delphi and were defeated at the very gates of town and sanctuary. Certainly stories of the attacks were circulating about Hellas within a generation of the narrated events, although that certainty is no guarantee of historical truth in stories which mingle, as they do, the supernatural with the humanly and physically possible.'

<sup>39</sup> Hdt. 8.36.1. The notable difference on that occasion, however, was that they only asked about the treasures and not about the evacuation of women and children, hence why it has been omitted from the index of war oracles: see Appendix 1, *infra*, p. 347.

<sup>40</sup> Cf. *supra*, p. 120. For a discussion of the debate over whether there was an actual attack on Delphi by the Persians in 480 B.C., see Parke and Wormell, 1956b: 172-173. Parke and Wormell put forward a very plausible proposition that a marauding band of stragglers from the main Persian army may have attempted, in defiance of orders not to loot the temple, to raid the sanctuary for treasures, but that the raiders were subsequently repulsed following a skirmish at the temple of Athena Pronaea.

<sup>41</sup> Parke and Wormell, 1956b: 255.

and protected the Delphians from Brennos and the Gallic army, when he says ‘soon portents boding no good to the barbarians were sent by the god, the clearest recorded in history.’<sup>42</sup> It is likewise possible to argue that the Apollo’s promise to ‘guard his own’ in the oracle of 480 B.C. could have indirectly had a similar effect on the psychology of the sixty men who had decided to remain behind to defend the sanctuary after the evacuation of the city. The reassurance of knowing that the god would be protecting his own, was possibly enough to persuade them to stay and meant that they were then in a position to be able to exploit the phenomena that befell the Persians. Indeed, Herodotus describes how the men, when they saw the Persians fleeing, ‘came down upon them and attacked them with great slaughter.’<sup>43</sup> It is therefore another compelling illustration of an oracle affecting the psychology and decision-making of a city-state in a time of war.

## 2.4 Timoleon and Sicily

Another oracular episode that clearly had a positive effect on *polis* and troop morale before an expedition can be seen in Timoleon’s consultation of the Delphic Oracle prior to his expedition to Sicily in 345/4 B.C.<sup>44</sup> Plutarch gives an account of how Timoleon, on the eve of his proposed expedition, was told by the priestesses of Persephone in Corinth, that they had been visited in a dream by the goddesses Demeter and Persephone, who told them that they would be joining Timoleon on his voyage.<sup>45</sup> Subsequently, on the back of such a propitious revelation, the Corinthians fitted out a sacred trireme and dedicated it to the two goddesses. Even so, Timoleon still travelled to Delphi before he sailed for Sicily in order to offer sacrifice to Apollo. Whilst he was descending into the Pythia’s chamber, he received another resoundingly clear endorsement by the god for his endeavour when a votive offering wreath, which had crowns and figures of Nike embroidered on it, slipped down and fell directly on his head, which ‘thus gave the impression that he was being sent forth upon his enterprise crowned with success by the god.’<sup>46</sup> Understandably, Timoleon promptly set sail from Corinth for Sicily with seven ships under his command. Also, the expedition was apparently blessed with further omens of success en route. Plutarch tells us that during the voyage the fleet was carried by a favourable strong wind and that a flaming torch appeared in the sky above Timoleon’s ship and guided

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<sup>42</sup> Paus. 10.23.3

<sup>43</sup> Hdt. 8.38.

<sup>44</sup> Oracle no. 56: Plut. *Tim.* 8

<sup>45</sup> See also Diod. Sic. 16.66.3-5.

<sup>46</sup> Plut. *Tim.* 8.2.

them to their destination. This was seen as further affirmation that the goddesses were accompanying them on their expedition.<sup>47</sup> Timoleon and the Corinthians subsequently offered dedications at Delphi after their victory.<sup>48</sup>

If we are to believe Plutarch's account to be true and that the incident with the wreath took place, then such positive endorsement from the Delphic Oracle would surely have had a massive boost to Corinthian morale for the expedition. Indeed, as Parke and Wormell correctly assert, 'To set out thus crowned by the god was of course auspicious, and the rest of Timoleon's career shows that he was the man to heed and make full use of omens.'<sup>49</sup> Moreover, the dedication of the spoils of victory to the god at Delphi after the defeat of the Carthaginians on Sicily suggests once again that, in the eyes of Timoleon and the Corinthians, Delphic Apollo had played a key role in the expedition's success, or at the very least in encouraging them to embark upon the mission in the first place. On the other hand, if the story was a contemporary or later invention, then it is still revealing. If it was a contemporary fabrication, it is not beyond the reasonable boundaries of conjecture to speculate that a guileful Timoleon might, on a routine consultation before embarking upon a voyage, have invented the wreath incident with the sole purpose of instilling belief, optimism, and courage in his expeditionary force. If the story is a *post-eventum* invention, perhaps with the intention of Plutarch to prove once more the Delphic Oracle's omniscience and infallibility, it nevertheless illustrates how common and necessary the practice was in the minds of Plutarch's ancient Greek and Roman audience for military ventures to be given the divine seal of approval before being launched.<sup>50</sup> In this regard it can be argued to be very similar to Sparta's consultation of Delphi before the Peloponnesian War,<sup>51</sup> for it is clear that Corinth had already decided to go on the expedition and Timoleon

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<sup>47</sup> Cf. Dioskouroi at sea, *supra*, p. 121.

<sup>48</sup> For the dedications of victory by Timoleon and the Corinthians, see Plut. *Tim.* 29; Diod. Sic. 16.80.6; Pritchett, W. K., *The Greek State at War: Part II* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974) 96.

<sup>49</sup> Parke and Wormell, 1956b: 242.

<sup>50</sup> For discussion of Plutarch's bias to Delphi due to his service there as a priest, see Brenk, F. E., *In Mist Apparelled: Religious Themes in Plutarch's Moralia and Lives, Mnemosyne* (Lugduni Batavorum: Brill, 1977) 236-255; Brenk, F. E., *Relighting the Souls: Studies in Plutarch, in Greek Literature, Religion, and Philosophy, and in the New Testament Background* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1998) 129-130; Stadter, P. A., 'Plutarch: Diplomat for Delphi?', in De Blois, L. ed., *The Statesman in Plutarch's Works: Proceedings of the Sixth International Conference of the International Plutarch Society, Nijmegen, Castle Hernen, May 1-5, 2002* (Leiden, 2004) 19-31; Casanova, A., 'Plutarch as Apollo's Priest at Delphi', in Lanzillotta, L. R. and Gallarte, I. M. eds., *Plutarch in the Religious and Philosophical Discourse of Late Antiquity*, 2012) 151-158.

<sup>51</sup> *Q.v.* Oracle no. 41, *supra*. p. 59ff.

had been elected as *strategos* by the Corinthian assembly to lead the fleet,<sup>52</sup> yet he still felt the need to consult the Oracle for divine ratification before departing for Sicily.

## 2.5 Alexander and the Oracles

A series of three successive oracles received by Alexander between 333 and 331 B.C., while he was on his campaign of conquest against the Persian Empire, further demonstrates the psychological impact of oracular prophecies not only on Alexander himself and his Macedonian troops, but also on the peoples he intended to subjugate.<sup>53</sup>

### 2.5.1 Alexander and the Gordian knot

The first oracular incident of great import concerns Alexander's visit to Gordion, the capital of Phrygia, in the spring of 333 B.C.<sup>54</sup> According to several sources, there was an ancient wagon which stood within the temple of Zeus Basileus on the Akropolis of Gordion. An ancient oracle, which was known to the Phrygian people, prophesied that the man who would undo the knot attached to the yoke of the wagon would rule over all of Asia. Arrian, recounting Aristoboulos' account, states that when Alexander visited the temple, he took out the wooden pole pin that the cord was attached to, which exposed the ends and enabled him to undo the knot, thus fulfilling the prophecy.<sup>55</sup> Arrian also records an alternative version of Alexander's loosening of the Gordian knot, in which Alexander could not find a way to loosen the cord, but as he was unwilling to allow it remain unloosened in case it should have a disturbing effect upon the multitude, severed the cord with his sword, saying that it had been untied by him.<sup>56</sup> Tarn, however, has convincingly shown that the version of how Alexander solved the problem of the knot, as reported by Aristoboulos, is most likely the correct one, as opposed to the vulgate account, which has Alexander cutting the cord with his sword.<sup>57</sup> Furthermore, Arrian reports that on that night there was thunder and lightning, which Alexander took to be signs from

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<sup>52</sup> Plut. *Tim.* 3.1, 7.2; Diod. Sic. 16.65.8, 16.66.1; Pritchett, 1974: 95: Plutarch (*Tim.* 7.2) states that Timoleon was elected by the assembly, whereas Diodorus (16.65.8) states that it was by the Corinthian *synedrion*.

<sup>53</sup> For the important consultation of Delphi before the expedition, and the revealing psychological motivations behind it, which have already been discussed, see Oracle 58, *supra*, p. 63ff.

<sup>54</sup> Oracle no. 59: Arr. *Anab.* 2.3; Plut. *Alex.* 18.1-2; Curt. 3.1.11-17; Just. *Epit.* 11.7.3-16.

<sup>55</sup> Arr. *Anab.* 2.3.7.

<sup>56</sup> Arr. *Anab.* 2.3.7.

<sup>57</sup> Tarn, W. W., *Alexander the Great*, 2 vols., vol. II (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1948) 262ff.

Heaven of the fulfilment of the prophecy and divine confirmation that the knot had been untied properly.<sup>58</sup>

Justin asserts that the oracle was Alexander's main motive for coming to Gordion,<sup>59</sup> whereas Arrian, Plutarch, and Curtius Rufus state that his reasons for going to Phrygia and Gordion were strategic, and that he had not heard of the oracle prior to his arrival in Gordion.<sup>60</sup> Indeed, Arrian states that it was only after Alexander arrived at the city that he was 'seized with a longing' to ascend the Akropolis to see the wagon and the famous cornel bark knot,<sup>61</sup> while Curtius states that it was only when Alexander saw the wagon in the temple of Zeus and the local inhabitants told him of the prophecy that the desire to fulfil the oracle entered his mind.<sup>62</sup> Roller argues that it is likely that Justin's statement reflects later rationalising resulting from the fame of the incident, and that consequently the reasons of military strategy proposed by the other three sources is a more likely explanation for Alexander's visit to Gordion.<sup>63</sup> This is further supported by the fact that Gordion lay on the key transportation route between Sardis and the interior of Anatolia, and that its position has always held military importance throughout all periods of history, even up to present day.<sup>64</sup> It is Fredricksmeier's opinion, however, that Alexander most definitely knew of the Macedonian tradition about King Midas, son of Gordias, who had apparently migrated from Macedonia to Phrygia with his people and settled in Gordion in the late eighth century B.C., hence why he had such a strong desire to see the infamous wagon, and that he subsequently brought this intimate knowledge to bear upon the legend he learned at Gordion.<sup>65</sup>

Whether or not Alexander knew about the oracle beforehand does not really matter, however - what is of key importance is the fact that once he knew about the oracular prophecy he made absolutely sure he fulfilled it for powerful psychological reasons: to affirm to himself, his

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<sup>58</sup> Arr. *Anab.* 2.3.8. Cf. Curt. 3.2; Plut. *Alex.* 18.

<sup>59</sup> Just. 11.7.4.

<sup>60</sup> Arr. *Anab.* 1.24.1-4, 1.29.3-4, 2.3.1; Curt. 3.1.14-16.

<sup>61</sup> Arr. *Anab.* 2.3.1.

<sup>62</sup> Curt. 3.1.16-17.

<sup>63</sup> Roller, L. E., 'Midas and the Gordian Knot', *Classical Antiquity* 3, 2 (1984) 258. See also Bosworth, A. B., *A Historical Commentary on Arrian's History of Alexander*, 2 vols., vol. I (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980) 174-175.

<sup>64</sup> See Young, R. S., 'Gordion on the Royal Road', *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 107, 4 (1963) 348-364.

<sup>65</sup> See Fredricksmeier, E. A., 'Alexander, Midas, and the Oracle at Gordium', *Classical Philology* 56, 3 (1961) 160-168. For further discussion of the Phrygian and Macedonian traditions about Midas and the legend of the Gordian knot, and on the dates of Midas' migration and reign, see Fredricksmeier, 1961: 160-163; Roller, 1984: 256-271.

troops, and the Persian Empire that he was the man appointed by Zeus to conquer Asia. This affirmation was made even more potent with the knowledge that Midas, during his migration from Macedonia to Phrygia in the dim and distant past, would have brought with him the cults and gods of Macedonia, therefore to Alexander the fact the prophecy of lordship over Asia was made not by a Phrygian deity but by the actual Zeus of his homeland would have made a profound impression upon him.<sup>66</sup> The fact also that several sources suggest that he made absolutely sure that he undid the knot, even resorting to cutting it with a sword, out of concern that if he did not it would have a detrimental impact on the minds of the gathered masses, speaks volumes, too, about the psychological power of oracles. Indeed, Fredricksmeyer goes so far as to suggest that Alexander's fulfilment of the oracle at Gordion immediately forged his personal resolution to meet and realise his destiny as ruler over Asia.<sup>67</sup> Moreover, Fredricksmeyer also connects this oracle with Alexander's visit to Ammon at Siwa, suggesting that Alexander was perhaps seeking reassurance from Zeus Ammon of the promise made to him by Zeus Basileus at Gordion that he was indeed the one prophesied to conquer all of Asia. Fredricksmeyer intriguingly points to Alexander's great sacrifice to Zeus Basileus at Memphis shortly after the return from Siwa,<sup>68</sup> and just before his departure to face Darius in their decisive encounter, as possible evidence that the confirmation Alexander received from Ammon prompted the sacrifice to the god who had first promised him rule over Asia.<sup>69</sup>

### **2.5.2 Alexander and the Oracle of Zeus Ammon**

A particularly pertinent and undoubtedly the most famous oracular episode associated with Alexander, which illustrates the powerful influence of Oracles in terms of the psychological impact on *poleis* and the army, is Alexander's consultation of the Oracle of Ammon at Siwa before the Battle of Gaugamela.<sup>70</sup> Shortly after arriving in Egypt in 331 B.C., where he was welcomed as a liberator from Persian rule, Alexander decided to make a journey of around 300 miles to consult the Oracle of Zeus Ammon at the Oasis of Siwa in Libya. It appears from the sources that Alexander wished to consult the Oracle on three issues: to enquire about his empire and future military success; to discover if he had managed to kill all his father's murderers; and

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<sup>66</sup> Fredricksmeyer, 1961: 166.

<sup>67</sup> Fredricksmeyer, 1961: *op. cit.* Cf. Kypselos' desire to fulfil the Delphic prophecy which stated that the son of Eëtion would destroy the Bacchiadae. Herodotus (5.92e) states unequivocally 'Such was the prophecy which induced Kypselos to seize power [of Corinth].' See also P-W 6-9; Fontenrose, Q59-62.

<sup>68</sup> Arr. *Anab.* 3.5.2.

<sup>69</sup> Fredricksmeyer, 1961: *op. cit.*

<sup>70</sup> Oracle no. 60: Diod. Sic. 17.49-51; Strab. 17.1.43; Plut. *Alex.* 26-7; Arr. *Anab.* 3.3; Curt. 4.7.5-30; Just. *Epit.* 11.11.2-13.

to enquire about the possibility of his divine parentage. Arrian and Curtius Rufus particularly emphasise the latter as being his main motive for visiting the shrine. Both authors suggest that he wanted the shrine to officially endorse his claim to be a descendant of Herakles, and therefore verify that he was of the divine lineage of Zeus. On the other hand, Kallisthenes' original account of the visit only states that he wanted to emulate his ancestors, Perseus and Herakles, who had both visited the shrine.<sup>71</sup> It is probably safe to assume that he would have also wanted the Oracle's approval for the building of the city of Alexandria on the north coast of Egypt.<sup>72</sup> Strabo records that Alexander consulted the Oracles at Erythrai and Didyma in Asia Minor as well.<sup>73</sup>

The accounts of the visit from the different sources are not without considerable problems, but they do manage to agree on some vital points. One of the biggest problems when dealing with Alexander, of course, is sifting fact from fiction. Kallisthenes' fanciful account of the journey to the shrine has been severely criticised by both ancient and modern historians for being blatant flattery, but his account nevertheless was still the basis for the other histories that have survived. He records, for instance, how the caravan was saved from thirst by a deluge of rain, and how, when they were hit with a terrible sandstorm, which obliterated the landmarks in the desert, two crows came to their rescue and guided them safely to the oasis.<sup>74</sup> Although this romantic account is no doubt embellishment, and the divine aid in the desert was probably used by Kallisthenes to foreshadow Alexander's confirmation of divinity at the Oracle, there are still central truths in the story that should not be disregarded. As Bosworth points out, Kallisthenes' elaboration was built upon known features of the Libyan Desert, such as the southern sirocco, the unpredictable winter rainfall, and the presence of crows around oases in the Sahara.<sup>75</sup> Indeed all the sources, including the vulgate tradition, and even eyewitnesses, such as Ptolemy

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<sup>71</sup> Strab. 17.1.43.

<sup>72</sup> Pseudo-Kallisthenes (1.30) states that Alexander wanted Ammon's approval for founding Alexandria. There is, however, conflict between the sources on whether the foundation of Alexandria took place before or after the visit to Ammon. Arrian (*Anab.* 3.1.5-2.2) agrees with Plutarch (*Alex.* 26.4) that the foundation of Alexandria preceded the consultation at Ammon, whilst Curtius Rufus, Diodorus, and Justin state that it happened after. For arguments that the foundation took place before the visit to Siwa, see Green, P., *Alexander of Macedon, 356-323 B.C.: a Historical Biography*, Revised and enlarged [ed.] ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991) 271, 275-6; Lane Fox, R., *Alexander the Great* (London: Penguin, 2004) 198-200, 204-205. For arguments in favour of the view that the foundation took place after the Ammon consultation, see Welles, C. B., 'The Discovery of Sarapis and the Foundation of Alexandria', *Historia* 11, 3 (1962) 271-298; Bosworth, A. B., *Conquest and Empire: The Reign of Alexander the Great* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988) 72, 74; Cartledge, P., *Alexander the Great: The Hunt for a New Past*, 1st ed. (Woodstock: Overlook Press, 2004) 120, 151.

<sup>73</sup> Strab. 17.1.43.

<sup>74</sup> All the sources record the supernatural aid of the crows, with the exception of Ptolemy who replaces the corvine guides with two serpents: see Arr. *Anab.* 3.3.

<sup>75</sup> See Bosworth, 1988: 72.

and Aristoboulos, record the same difficulties in the desert. There is hope, therefore, that beyond the romance and legend the core of the tale is real and based on historical fact.

The general picture that emerges from Diodorus, Plutarch, Curtius, and Justin is that, as Alexander was approaching the shrine, the elderly high priest of Ammon greeted him as 'my son', which Alexander took to be confirmation of his divine heritage. He then proceeded to ask whether he had killed all his father's assassins, and whether he was fated to rule over the entire world, the answer to which for both questions was in the affirmative. His companions then consulted the Oracle to ask the god whether they should accord divine honours to Alexander, to which the priest replied that it would be agreeable to Zeus. Strabo, who berates Kallisthenes for his adulatory account, records simply that the priest told Alexander 'in express terms, that he was the son of Jupiter',<sup>76</sup> whereas Arrian just states that Alexander 'put his question to the Oracle and received (or so he said) the answer which his heart desired'.<sup>77</sup>

Parke urges caution regarding the tendency of the vulgate tradition to augment the enquiry, with the purpose of stressing Alexander's supernatural origins and his early ambitions for world domination. This predilection usually results in the address being merged into a dialogue with the prophet in order to make it in essence an oracular response.<sup>78</sup> Hence, for example, when Alexander enquires whether he has dealt with all of his father's murderers, the priest rebukes him and replies that his father is not mortal. Plutarch, on the other hand, and in the other extreme, tries to explain away the priest's address as a linguistic error and puts forward the very plausible theory that the priest, who wished as a mark of courtesy to address Alexander with the Greek phrase, '*paidion*' (my son), because of his foreign pronunciation said, '*pai Dios*' (son of Zeus).<sup>79</sup> Plutarch suggests that Alexander, delighted at this slip of the tongue, leapt upon the error and subsequently spread it around as a true oracle. Another possibility, which Parke proposes, is the supposition that the priest may have greeted Alexander as the 'son of Zeus' in accordance with Pharaonic tradition, which would clearly have had the same outcome.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> Strab. 17.1.43.

<sup>77</sup> Arr. *Anab.* 3.4.

<sup>78</sup> Parke, 1967: 226

<sup>79</sup> Plut. *Alex.* 27.5. See also Fontenrose, 1978: 339, *ap.* Q216.

<sup>80</sup> Parke, 1967: 226.



There is, therefore, a clear distinction between the prophet's spontaneous address to Alexander as he approached the shrine, and Alexander's actual enquiry and the Oracle's reply. On the latter, we have very little to go on from our sources, apart from Arrian's cursory comment that Alexander heard what he wanted to hear and then set off towards Egypt again, and Plutarch's reference to a letter from Alexander to his mother, Olympias, in which he said that he had received some secret oracles, which he would tell to her, and to her alone, on his return.<sup>81</sup> Kallisthenes gives no indication of the nature of the oracular enquiry or the response, which Parke believes was done deliberately and probably at the behest of Alexander.<sup>82</sup> However, although it is virtually impossible to discern what Alexander's exact enquiry was, Parke makes the convincing argument that it was most likely to enquire about the future success of his campaign against Persia.<sup>83</sup> Whether Alexander actually asked for counsel on his military objectives for Persia, or whether he simply asked for the god's approval of his plans, it appears that he received the positive answer he was looking for and left satisfied. This hypothesis is supported by the fact that six and a half years later, when Alexander had turned back from his furthest conquests, he offered sacrifices which he said had been commanded by the Oracle at Ammon to be carried out when he had become the ruler over Asia.<sup>84</sup> The relative silence from the sources on this oracle can therefore be explained by the fact that it was overshadowed by the furore surrounding Alexander being addressed as the 'son of Zeus', and which was the aspect stressed most by Kallisthenes in his role as the official historian of Alexander at that time.

As already touched upon above,<sup>85</sup> there is considerable debate amongst the sources as to the real intent of Alexander's visit to the Oracle at Ammon, especially with regards to the query over his divine bloodline. It is clear that one of the reasons why he would have consulted the Oracle was the common desire, as we have seen so many times before, to gain knowledge about future military success. However, writers such as Plutarch, Arrian, and Curtius suggest that his

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<sup>81</sup> Plut. *Alex.* 27.5.

<sup>82</sup> See Parke, 1967: 226.

<sup>83</sup> See Parke, 1967: 228-229.

<sup>84</sup> In August 325 B.C., according to Arrian (6.18.11-12), Alexander sacrificed to his ancestral gods and those gods designated by the Oracle: Poseidon, Amphitrite, the Nereids, Okeanos, the river Hydaspes, the Akesines, and the Indos; and instituted musical and athletic games, and victims for sacrifice were given to every regiment in the army. As far as we know Alexander never performed any sacrifices on the instructions of the Oracle before this point, and the fact that Alexander conducted the sacrifices on islands in one of the mouths of the Indos river when he had reached the southern ocean, before beginning the return journey to Babylon, suggests that he considered the conquest of Asia complete: see Fredricksmeyer, 1961: 167 n. 39.

<sup>85</sup> *Supra*, p. 152.

overarching aim was to have his divinity proven by one of the most important Oracles of the ancient world for military and political reasons. Curtius, for instance, states that Alexander was ‘goaded by an overwhelming desire to visit the temple of Jupiter – dissatisfied with elevation on the mortal level, he either considered, or wanted others to believe, that Jupiter was his ancestor.’<sup>86</sup> Whilst Arrian says, ‘he undertook this expedition with the deliberate purpose of obtaining more precise information on this subject – or at any rate to say that he had obtained it.’<sup>87</sup>

Therefore, if we accept both Curtius and Arrian’s reasoning, as I am strongly inclined to do, then it seems that, even if Alexander did not believe in his divinity himself, he felt it was hugely important to have others believe that he was the offspring of Zeus, in order to gain an advantage over his enemies. In fact, it appears that he believed so strongly in this stratagem that he may even have manipulated the Oracle to ensure he received the appropriate responses. Justin, for instance, claims that envoys were sent ahead of Alexander in order to obtain from the priests of Ammon ‘what answers he wished to receive’.<sup>88</sup>

Alexander’s hopes of receiving positive responses from Ammon would also have been aided by the fact that the North African states were already looking for help from a liberator. As Scott-Kilvert states: ‘The priests of Ammon had contact with those of Zeus in Greece, and since Egypt had become a vassal of Persia, prophecies had begun to look to the kingdoms of the north, Macedonia and Epirus, for the rise of a deliverer and universal ruler.’<sup>89</sup> Certainly, the obsequious reception Alexander received at Ammon did not go unnoticed by the ancient authors. Curtius, for example, states that in response to the question posed by Alexander to the Oracle on whether he was fated to rule over the entire world, the priest, ‘who was as ready as anyone else to flatter him, answered that he was going to rule over all the earth.’<sup>90</sup> In addition, he goes on to say, ‘Someone making a sound and honest judgment of the Oracle’s reliability might well have found these responses disingenuous.’<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>86</sup> Curt. 4.7.8.

<sup>87</sup> Arr. *Anab.* 3.3. For further discussion on Alexander’s motives for visiting the shrine, see Parke, 1967: 222-224.

<sup>88</sup> Just. *Epit.* 11.11.2-12.

<sup>89</sup> Plutarch, *The Age of Alexander*, translated by Ian Scott-Kilvert, with an introduction by G.T. Griffith (London, 1973) 283 n. 1.

<sup>90</sup> Curt. 4.7.26.

<sup>91</sup> Curt. 4.7.29.

It is possible that Alexander may have been seeking ratification from the Oracle with the foreknowledge that when he returned to Egypt to be crowned as Pharaoh at Thebes, he would be, as every other Pharaoh was, deemed to be the son of Ammon. However, both Arrian and Plutarch regard Alexander's consultation of Ammon as a political manoeuvre to overawe and subdue the people he aimed to conquer. This certainly is supported by the fact that Alexander 'adopted a haughty and majestic bearing towards the barbarians, as a man who was fully convinced of his divine birth and parentage, but towards the Greeks was more restrained.'<sup>92</sup> Furthermore, Plutarch states that 'Alexander did not allow himself to become vain or foolishly conceited because of his belief in his divinity, but rather used it to assert his authority over others.'<sup>93</sup> Likewise, Arrian states that 'Alexander's claim to a divine origin...may well have been a mere device to magnify his consequence in the eyes of his subjects.'<sup>94</sup> De Sélincourt, whilst acknowledging the validity of this view, does, however, argue that it also 'seems probable that Alexander believed that he was in some way son of Ammon.'<sup>95</sup>

Regardless of Alexander's motives for consulting the Oracle of Ammon, the episode reveals several crucial points. The trip itself, if we are to believe Diodorus' account, involved an arduous and hazardous nine-day crossing of the Libyan desert from Marsa Matruh on the north coast to the Oasis of Siwa,<sup>96</sup> and, perhaps most remarkably, took place at a time when Darius was readying his forces for the final confrontation with the Greeks. The fact that Alexander went to such trouble to consult the Oracle, taking six weeks out of his schedule at a crucial time and travelling several hundred miles across exacting terrain, shows once more the importance Oracles held in the ancient world and the considerable lengths generals would go to to obtain divine affirmation and sanction for their military aspirations and campaigns. As Fredrickmeyer succinctly asserts, his motives for doing so must have been compelling.<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>92</sup> Plut. *Alex.* 28.

<sup>93</sup> Plut. *Alex.* 28.6.

<sup>94</sup> Arr. *Anab.* 7.29.

<sup>95</sup> See de Sélincourt in Arrian, *The Campaigns of Alexander*, translated by Aubrey de Sélincourt, revised with a new introduction and notes by J.R. Hamilton (London, 1971) 153 n. 14. See also, Hamilton, J. R., 'Alexander and His 'So-Called' Father', *CQ* 3, 3/4 (1953) 151-157 on the significance of Alexander's letter to the Athenians (quoted in Plut. *Alex.* 28), in which he disowns Philip as his father, with the implication that Zeus is his real father. For further discussion of Alexander's genuine, and, in many ways in light of the traditions and beliefs of the ancient world, not unreasonable beliefs in his own divinity, see Fredrickmeyer, 2003: 270-278. For a comprehensive discussion of the motivations behind Alexander's consultation of the Oracle of Ammon, see Fredrickmeyer, E. A., 'Alexander, Zeus Ammon, and the Conquest of Asia', *TAPA* 121 (1991) 199-214.

<sup>96</sup> Curtius (4.7.5-15) is slightly vaguer, but his account states that the journey took at least six days. However, as discussed above, all the sources record the difficulties encountered on the journey.

<sup>97</sup> Fredrickmeyer, 1991: 199; Fredrickmeyer, 2003: 270. Cf. Cartledge, 2004: 121.

Whether or not Alexander sincerely believed in his own divinity, or whether it was manipulation and strategy, the fact remains that Alexander still thought that the Oracle's influence was such that it would hold sway over the masses. He certainly used the divine confirmation of his godhood to his advantage within a short space of time after obtaining it, when he used it to rouse the spirits of the Greek troops against the Persians at the Battle of Gaugamela in the autumn of 331 B.C. Plutarch records how Alexander, in his battlefield address to the Thessalians and the rest of the Greeks, 'called upon the gods and prayed that if he were really the son of Zeus they should protect and encourage the Greeks.'<sup>98</sup> This gesture, combined with a fortuitous eagle omen espied by the seer Aristander,<sup>99</sup> instantly inspired the Greek foot soldiers and cavalry who immediately charged with great vigour and routed the barbarian horde.<sup>100</sup>

### 2.5.3 *Alexander and the Oracle of Didyma*

A comparable psychological impact would have been generated by the Apolline Oracle of Didyma declaring that Alexander would be victorious at Arbela in 331 B.C.<sup>101</sup> According to Kallisthenes, after Miletos had been put under siege and liberated by Alexander in 334 B.C., the Milesians began to plan the revival of the Oracle of Didyma and the rebuilding of the temple, which had been destroyed around 160 years earlier, c. 494 B.C., by the Persians, and had remained inactive ever since.<sup>102</sup> Kallisthenes, cited by Strabo, states that on the renewal of the Oracle, the Milesians consulted it, and a series of oracles were uttered which declared that: Alexander was the son of Zeus; he would be victorious at Arbela; there would be revolution in Lakedaimon; and the details of King Darius' death were foretold. Consequently, the Milesian envoys brought these oracles to Alexander in Memphis.

Kallisthenes reports generally that the Milesian envoys took 'many' oracles to Memphis. These oracles were most likely spoken within a very short period, and were perhaps even multiple prophecies delivered during a single consultation.<sup>103</sup> Fontenrose certainly groups these oracles

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<sup>98</sup> Plut. *Alex.* 33.1.

<sup>99</sup> Plut. *Alex.* 33.2.

<sup>100</sup> Plut. *Alex.* 33.3.

<sup>101</sup> Oracle no. 61: Kallisthenes, 12.4.14aJ *ap.* Strab. 17.1.43 & 17.1.814; Fontenrose, D4.

<sup>102</sup> See Hdt. 6.18-21. *Cf.* Oracle no. 25: Zen. 5.80; Prov. Bodl. 776; Demon 327.16J *ap.* Schol. vet. *in* Aristoph. *Plut.* 1002; Schol. vet. on Aristoph. *Plut.* 1002; Diod. Sic. 10.25.2; Schol. vet. on Aristoph. *Plut.* 1075; *Suda*, H572; Fontenrose, D40; *infra*, p. 217.

<sup>103</sup> See Fontenrose, 1988: 181.

together as a single pronouncement and indeed classifies them as ‘historical’ and genuine in part. Indeed, it is extremely likely that Didyma proclaimed Alexander as the son of Zeus in gratitude for his liberation of Miletos and the revival of the Oracle. The other predictions, Fontenrose believes, were likely *post eventum*, although he does admit that the prophecy about Alexander’s victory over the Persians may have been genuine.<sup>104</sup> However, there is no need to believe that any of the prophecies were made *post eventum*. Even with a cynical eye, one can suppose that the prophecies were fairly safe predictions for the *prophētis* and her attendant ministers to make: Alexander’s victory over the Persians must have looked inevitable and was thus a prudent prediction to venture; Darius’ death was inexorable, and a vague prediction about the time and place would not have been difficult to make; and it is also very possible that news of Sparta’s revolt against Macedonia may have reached Didyma and they were therefore passing on the information to Alexander. The prediction that the victory over the Persians would take place at Arbela, however, would surely have been too much of a stretch for the *promantis* and her aides. This may have been, therefore, an association of the oracle with the victory at Arbela on Kallisthenes’ part.<sup>105</sup>

Although we do not know for certain the effect these oracles had on Alexander and his troops, we must surely assume that they could only have been positive and morale-boosting. Alexander was told he was the son of Zeus and that he would be victorious over the Persians, and he would have undoubtedly used these prognostications to his advantage, as seen with his use of the oracle given to him by the Oracle of Ammon at the Battle of Gaugamela.<sup>106</sup> Indeed, the Oracle of Didyma was the first to recognise Alexander as Zeus’s son.<sup>107</sup> This oracular episode also reveals, however, the political nature of Oracles at times; in this instance lauding Alexander with praise and positive prophecies in order to gain favour and protection, or perhaps simply to secure freedom to be left alone.

## 2.6 Agesilaos and Agesipolis

Two war oracles concerning the Spartan kings, Agesilaos and Agesipolis, provide further evidence of the positive psychological effect and reassurance the affirmation from an Oracle

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<sup>104</sup> See Fontenrose, 1978: 420.

<sup>105</sup> See Fontenrose, 1988: 15-16, 89.

<sup>106</sup> Q.v. see Oracle no. 60, *supra*, p. 158.

<sup>107</sup> Fontenrose, 1988: 168.

could provide *strategoi* and *poleis* with before embarking upon a war or military campaign. However, on a subtler level they also illustrate the psychological need for *strategoi* and *poleis* to obtain divine sanction for their military and foreign policy decisions in order to establish a clear *ius ad bellum* and to convince the citizenry and soldiery unequivocally that their cause is a moral one.

According to Plutarch, before embarking on an expedition to Asia Minor in 396 B.C. to come to the aid of the Asiatic Greeks against their Persian overlords, Agesilaos consulted the Oracle of Zeus at Dodona for divine sanction and to enquire of the expedition's chance of success.<sup>108</sup> The Oracle subsequently told him to go to Asia, and Agesilaos reported this back to the ephors at Sparta. Upon hearing the oracle, however, the ephors told Agesilaos to go and ask the same question of the Oracle at Delphi. Accordingly, Agesilaos asked the Pythia, 'Apollo, are you of the same opinion as your father?', to which Apollo concurred and Agesilaos thus began the campaign, content in the knowledge that he had obtained the divine approval of both Zeus and Apollo for the military venture.

Once again we see the seemingly ubiquitous practice of a Greek *polis* consulting an Oracle for divine consent and counsel on the likelihood of success before launching a military campaign. However, what is particularly noteworthy in this instance, in a similar vein to the Athenians and the Sicilian expedition discussed below,<sup>109</sup> is the consultation of more than one major Oracle when embarking upon a campaign of exceptional importance, on a considerably larger scale and greater distance from the *polis* than was usual.

It should be noted that a very similar story is recorded by Xenophon below relating to Agesipolis and as a result it is assumed by many historians that Plutarch most likely made a mistake and incorrectly assigned the oracles of Agesipolis to Agesilaos.<sup>110</sup> However, Pritchett argues that there are significant differences in the two accounts, such as the oracular shrines involved and the specific nature of the questions asked of the gods, and, moreover, that 'it seems highly unlikely that Sparta would have undertaken such a major invasion without the usual question (εἰ νικήσουσιν) to the Oracles.'<sup>111</sup>

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<sup>108</sup> Oracle no. 47: Plut. *Mor.* 191B & 209A. See also Plut. *Lys.* 23 & *Ages.* 15.

<sup>109</sup> Oracle no. 43, *infra*, p. 246.

<sup>110</sup> See Amandry, 1950: 158 n.1; and Parke and Wormell, 1956c: 75. For the oracle of Agesipolis, see Oracle no. 48, *infra*, p. 161.

<sup>111</sup> Pritchett, 1979: 314.

In the similar account related by Xenophon, it is Agesipolis who consults two separate Oracles before launching an invasion of Argos in 388 B.C.<sup>112</sup> According to Xenophon, after Agesipolis had made the necessary sacrifices and received favourable omens at the frontier, he personally consulted the Oracle of Zeus at Olympia in order to ask the god whether he would be acting righteously if he refused to acknowledge the holy truce being proffered by the Argives. It was Agesipolis' argument that the truce was false, as the Argives conveniently made a habit of claiming that it was festival time whenever a Lakedaimonian army threatened to invade their territory.<sup>113</sup> The Oracle at Olympia replied that 'it was in accordance with his religious duties not to accept a truce which had been offered in a dishonest manner.' To confirm this, Agesipolis then went straight to Delphi and asked Apollo: 'Is your opinion as to the truce the same as that of your father?'. Apollo answered in the affirmative that he most certainly did. Agesipolis thereupon promptly invaded Argos.

Once again this example is important in illustrating the consultation of more than one Oracle on a particularly important military issue. It appears that whenever there was considerable trepidation or uncertainty involved, whether it be because of the scale or remoteness of the undertaking, or, as in this case, significant doubt over the religious rectitude of the campaign, the advice of a solitary Oracle was not considered enough to give *poleis* or *strategoï* the level of assurance they required.<sup>114</sup>

Furthermore, the fact that the entire Spartan army was delayed for several days whilst it waited on the counsel and guidance of the gods, demonstrates the importance of the Oracle in the decision-making process and how vital an Oracle's affirmation and advice was to the operation of military campaigns. As Pritchett states: 'It is an impressive fact for the modern scholar seeking to recover the religious convictions of the Greek soldiers that the entire Lakedaimonian

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<sup>112</sup> Oracle no. 48: Xen. *Hell.* 4.7.2; Arist. *Rh.* 2.23.1398b; P-W 175; Fontenrose, H13.

<sup>113</sup> Because the calendars of different Greek city-states varied so much, it was not uncommon to manipulate religious festivals to their advantage as and when circumstances dictated. Certainly, the practice, such as the one alleged here, of shifting the times of a religious festival to stave off an impending invasion, was not difficult or unusual. Cf. Xen. *Hell.* 4.2.16 and Thuc. 5.54.

<sup>114</sup> Cf. the multiple oracle consultations of Croesus (Oracle no. 19, *infra*, p. 248), Mardonius before Plataea (Oracle no. 35, *infra*, p. 233), Agesilaos before his expedition to Asia Minor (Oracle no. 47, *supra*, p. 160), and Epaminondas before Leuktra (Oracle no. 51, *infra*, p. 181).

army could be detained for several days in neutral territory, provisioning itself as best as it could, while it awaited the decisions of Zeus and his son.’<sup>115</sup>

## 2.7 Non-historical examples

### 2.7.1 Athens and the Amazons

Analogous oracular prophecies providing positive affirmation and the inherent psychological benefits for *poleis* and their armies are also recorded in the legendary oracles. Macrobius, for instance, tells us that during Theseus’ reign, the Athenians sent to Delphi to petition the god for his assistance in their forthcoming war with the Amazons.<sup>116</sup> The Pythia responded by instructing the Athenians to invoke Apollo on the battlefield with the cry ‘ἕ Παϊάν’. Clearly the god’s response that he himself would personally help them if they summoned him during combat with the cry, ‘*Hie Paian*’, would have most certainly provided the Athenians with a major psychological boost before the battle.

### 2.7.2 Agamemnon and Troy

A similar psychological boost to both *poleis* and their armies would have been conferred by the Delphic Oracle’s prognostication to Agamemnon that the Akhaians would eventually be victorious against the Trojans in their forthcoming war.<sup>117</sup> Through Demodokos’ song we are told that the Oracle informed Agamemnon that he would finally take Ilium when the noblest of the Akhaians would quarrel. The prophecy was fulfilled, when at a sacrificial feast, the Akhaian captains Odysseus and Achilles had a war of words, which gave Agamemnon great heart knowing that this signalled the final victory over the Trojans.<sup>118</sup>

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<sup>115</sup> Pritchett, 1979: 315.

<sup>116</sup> Oracle no. N3: Macrob. *Sat.* 1.17.18; P-W 533; Fontenrose, L129; *supra*, p. 107. According to the legend, the Attic War was supposedly caused by Theseus’ abduction of Antiope during Herakles’ ninth labour to bring Eurystheus the girdle of Hippolyte. For the story and several variations of the myth, see: Apollod. *Bibl. Epit.* 4.1.16; Diod. Sic. 4.16; Hyg. *Fab.* 30; Paus. 1.2.1; Plut. *Theseus*, 26-27; Hyg. *Fab.* 241; Ov. *Her.* 117-120; Eur. *Hipp.*; Athenaeus, *Deipnosophistae*, 13.557; Just. *Epit.* 2.4.

<sup>117</sup> Oracle no. N10: Hom. *Od.* 8.78-81; Strab. 9.3.2; Schol. on Hom. *Od.* 8.75, 77, 80; Eust. *Od.* 8.73; Tzetz. *Exeg. II*; P-W 19; Fontenrose, L1. This date is derived from the traditional dates given by Eratosthenes for the Trojan War, 1194–1184 B.C., which roughly corresponds with archaeological evidence of a catastrophic burning of Troy VIIa: see Möller, A., ‘Epoch-making Eratosthenes’, *Greek, Roman and Byzantine Studies* 45 (2005) 245-260; and Wood, M., *In Search of the Trojan War* (London: BBC Books, 2005) 116-118.

<sup>118</sup> See Fontenrose, 1978: 4, 20, 91.



In the *Iliad*, there is no mention of Agamemnon's consultation of Delphi. Instead, the *Iliad* simply tells us that Agamemnon gathered his forces at Aulis on his own authority, and then made sacrifices to the gods and paid heed to omens and to the seer Kalchas. Originally, the legends of Orestes, Alkmaion, Herakles and the Trojan War had no oracles to begin with in their basic plots, but were later embellished with prophecies or oracular commands, which eventually acquired a Delphic attribution in some versions. In this case it is the first appearance of the Delphic Oracle in the Trojan legend, although it cannot have emerged much earlier than 700 B.C.<sup>119</sup> Nevertheless, this episode reveals once more the routine practice of generals and/or city-states consulting the Oracle on the eve of a campaign. In this instance the allied Greek commander-in-chief, Agamemnon, received a morale-boosting, crystal-clear prognostication that the Akhaians would come out as the eventual victors in the war, along, perhaps, with the implicit and comforting knowledge that if it had been ordained by the gods that the Akhaians would win, then they must surely have also had the divine support of Zeus himself.

So too, then, would the Pythia's prophecy to Achilles, that the Akhaians would defeat Troy in the tenth year of the war, have given the allied Greeks heart before launching their invasion, albeit with the knowledge that their struggle was going to be a long and arduous one, but also ultimately successful.<sup>120</sup> Dares Phrygius' *History of the Fall of Troy* records an oracular consultation by Akhaian envoys, led by Achilles, on the eve of the expedition to Troy.<sup>121</sup> According to Dares, when all the Greek leaders had assembled at Athens, Agamemnon called the leaders to council and advised them that they should consult the Oracle of Apollo at Delphi regarding their proposed campaign. The council agreed unanimously and appointed Achilles to be in charge of this mission. When Achilles consulted the Oracle about the war, the Pythia prophesied that the Hellenes would conquer and capture Troy in the tenth year.

Dares also tells that when Achilles was at the shrine, the seer Kalchas arrived at the same time and consulted the Oracle on behalf of his people, the Phrygians, and of himself. In response to

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<sup>119</sup> See Fontenrose, 1978: 117-118.

<sup>120</sup> Oracle no. N13: Dares Phrygius, *Exc. Tr.* 15; Schol. vet. on Lycoph. 200; Hom. *Il.* 3.28-329; Ov. *Met.* 12.19-21; Cic. *Div.* 2.30.64; Apollod. *Epit.* 3.15; *Kypria ap. Procl. Chrest.* 1, p. 104 Allen; Lycoph. *Alex.* 202-203; P-W 505; Fontenrose, L122. See also P-W 506; Fontenrose, F8.

<sup>121</sup> Dares of Phrygia's *History of the Fall of Troy* is purportedly a first-hand, pre-Homeric account of the Trojan War by Dares, a Trojan priest of Hephaistos in the *Iliad*: Hom. *Il.* 5.9; Ael. *VH.* 11.2. The short prose work was a later Roman construct, probably dating to the late fifth or early 6<sup>th</sup> century A.D. The prefatory letter from Sallust to Cornelius Nepos, which attributes the Latin translation to the latter, is also a forgery. However, the work was much read in the Middle Ages. See Hornblower and Spawforth, 2003: *ap.* Dares of Phrygia, p. 430; Beschorner, A., *Untersuchungen zu Dares Phrygius* (Tübingen: Narr, 1992).

his enquiry, the Pythia declared that the Greeks would sail against Troy and would continue their siege until they had captured it, and that he would go with them and give them advice. As a result, when Achilles and Kalchas met in the temple and compared their responses, they rejoiced in each other's friendship and set out for Athens together. Subsequently, when Achilles made his report to the council in Athens, the Greeks were delighted and they promptly embraced Kalchas as one of their own.

Fontenrose argues correctly that this is a good example of a well-known prophecy spoken by an individual seer that in later times became attributed by certain authors to the Delphic Oracle. Whilst Dares and the Scholiast on Lykophron make this a prognostication spoken to Achilles by the Pythia at Delphi, the Kypria, Apollodorus, Ovid, and Cicero, who all rely upon Homer's *Iliad*, record that it was Kalchas' prophecy in response to the omen of the snake and the nine sparrows, which appeared at Aulis as the Akhaians made sacrifice upon the altar to appease Artemis and enable their ships to continue to Troy. Dares' story, therefore, of Kalchas being a Phrygian ally of the Trojans, who became a seer for the Greeks on the advice of the Delphic Oracle is entirely fictional, invented for narrative purposes.<sup>122</sup>

Nonetheless, the legend still reveals, in terms of what its audience expected as normal, the habitual custom of both *poleis* and individuals consulting an Oracle before a military venture. Furthermore, we see here once more the Oracle having an input into the forging of alliances, as in this case, even if it is a later invention, Kalchas is told to go with the Greeks and help them with his skill. We see clearly also the psychological boost the Oracle's response has on the Akhaians when Achilles passes on the extremely positive news that they will be ultimately victorious against the Trojans in the tenth year of war.

In addition, an inscription of Delphi records another response given to Agamemnon when he consulted the Pythia on the eve of the Trojan War.<sup>123</sup> Although the question has not been preserved, the Pythia's response was as follows:

Take care that you do not in folly enter Mysia and receive harm from a Hellene of foreign speech. You will avoid harm if you sacrifice to Dionysos Sphaleotas the Mysian where you entered the temple in Pytho to hear Apollo's voice from the *adyton*.<sup>124</sup>

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<sup>122</sup> See Fontenrose, 1978: 414.

<sup>123</sup> Inscription of Delphi, *Rev. Arch.* ser. 6, 19 (1942) 119-120; 20 (1943) 21-24; *Klio* 15 (1918) 48, no. 68; Schol. vet. on Lyk. 204; P-W 408; Fontenrose, L100.

<sup>124</sup> trans. Joseph Fontenrose (*The Delphic Oracle*).

This is an alternative response to the one already discussed above given to Agamemnon by the Delphic Oracle when he sought advice on the proposed war against Troy. Although in this instance the oracular response did not contain any indication of success or failure, the fact that it warned Agamemnon on how to avoid personal injury, would have naturally led Agamemnon to believe that he had the implicit support of the god to proceed. Moreover, as the Oracle did not warn of any greater danger with regards to the overall campaign, Agamemnon could have taken it to mean that the Akhaian campaign would be successful. Either way, it still illustrates the routine nature of commanders consulting Oracles before military expeditions and being given positive affirmation by the god and a positive boost to morale long before first blood was drawn in battle.<sup>125</sup>

### 2.7.3 *The Boiotians and Aiolis*

A particularly illuminating legendary episode, which clearly reveals the positive effects that oracular prophecies could have on *polis* and army morale during a war, concerns the Boiotian invasion of Thessalian Aiolis. According to Demon, preserved in a fragment of Didymos' commentary on Demosthenes, after the Boiotians had driven out the native Aiolians from their land, they were under constant attack from the marauding Aiolians and their crops were being continually razed, and as a consequence they decided to consult the Delphic Oracle on whether they should stay in Thessaly or flee and look for another country to live in.<sup>126</sup> The Pythia responded by decreeing that white ravens would be seen before the Boiotians would be ejected from that land. In a variation of the episode, the Pythia apparently told the Boiotians that they should settle where the white ravens appeared.<sup>127</sup>

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<sup>125</sup> Cf. Menelaos' consultation of the Delphic Oracle before the Trojan expedition. Ephorus tells us that at the beginning of the war with Troy, Menelaos consulted the Pythia at Delphi about how he could punish Paris for stealing his wife, Helen. Apollo responded by commanding Menelaos to bring him the necklace that Aphrodite gave Helen. See Oracle no. N12: Ephorus/Demophilos 70.96J *ap.* Ath. 232f.; Demetrios Phal. 228.32J *ap.* Schol. *et.* Eust., p. 1466 in Od. 3.267; P-W 236/404; Fontenrose, L56; Smith, W. and Marindin, G. E., *A Classical Dictionary of Greek and Roman Biography, Mythology and Geography*, 4th ed. (London: J. Murray, 1894) *ap.* Menelaos.

<sup>126</sup> Oracle no. N14: Demon 327.7J *ap.* Didym. *Dem. Comm.* 12.9-11; Paus. *Att. ap.* Eust. *Od.* 13.408, p. 1746; Phot. *Lex.* 1.215 Naber; Zen. 3.87; Schol. *vet.* on Aristoph. *Pl.* 604; Suda E3154; Apost. 7.96; Diod. Sic. 19.53.8; Schol. on Clem. Al. *Protr.* 9P; P-W 309; Fontenrose, L75.

<sup>127</sup> Paus. *Att. ap.* Eust. *Od.* 13.408, p. 1746; Phot. *Lex.* 1.215 Naber; Zen. 3.87; Schol. *vet.* on Aristoph. *Pl.* 604; Suda E3154; Apost. 7.96. According to Diodorus (19.53.7-8) this took place four generations after the Thebans had gone to Asia for the Trojan War.

This is yet another example of a *polis* approaching an Oracle for guidance during a military conflict. However, more importantly, in Demon's version the Boiotians clearly obtain a great psychological boost from the Delphic Oracle's response to their enquiry. Demon states that upon hearing the god's pronouncement, the Boiotians, 'took great heart at his response and eagerly convened the [...] assembly.' (θαρρήσαντες ἐπὶ τ[ῶ]ι χρησμῶι τὴν ν[...]ν ἀγορὰν ἐντόνωσ συνῆγον).<sup>128</sup> It was presumably the improbability of such a rare thing as white ravens appearing which gave the Boiotians the impression that the Oracle had prophesied victory for them in their current conflict and provided them with a much-needed fillip. It is also interesting to note that this is another example of a conditional prediction issued by the Delphic Oracle, similar to the oracular tale of Agamemnon discussed above, where he is told that his army will be victorious when the best of the Akhaians quarrel.<sup>129</sup>

That being said, although the Boiotians interpreted the oracle as a positive prognostication, there also looms ominously above the heads of the Boiotians the menacing threat that at some point in the future they will lose the country to the Aiolians and have to settle elsewhere when an event out of their control, that is the appearance of the white ravens, occurs.<sup>130</sup> It is strange that the Boiotians did not seem to be very perturbed by this more negative part of the oracle, but it does once again illustrate the power of interpretation in the hands of the ancient Greeks. Demon's account also suggests, of course, that when the condition of the white ravens was finally realised it would have the inverse effect on Boiotian morale as it had initially in the short term. Indeed, the negative psychological effects that this doom-laden condition would eventually have on the Boiotians is amply illustrated by the drunken prank some Boiotian youths played directly after the oracle was received, whereby they caught some crows and covered them in chalk and let them loose to fly.<sup>131</sup> Didymos crucially records that the practical joke caused widespread panic among the Boiotians who believed that the oracle had been fulfilled.<sup>132</sup> The drunken youths paid dearly for the hoax and were sent into exile (or fled) to an area beside the gulf of Pagasai. Didymos also goes on to relate how, later, when the Boiotians were in a state of disarray, 'the Aiolians fell upon them and drove them out and took

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<sup>128</sup> Demon 327.7J *ap.* Didym. *Dem. Comm.* 12.9-1: see Didymos, *Didymos on Demosthenes*, edited with a translation by Philip Harding (Oxford, 2005) 85-86.

<sup>129</sup> *Q.v.* Oracle no. N10, *supra*, p. 162.

<sup>130</sup> It is also interesting to note once again Delphic Apollo using ravens as animal guides to show the Boiotians the location of their new home: *cf.* Theseus' bones on Skyros, Oracle no. 37, *supra*, p. 70ff.

<sup>131</sup> Didym. *Dem. Comm.* 12.12-15.

<sup>132</sup> Didym. *Dem. Comm.* 12.16-22. See also Harding's commentary on this passage: Harding, 2005: 231.

back the land.’<sup>133</sup> Although it is not explicit, Demon’s account as told by Didymos seems to suggest that it could have been the later fulfilment of the white ravens prophecy, which threw the Boiotians into dismay and disorder and helped the Aiolians to victory.

#### 2.7.4 *Jason and the Argonauts*

The same positive psychological effects of divine sanction and positive encouragement from the Oracle can be seen in the myths surrounding Jason’s expedition to Kolchis to retrieve the Golden Fleece. According to Apollonius Rhodius’ *Argonautica*, Jason consulted the Delphic Oracle after Pelias requested that he go on the quest to bring back the infamous treasure.<sup>134</sup> The Pythia’s response was that he should sail for the fleece, taking with him all the best men of Hellas, and, furthermore, that Apollo would show him the way over the sea if he began the voyage by making sacrifices to him. He was also told by the Oracle that he would be given two tripods by Apollo and that in whoever’s land Jason set the tripods up in, its people would never be uprooted by enemies. A final proclamation stated that the gods would make a clod of earth thrown into the sea an island, where Euphemos’ descendants would live.

The original oracle of the legend, as Apollodorus records, appears to have been simply the approval of Jason’s quest and the command to assemble the leading nobles of Greece. We must assume, therefore, that the additional oracular pronouncements were added by Apollonius for narrative purposes of his tale. Fontenrose even suggests that in the earliest form of the legend, Jason readily undertook the quest at Pelias’ suggestion without needing oracular approval; although Fontenrose does not explain how he comes to that conclusion.<sup>135</sup>

However, in the version recorded by the first-century A.D. poet, Valerius Flaccus, when Jason consulted the Delphic Oracle about his intention to go after the Golden Fleece, he was informed that the greatest warrior of their band would be held back by fate and Zeus’s command before they would reach the clashing rocks.<sup>136</sup> This oracular prognostication must surely be seen as a further addition to the other pronouncements recorded by Apollonius, which were given to Jason when he first sought counsel for his proposed campaign to get the fleece.

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<sup>133</sup> Didym. *Dem. Comm.* 12.25-28.

<sup>134</sup> Oracle no. N5: Ap. Rhod. *Argon.* 1.209-210, 1.301-302, 1.361-362, 1.413-414, 4.529, 4.532-533, 4.1750-1752; Schol. vet. on *Arg.* 4.532; Apollod. 1.9.16; P-W 399; Fontenrose, L96.

<sup>135</sup> See Fontenrose, 1978: 390.

<sup>136</sup> Oracle no. N6: Val. Flacc. *Arg.* 3.619-621; P-W 403; Fontenrose, L97.

The oracular tales concerning Jason's quest to retrieve the Golden Fleece reveal once more the need for commanders embarking upon a military campaign to obtain divine sanction for their plans; in all of the accounts by Apollonius, Apollodorus, and Valerius Flaccus, Jason clearly follows protocol and does this. Moreover, we must also assume that the approval of the god for the voyage would have given Jason a much easier task of assembling willing volunteers for the voyage, as well as boosting the Argonauts' hopes of success. Indeed, in Apollonius' poem, Jason comforts his distraught mother, Alkimedea, by telling her not to worry for his safety as 'the oracles of Phoibos could hardly have been more propitious.'<sup>137</sup>

### 2.7.5 *Herakles and the Dryopes*

Finally, an oracular tale recounted by Pausanias regarding Herakles' war with the Dryopes adds further evidence of the belief in the power of the Oracles to boost morale and provide encouragement to *poleis* and armies in times of war. According to Pausanias, after Herakles had conquered the Dryopes, he took them to Delphi as an offering to Apollo for his victory, whereupon he was told by the Oracle to take the captive Dryopes to the Peloponnese.<sup>138</sup> Herakles obediently did so and the Dryopes subsequently settled in Asine and then later Messenia. Thus, in a similar way to the Phokians' act of dedicating spoils to Delphi after their historical war against the Thessalians,<sup>139</sup> the fact that Herakles took the captive Dryopes to Delphi in dedication for his victory, implies that Delphi must have been involved in giving Herakles advice on the war at some point (most likely at the start of the conflict as we can see below in Herakles' campaign against Pisaia),<sup>140</sup> and that Herakles believed that Delphic Apollo's positive affirmation, guidance, and support had aided him in his victory.

## 3. **Deliberate fulfilment of a conditioned prognostication: effects on battlefield tactics and psychology**

There is a wealth of other war oracles that contain within them the promise of victory to the consultants if they fulfil certain stipulated conditions.<sup>141</sup> As a consequence, the conscious fulfilment of these conditions would clearly have had an extremely positive impact upon *polis* and troop morale before embarking upon war or during a conflict.

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<sup>137</sup> Ap. Rhod. *Argon.* 1.302-303.

<sup>138</sup> Oracle N4: Paus. 4.34.9; Strab. 8.6.13; Ap. Rhod. *Argon.* 1.1207 ff.; P-W 448; Fontenrose, L112.

<sup>139</sup> Q.v. Oracle no. 26, *supra*, p. 142.

<sup>140</sup> Q.v. Oracle no. N7, *infra*, p. 202.

<sup>141</sup> For a further discussion of conditional predictions, see Fontenrose, 1978: 20-21.

An insight into just how powerful the fulfilment of a war oracle could be on troop and *polis* psychology can be gleaned from the various examples we have of *stratego*i and *poleis* attempting to deliberately fulfil an oracular prognostication in the earnest hope of bringing about that which had been foretold, or with the intent to seriously damage enemy morale whilst boosting their own; indeed, the two are inextricably linked.

On several occasions, the Oracle delivers a conditioned prophecy concerning a forthcoming war or battle, which then has a significant impact on military decision-making on the battlefield during the conflict, such as the selection of terrain, the siting of troops, or the execution of certain stratagems and tactics advocated by the Oracle. Moreover, in most instances it is clear from the ancient authors' point of view that the fulfilment of the Oracle's directives has a direct impact upon troop psychology and that the fulfilment of the oracle's words leads directly to victory.

### 3.1 Aristeides and Plataea

One of the most striking examples concerns the Athenians during the Persian Wars. The Athenians in this instance gained a substantial lift to their spirits and self-belief before the Battle of Plataea, when they were promised victory against the Persians by the Delphic Oracle if they made the correct sacrifices to certain gods and fought the battle on a predetermined spot on the plain of Demeter Eleusinia and Kore.<sup>142</sup> At this point in time Aristeides, the son of Lysimachus, had been re-elected *strategos* of the Athenian army once more in 479 B.C and had been put in command of the Athenian forces at Plataea.<sup>143</sup> According to both Herodotus and Plutarch, before the battle commenced the seer Tisamenos of Elis delivered a prophecy to Pausanias and the whole of the allied Greek force that they would be victorious providing they did not advance to the attack, but instead stayed on the defensive.<sup>144</sup> However, Plutarch goes on to record that Aristeides subsequently sent envoys to Delphi to consult Apollo, who responded by prophesying that the Athenians would overcome their adversaries if they prayed to Zeus, Hera Kithaironia, and Pan and the Sphragitic nymphs; sacrificed to the heroes

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<sup>142</sup> Oracle no. 36: Plut. *Arist.* 11.3; Plut. *Mor.* 628f; Clem. Alex. Protr. 35P; P-W 102; Fontenrose, Q154.

<sup>143</sup> See Plut. *Arist.* 11.3; Hdt. 9.28.6. Aristeides had previously been appointed as *strategos* in command of his native tribe, Antiochis, at the Battle of Marathon.

<sup>144</sup> Hdt. 9.36; Plut. *Arist.* 11.2.

Androkrates, Leukon, Peisandros, Damokrates, Hypsion, Aktaion, and Polyeidios; and they fought the battle on their own territory on the plain of Demeter Eleusinia and Kore.<sup>145</sup>

When the oracle was reported back to Aristeides he was at first bewildered, as the heroes to whom he had been ordered to sacrifice were clearly the founders of Plataea, and the cave of the nymphs of Sphragis was situated on one of the peaks of Mount Kithairon, yet the reference to the plain of Demeter of Eleusis, and the promise of victory if they fought the battle on their own soil, seemed to be directing them back to Attica and to transfer the seat of the war there. However, the true meaning of the oracle was revealed, when the Plataean commander, Arimnestos, had a dream in which he was questioned by Zeus Soter as to what the Greeks had decided to do, and when Arimnestos replied that they had decided to return to Eleusis in Attica and fight the Persians there as Delphic Apollo had commanded, Zeus declared that they had misinterpreted the meaning of the oracle and that all of the places that had been mentioned were in the neighbourhood of Plataea, but they would have to look for them. Consequently, when Arimnestos awoke he gathered some men and soon discovered that under Mount Kithairon, near Hysiae, there was an ancient temple dedicated to the Eleusinian goddesses, Demeter and Kore. Upon discovering this, Arimnestos took Aristeides to the spot, and it was soon determined that the area offered an excellent position for heavy infantry to defend against a force with superior cavalry, as the spurs of Mount Kithairon, where they adjoined the temple and ran down to the plain, made the ground impassable for cavalry. Furthermore, it was also discovered that the shrine of the hero Androkrates stood close by too in the midst of a thick grove of trees. Finally, to make sure that all the conditions of the oracle were fulfilled, Arimnestos proposed a motion, which the Plataeans subsequently approved, to remove their boundary stones adjacent to Attica, and to give this territory to the Athenians, in order to make the land part of Attica, and therefore enable the battle to take place on their own soil as the Pythia had decreed. The subsequent Battle of Plataea, of course, dealt a fatal blow to the Persian land forces, and, following swiftly on the heels of the allied naval victory at Salamis, ensured final victory for the Greeks in the Persian Wars.

Although we do not have the exact question put to the Pythia, it must be safe to assume that it was a request on how to obtain victory in the forthcoming engagement against Mardonius or simply to enquire whether they would be victorious, especially considering the fact that the

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<sup>145</sup> Plut. *Arist.* 11.3.



consultation was on the eve of battle, and seers had already been issuing prophecies on the best military tactics to adopt and were divining omens for victory.<sup>146</sup> Indeed, Parke and Wormell believe that the ritual prescriptions to worship the specific gods may have been appended to some more generally worded encouragement to battle, which further supports the theory that the consultation was seeking guidance on how to achieve victory or ascertaining their chances of success.<sup>147</sup>

Both Parke and Wormell, and Fontenrose believe that the first part at least of the oracle, directing the Athenians to worship the named gods and heroes, is most certainly genuine.<sup>148</sup> Parke and Wormell argue that the oracle, which is given by Plutarch in prose, is evidently taken direct from a verbatim version of the Delphic response, which in this instance may well have not contained any verses. However, they also argue convincingly that the original and authentic oracle has been somewhat misrepresented by a later narrative designed to show that it was a perfect Delphic prophecy for the battle to be fought at Plataea.

Parke and Wormell put forward the prudent line of reasoning that the Athenians on Salamis, particularly the farmers, were becoming increasingly restless and more and more disgruntled at the failure to recover Attica. Furthermore, they were increasingly frustrated and angered at the Lakedaimonians for not aiding them in an attempt to wrest Attica from Persian control, as the Spartans were clearly more interested in fortifying the Isthmus at Corinth, and seemingly did not really care if Athens remained in Persian hands for the time being.<sup>149</sup> However, the second invasion of Attica by the Persians in 479 B.C. spurred the Athenians into action and they subsequently demanded the Lakedaimonians' co-operation in a campaign on land for the recovery of Athenian territory. The change of policy and strategy from the previous year is marked by the emergence of Aristeides as chief commander in place of Themistokles. Thus, Parke and Wormell argue, the reversal of strategy could best be helped by a Delphic oracle that would countermand the 'wooden wall' oracle of the previous year and encourage both the Athenians and the Lakedaimonians to seek battle, and hopefully victory, in western Attica and Mount Kithairon.

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<sup>146</sup> See Plut. *Arist.* 11.3; Hdt. 9.33-36.

<sup>147</sup> Parke and Wormell, 1956b: 175.

<sup>148</sup> See Parke and Wormell, 1956b: 174-175; Fontenrose, 1978: 320.

<sup>149</sup> See Hdt. 9.7.β2.

Indeed, Parke and Wormell's suggestion is that Aristeides, in an attempt to persuade both his own *polis* and the Lakedaimonians, may have even endeavoured to engineer such a response from the Delphic Oracle. From the route of Mardonius' retreat from Attica it is evident that Aristeides held the Thriasian plain in western Attica and all the western passes of Mount Kithairon. Moreover, it is clear from the Athenian delegates' prior speech to the Spartan Ephors that even before the consultation of Delphi was made, the Athenians believed that the best place to engage Mardonius in battle was on the plain of Thria.<sup>150</sup> Therefore, as Aristeides would undoubtedly have expected Mardonius to stand his ground, it is very possible that Aristeides could have conveyed to Delphi a suggestion that the Eleusinian plain in Attica should be the designated site where the decisive battle should take place. As a result, when Mardonius retreated unexpectedly and circled round behind Kithairon, it became necessary for Aristeides to concoct new expedients to make the oracle marry with the new situation. The first device was Arimnestos' dream, followed by the fine-tuning of the new site of operations upon the discovery of the Temple of Eleusinian Demeter, and lastly the Plataeans' lifting of the boundary stones, which presumably they would have been only too glad to do in order to secure the protection of the Athenians. It is a very persuasive argument.

Similarly, although Fontenrose reluctantly acknowledges that the direction to pray to the gods and sacrifice to the heroes is probably genuine, he too believes that the final direction to fight on the plain of the Eleusinian goddesses, Demeter and Kore, looks like a *post-eventum* addition, which allowed the story of how the Athenians had initially assumed that Apollo had meant the Eleusinian plain, but then discovered that there was a shrine of Demeter Eleusinia near Plataea.

However, a *post-eventum* fabrication or not, this oracular story is extremely illuminating in several ways. The first part of the oracle directing the Athenians to worship the gods and heroes, which certainly appears to be authentic, is another unequivocal example of an Oracle being consulted by a *strategos* for advice before commencing battle and the Oracle consequently issuing that general with guidance, albeit it vague and nebulous, on how to ensure victory in the forthcoming military engagement. Moreover, the fact that the Oracle issued such an innocuous and anodyne prognostication, with no hint of warning or pessimistic undertones, would have no doubt encouraged Aristeides to proceed with the battle against Mardonius at

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<sup>150</sup> Hdt. 9.7.β2. See also, Boardman, J. et al., eds., *The Cambridge Ancient History, Volume IV, Persia, Greece and the Western Mediterranean c. 525 to 479 B.C.*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988) 325.

Plataea and would surely have had a positive effect on Athenian morale. Indeed, as mentioned above, Parke and Wormell believe that there may even have been more specific words of encouragement given to the Athenians at the beginning of this oracle that were not recorded by Plutarch.

Even more intriguing, however, is the fact that Aristeides consulted the Delphic Oracle prior to battle, despite the fact that the seers had just prophesied that the allied Greeks would be victorious providing they remained on the defensive and did not attack. The suggestion is, therefore, that the prognostications of the *manteis* were not enough for Aristeides and that he needed further definitive advice and clarification from the much more authoritative and knowledgeable Delphic Oracle before committing himself to a particular strategy, or at least to obtain a more eminent and revered voice to override the defensive stance being advocated by the seers.

The second part of the oracle, however, regarding the oracular direction to take up position on the plain of the Eleusinian goddesses Demeter and Kore poses several important issues. If the second part of the oracle is in fact a *post-eventum* invention, then it is still indicative of the fact that to the ancient Greek audience this kind of oracular command was not uncommon, and that it was unremarkable that Oracles would issue specific strategic and tactical directives for *strategoï* and *poleis* to fight at particular sites. Once more, if that is the case, it illustrates how Oracles would have had the potential to heavily influence the outcome of ancient Greek warfare through their prognostications.

However, if the second part of the oracle is indeed genuine, and the directive to fight the Persians on the plain of Eleusis in Attica was, as Parke and Wormell suggest, delivered by the Pythia as a consequence of the prompting of Aristeides, then it is a crucial illustration of the political clout and psychological importance of Oracles in ancient Greek warfare. If we are to believe that the oracular directive from Delphi to fight in Attica was deliberately orchestrated by Aristeides, then it shows us clearly how vital the Oracle's prognostications were as tools of political persuasion. It stands to reason, therefore, that Aristeides must have initially been attempting to use the Delphic Oracle to persuade the Lakedaimonians and the other allies that they must make their stand against the Persians in Attica, as well as perhaps helping sway any doubters within the Athenian camp of the same. However, when Mardonius did not do as Aristeides had expected, and instead retreated behind Mount Kithairon, Aristeides had to

devise new excuses that would make the oracle square with the new situation. As a result, the only logical explanation why Aristeides would have gone to so much trouble to make sure that the oracle's words were perfectly fulfilled must be that he did so to reap the psychological benefits on his troops. In fact, Plutarch clearly states that the movement of Plataea's boundary stones was done expressly, at the behest of Arimnestos, in order to make it perfectly clear to the troops that all the conditions of the prophecy had been met so that 'the oracle might leave no rift in the hope of victory.'<sup>151</sup> It is abundantly clear, therefore, that there was a clear understanding on Aristeides' and Arimnestos' part of the psychological effect the oracle could have, hence why they worked so hard to fulfil its conditions within its constraints. With all the conditions of the oracle complied with, it must have provided the Athenians with a well-timed boost to their confidence and morale, knowing that Apollo had prophesied that they would be victorious if they made the appropriate dedications to the gods and heroes and fought the battle on that particular patch of earth, which had just been conveniently identified as Plataea. Thus, conditions being satisfied, victory was assured.

Yet, it must be noted that the critical importance of interpretation is resoundingly clear once again; no matter what words the Oracle uttered, the final decision and power lay ultimately with the interpreter. Although it appears that Aristeides had done his utmost to contrive a suitable oracle from the Pythia to suit his military strategy, when Mardonius' unexpected manoeuvre thwarted his plans, the ambiguous language of the oracle enabled him to twist and manipulate the Oracle's words to fit the new military circumstances. Furthermore, the abstruse nature of the Oracle's inscrutable prophecies enabled it, as always, to appear perfectly omniscient. Indeed, in this particular oracular story, Arimnestos is even visited in a dream by Zeus to inform him that the Athenians have misinterpreted Delphic Apollo's meaning and that they need to locate the areas specified in the oracle in their current surroundings at Plataea and not Attica as they had misconstrued. Thus, the infallibility of the Delphic Oracle was protected once again.

### **3.2 Kleisthenes and the First Sacred War**

A couple of similar episodes are recorded taking place during the First Sacred War. According to Aeschines, c. 590 B.C. the Amphictyons consulted the Pythia on what action to take against

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<sup>151</sup> Plut. *Arist.* 11.8.

Kirra, after the Kirraeans and Kragalidai had repeatedly committed sacrilege against the shrine at Delphi and carried out a series of transgressions against themselves.<sup>152</sup> The Pythia responded by commanding the Amphictyons to ‘fight against the Kirraeans and the Kragalidai day and night, bitterly ravage their country, enslave the inhabitants, and dedicate the land to the Pythian Apollo and Artemis and Leto and Athena Pronaea.’<sup>153</sup> In compliance with the oracle, the Amphictyons subsequently voted to go to war against the Kirraeans.<sup>154</sup> According to later authors, in the subsequent war there ensued a prolonged siege of Kirra, which prompted the Amphictyons to consult the Oracle once more to determine how they could acquire victory.<sup>155</sup> The Pythia declared that the city would remain invincible until the sea reached the edge of the Delphic sanctuary, which the Kirraeans took to be an assurance of their safety.<sup>156</sup> However, upon the advice of Solon, Kleisthenes of Sikyon immediately consecrated both the city and the land contiguous to the sea to Apollo, thus fulfilling the oracle and Kirra promptly fell to the Amphictyonic force.<sup>157</sup>

Furthermore, the Hippocratic Corpus also records another interesting oracle connected with this war. According to the story, during the First Sacred War the Amphictyons were inflicted with a plague in their camp and were unsure whether or not to continue with the campaign. Consequently, they consulted the Delphic Oracle as to what they should do.<sup>158</sup> The Pythia

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<sup>152</sup> Oracle no. 11: Aeschin. *In Ctes.* 107-12; Plut. *Sol.* 11; Plut. *Mor.* 76e; Paus. 10.37.4-5; Polyaeus. *Strat.* 3.5; P-W 17; Fontenrose, Q70.

<sup>153</sup> Aeschin. *In Ctes.* 108.

<sup>154</sup> Pausanias and Polyaeus state that it was Kleisthenes, the dictator of Sikyon, who commanded the League’s force, though Pausanias also mentions that he was aided by Solon. Plutarch, on the other hand, states that, according to Delphi records, it was Alkmaion, not Solon, who commanded the Athenians.

<sup>155</sup> Oracle no. 12: Diod. Sic. 9.16; Paus. 10.37.4-6; Polyaeus. *Strat.* 3.5; Aeschin. *In Ctes.* 107-12; Plut. *Sol.* 11; P-W 18; Fontenrose, Q71.

<sup>156</sup> The oracle appears also in Aeschines, but it sits out of context and appears to have been inserted at some point by an ancient editor, who most likely found it in an account of the events by either Pausanias or Diodorus: see Pritchett, 1979: 306; Parke and Wormell, 1956b: 106.

<sup>157</sup> This is the version recorded by Pausanias. The earliest account in Aeschines states that it was actually Solon who put forward the motion to the Amphictyonic Assembly to obey the command of the Oracle and go to war against the Kirraeans and the Kragalidai. However, as Aeschines was addressing an Athenian jury and wanted to stress how shameful and reprehensible it was that Athens had not participated on the Amphictyonic side during the Fourth Sacred War, he was evidently exaggerating the part played by the Athenians in the First Sacred War. Later tradition even attempted to claim that Solon was the general in command of the Amphictyonic force; however, Plutarch (*Sol.* 11) points out that according to the Delphic records, Alkmaion, the head of the Alkmaionidai family, was the Athenian commander at that time. The tradition which places Kleisthenes of Sikyon in command of the Amphictyonic force appears first in the Sikyonian historian, Menaechmus, and therefore may, out of local patriotism, have exaggerated his fellow countryman’s role in the war also: see Menaechmus *ap.* Sch. Pi. N. 9.23; *cf.* Polyaeus, *Strat.* 3.5). A third and perhaps more plausible tradition recounts that the Amphictyonic army was led by the Thessalian, Eurylochus. Although this version is not recorded by any very early sources, it is particularly credible due to the fact that it does not appear to be motivated by local partisanship, and it is extremely likely that it was Thessaly who was the driving force behind the whole war: see Hippoc. [*Ep.*] 27; Strab. 9.3.4; Sch. Vet Pi. P. (hypothesis). For a fuller discussion, see Parke and Wormell, 1956b: 102; 104-5.

<sup>158</sup> Oracle no. 13: Hippoc. [*Ep.*] 27.13; P-W 237; Fontenrose, Q72.

informed them that they should continue with the war, and that they would be victorious if they went to Kos and fetched back a stag's son, along with gold, to help them, but that they would have to do it quickly before the Kirrhaeans took the tripod in the *adyton* of the Temple of Apollo, otherwise the city would not be taken. The Amphictyons followed the Pythia's instructions and went to Kos, where it turned out that the stag's son and gold were a Koan father and son, called Nebros and Chryses. The Amphictyons were subsequently delivered from the plague and were victorious.

These three oracles concerning the First Sacred War reveal several important aspects of the Oracle's role in ancient Greek warfare, and, indeed, neatly encapsulate what we have seen so far with regards to *poleis* consulting Oracles for divine sanction and then consciously and deliberately fulfilling the Oracle's directives for psychological purposes.

Firstly, however, it is important to consider the fact that there is a strong possibility that the first oracular consultation may have been a later invention to corroborate and legitimise the Amphictyony's, and, by extension, Delphi's, ownership of the Kirrhaean plain. Fontenrose argues that, as it is fairly certain that Kirrha controlled Delphi before the First Sacred War, it is unlikely that the Amphictyons would have received an oracle commanding them to make war on the Kirrhaeans.<sup>159</sup> He therefore states that 'The oracle was obviously invented for the Amphictyons to bolster the justification that they afterwards put forth for destroying Krisa and taking Delphi under their supervision.'<sup>160</sup> He also points out that apart from Aeschines, no other writer on the Sacred War mentions this oracle. Nevertheless, even if the oracle is in fact a later

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<sup>159</sup> There is an ongoing and unresolved debate over the actual existence of the First Sacred War. The traditional and long-standing viewpoint, as set out by Georg Busolt in 1893 in the second edition of his *Griechische Geschichte*, in which he organised the fragmentary ancient source material into a chronological and logical narrative of events, accepted, in the main, the historical authenticity of the war and the events surrounding it. The picture painted by Busolt's history remained largely intact and accepted for the best part of eighty years, with a few tweaks, additions, and augmentations by Beloch, De Sanctis, Parke and Wormell, Sordi, Forrest, Parke and Boardman, and Boardman on his own, until Robertson radically challenged the consensus and argued that the whole narrative of the war was a fourth-century invention: see Busolt, 1885-1904: I.690-700; Beloch, J., *Griechische Geschichte*, 2nd ed., vol. 1 (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1924) 337-8; Sanctis, G. d., *Storia dei Greci dalle Origini alla Fine del Secolo V* (Firenze: La Nuova Italia, 1940) 564ff.; Parke and Wormell, 1956b: 99-113; Sordi, M., 'La prima guerra sacra', *RFIC* 81 (1953) 320-346; Forrest, W. G., 'The First Sacred War', *Bulletin de Correspondance Hellénique* 80 (1956a) 33-52; Parke, H. W. and Boardman, J., 'The Struggle for the Tripod and the First Sacred War', *JHS* 77 (1957) 276-282; Boardman, J., 'Herakles, Delphi and Kleisthenes of Sikyon', *Rev. Arch.* (1978) 227-234; and Robertson, N., 'The Myth of the First Sacred War', *CQ* 28, 1 (1978) 38-73. For a discussion of the debate, see Davies, J. K., 'The Tradition about the First Sacred War', in Hornblower, S. ed., *Greek Historiography* (Oxford, 1994) 193-212. Overall, taking into account all the evidence, I believe that Robertson's stance is too dismissive and too sceptical. Davies, likewise, palliates Robertson's argument to a certain degree and, although tentative, he concludes that 'the idea of a Sacred War in the early sixth century remains a plausible hypothesis' (p. 206).

<sup>160</sup> Fontenrose, 1978: 291. See also: Forrest, 1956a: 33-52; and Fontenrose, 1960: 221-222. For the traditional view, see Parke and Wormell, 1956b: 99-108.

fabrication, it still shows us the need for *poleis* to obtain divine sanction for their actions, or at least attempt to convince others that they had received such authority, and consequently illustrates the fact that the ancient Greek world accepted such consultations and proclamations as being commonplace and valid.

Secondly, with regards to the varying accounts in the sources over whether it was the Kirrhaeans or the Amphictyons who received the oracle declaring that Kirrha would remain invincible until the sea reached Delphi's sacred precinct, Fontenrose points out that it is common in stories of this kind for different versions to vary over whether it was the attackers or the defenders who received the oracle.<sup>161</sup> According to Polyaeus, for instance, it was the Kirrhaeans who received the oracle that the city would not be taken until the sea reached the edge of the sanctuary, but that Kleisthenes found out about it and exploited the information to his advantage. If this was the case, then it provides an intriguing insight into the value and utility of oracular prophecies as key pieces of military intelligence.<sup>162</sup> However, regardless of which side received the oracle, the vital thing to note is, like Aristeides' deliberate fulfilment of the oracle at Plataea, the Amphictyonic commanders purposely fulfilled the Delphic oracle to ensure the preconditions for victory stipulated in the prophecy were met. Once more, the only logical reason for doing so must have been for the psychological effects such an action would produce in both their own troops and their enemies. It is clearly the view of Pausanias that this stratagem, along with a more secular tactic of poisoning the Kirrhaeans' water supply,<sup>163</sup> brought about the capitulation of Kirrha.<sup>164</sup> Polyaeus, too, states that after carrying out this scheme Kirrha subsequently fell.<sup>165</sup>

As regards the Amphictyons' consultation of the Pythia vis-à-vis the plague in their camp and the question of whether or not to continue with the war, the Oracle's conditioned prognostication and the Amphictyons' consequent fulfilment of it is also very revealing. It appears from the story that the Amphictyonic forces were clearly experiencing a difficult time in the conflict and because of the plague were considering abandoning the campaign. One might safely venture, that if this was the case, then there would presumably have been rumblings of discontent from the rank and file about their current fortunes in the war. That

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<sup>161</sup> Fontenrose, 1978: 292.

<sup>162</sup> For further discussion of the use of oracular prophecies as stratagems and tools in psychological warfare, see *infra*, p. 304ff.

<sup>163</sup> Paus. 10.37.7.

<sup>164</sup> Paus. 10.37.8.

<sup>165</sup> Polyaeus. *Strat.* 3.5.

being so, then the consultation and swift fulfilment of the conditions would have given the commanders crucial breathing space to carry on and lifted the morale of their men. Once again, it is the view of the ancient author that the consultation and fulfilment of the prophecy seems to have had the desired effect, for he states the plague lifted and the Amphictyons were victorious. Thus, the consultation promising victory, providing certain equivocal conditions were quickly met, provided the Amphictyonic commanders with a very convenient psychological tool to placate their men. One cannot help but think that this was the underlying intention of the consultation in the first place.

### 3.3 Leonidas' self-sacrifice at Thermopylae

Another compelling example can be seen with Sparta's consultation of the Delphic Oracle in 481 B.C. for guidance regarding the imminent invasion by Xerxes.<sup>166</sup> Herodotus, in his account of the Battle of Thermopylae, describes how, on the third and last day of the battle, after the Greeks discovered that they had been betrayed by Ephialtes, who had revealed to the Persians the Anopaea trail which led to the rear of the Greek encampment,<sup>167</sup> the Spartan king Leonidas decided to send home the rest of the Greek allies and to make a stand to the death against the Persians.<sup>168</sup> Herodotus, however, crucially goes on to explain the reasoning behind Leonidas' tactical decision. He states that the reason why Leonidas sent the rest of the allies home, apart from a personal desire to achieve glory for himself and Sparta, was to fulfil a prophecy given to the Spartans by the Pythian priestess 'at the very beginning of the war'.<sup>169</sup> According to Herodotus, the Spartans were the first Greeks to learn of Xerxes' preparations to invade Hellas, and when they obtained this intelligence they immediately sought the counsel of Delphic Apollo, who gave them the following prophecy:

Hear your fate, O dwellers in Sparta of the wide spaces;  
Either your famed, great town must be sacked by Perseus' sons,  
Or, if that be not, the whole of Lacedaemon  
Shall mourn the death of a king of the house of Heracles,  
For not the strength of lions or of bulls shall hold him,  
Strength against strength; for he has the power of Zeus,

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<sup>166</sup> Oracle no. 29: Hdt. 7.220.3-4; Anth. Pal. 14.96; Plut. *Pelop.* 21.3; P-W 100; Fontenrose, Q152.

<sup>167</sup> Hdt. 7.213, 7.219.

<sup>168</sup> Hdt. 7.220.1.

<sup>169</sup> Hdt. 7.220.3 & 7.239.1. For the chronology of the Greeks' various consultations of the Delphic Oracle, see Hammond, N. G. L., 'The Narrative of Herodotus VII and the Decree of Themistocles at Troezen', *JHS* 102 (1982) 79-81.



And will not be checked till one of these two he has consumed.<sup>170</sup>

It thus appears that Leonidas, a direct descendant of Herakles, sacrificed himself and the 300 in order to fulfil the prophecy of ‘the death of a king of the house of Herakles’, and in doing so save Lakedaimon and the rest of Greece.<sup>171</sup> What is interesting about this account, apart from the chronicling of another incidence of a *polis* consulting an Oracle before going to battle or war, is the fact that the Spartan commander of the allied Greek force supposedly changed his strategy in order to fulfil the words of the oracle.

Of course, it can be argued that this is simply another typical response legend created after the event, in a similar vein to the legend of Athens and King Kodros discussed below.<sup>172</sup> This is certainly the argument made by How and Wells, who state that the oracle is plainly a *vaticinium post eventum*.<sup>173</sup> They argue that Herodotus is attempting here to excuse the allies for deserting Leonidas by explaining that his death was ordained by the gods and foretold by the Pythia.<sup>174</sup> They assert that the official story of Leonidas’ self-sacrifice and patriotic self-devotion provided a convenient excuse for all parties concerned, in that it absolved the Athenians for pushing the line of defence forward to Thermopylae and Artemisium, assuaged the guilt of the Peloponnesian allies for deserting their general and the Spartans in their hour of need, and excused the Spartans themselves for not providing adequate support for their heroic king.<sup>175</sup> This view is supported by Munro, who argues that the reason the oracle story was so readily accepted was because it ‘proved to all parties so convenient a screen against censure, that it was at once adopted by tacit consent as the authorized version, and being unchecked by any

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<sup>170</sup> Hdt. 7.220.4, trans. Aubrey De Sélincourt (*Herodotus: The Histories*).

<sup>171</sup> Herodotus (7.204) explains that ‘Leonidas traced his descent directly back to Herakles, through Anaxandridas, Eurykates, Polydoros, Alkamenes, Teleklos, Archelaos, Agesilaos, Doryssos, Leobotas, Echestratos, Agis, Eurysthenes, Aristodemos, Aristomachos, Kleodaios – and so to Hyllos, who was Herakles’ son.’

<sup>172</sup> See Fontenrose, 1978: 78-79; Parke and Wormell, 1956b: 167-168. For further discussion of the idea of kingly sacrifice in the literary tradition, see Oracle no. N23, *infra*, p. 212; and for Kodros as a scapegoat, see Ogden, D., *The Crooked Kings of Ancient Greece* (London: Duckworth, 1997) 22, 95.

<sup>173</sup> How and Wells, 1912: *ap.* 7.221. *Cf.* Kron, 1999: 75-78.

<sup>174</sup> One of the main reasons why How and Wells feel that the oracle is a *vaticinium post eventum* is because of the fact that this is the first time the oracle is mentioned and it is inconsistent with the account of Leonidas’ expedition given earlier by Herodotus (7.202-7), with the exception perhaps of the reference to Leonidas choosing the 300 Equals to accompany him from those who were fathers with living sons. However, How and Wells argue that this only implies danger, not self-immolation.

<sup>175</sup> Grundy, building upon a suggestion made by Bury in the Annual of the British School of Athens, goes even further to suggest that the 2800 allies were not in fact dismissed, but rather were sent to head off Hydarnes on the Anopaea, and after having failed, then returned to their native cities. See Bury, J. B., ‘The Campaign of Artemisium and Thermopylae’, *The Annual of the British School at Athens* 2 (1895) 102; and Grundy, G. B., *The Great Persian War and its Preliminaries: A Study of the Evidence, Literary and Topographical* (London: J. Murray, 1901) 315-317.

criticism soon won its way to the domain of the romantic.’<sup>176</sup> It cannot and should not be discounted, nevertheless, that the oracle was in fact genuinely received and that Herodotus’ account was actually *bona fide*. It can be argued validly that Herodotus’ account, written around fifty or so years after the battle, would surely not have been too far removed from the actual events, else it would have raised some eyebrows and questions and even protest from his contemporaries and surviving eyewitnesses. As Fontenrose states of the ‘wooden wall’ oracles of 481/80 B.C.: ‘It is not likely, one may suppose, that forty years after Salamis anyone could successfully circulate these oracles as Delphic, if they were not; for elder Athenians would presumably have known that they were false.’<sup>177</sup>

Diodorus later indirectly records the oracle story as well, and elaborates upon it further by detailing Leonidas’ discussion with the ephors concerning his decision to only take 300 Equals to Thermopylae.<sup>178</sup> In Diodorus’ version of events, however, it appears that the oracle was in fact only given to Leonidas, as the ephors seem unaware of the prophecy and consequently Leonidas has to speak to them in private about his intended self-sacrifice for the good of Sparta and Hellas. How and Wells, however, believe that Diodorus’ account is simply a completion of a process begun in Herodotus, and that the oracle story was ‘an afterthought gradually perfected by later ages.’<sup>179</sup>

However, regardless of whether or not the oracle story was true or was in fact a later invention, does not detract from its importance. If indeed the oracle story is true, then it provides us with another crucial example of how the fulfilment of an Oracle’s prognostication could heavily affect the military decision-making of commanders on the battlefield. However, on the other hand, if it is a later fabrication, then it still illustrates the immense influence oracles could have on psychology and morale. Munro argues, for instance, that the official oracle explanation of the disaster was put forward at the time to counteract the detrimental psychological effects the news would have on the minds of the Greeks that one of the Spartan kings had been defeated and slain on the first encounter with the invading Persians, and that it was therefore ‘produced to meet the discouragement which would naturally follow on so sinister an opening to the campaign, and to turn the bad omen into a presage of victory.’<sup>180</sup> Likewise, How and Wells

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<sup>176</sup> Munro, J. A. R., ‘Some Observations on the Persian Wars (Continued)’, *JHS* 22 (1902) 316.

<sup>177</sup> Fontenrose, 1978: 125.

<sup>178</sup> Diod. Sic. 11.4.3-4.

<sup>179</sup> How and Wells, 1912: *ap.* 7.221.

<sup>180</sup> Munro, 1902: 316.

similarly argue that ‘This official explanation that Leonidas, like Decius Mus, devoted himself to save his country, was designed to make his defeat and death an omen for future victory.’<sup>181</sup> Also, if the oracle was indeed invented later and the relevant city-states were compliant in perpetuating the story, then it also provides us with an illustration once more of the need for *poleis* to receive divine sanction and justification for their military decision-making and actions, even if it was *post eventum*.

Furthermore, regardless of whether or not the oracle story is a later invention to justify the retreat of the Greek allies, and whether or not Herodotus genuinely believed it himself, he clearly did not seem to feel that his audience would have much difficulty believing that Leonidas’ hand was guided, and his actions shaped, by the oracular prophecy. The fact that the tradition was built upon by later writers other than Herodotus, such as Diodorus, also reinforces the idea that the ancient world felt that such action by commanders was indeed commonplace and that it was readily accepted that commanders would make such decisions in accordance with the words of the oracles they received.

### 3.4 Epaminondas and Leuktra

Another powerful example can be seen with the Thebans’ consultation of the Oracle of Trophonios before the Battle of Leuktra in 371 B.C.<sup>182</sup> Pausanias records how the Thebans, prior to the Battle of Leuktra, consulted at least five different Oracles before commencing battle against the Spartans. These Oracles included those of Apollo at Delphi, Ismenian Apollo at Thebes, Apollo at Ptoion in upper Boiotia, Apollo at Abai in Phokis, and Trophonios at Lebadeia. According to Pausanias, the response of Trophonios, who gave his prophecies in hexameter verse, was as follows:

Before the spears whizz raise your trophy:  
Take my shield; raging Messenian  
Aristomenes leaned it on my walls.  
I tell you I shall destroy this army  
of wicked-willing men in their shell of shields.<sup>183</sup>

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<sup>181</sup> How and Wells, 1912: *ap.* 7.221. How and Wells compare Leonidas’ patriotic self-sacrifice to that of the Roman consul, Decius Mus, who in 340 B.C. sacrificed himself in battle against the Latins and Campanians at Veseris in Campania in order to ensure victory for the Roman legions: see Livy, 8.10; 10.28.

<sup>182</sup> Oracle no. 51: Paus. 4.32.5; P-W 253; Fontenrose, Q205.

<sup>183</sup> Paus. 4.32.5, trans. Peter Levi (*Guide to Greece*).

Pausanias states that when Epaminondas received this oracle, he sent for the shield of Aristomenes, which was kept as a dedication in Trophonios' shrine,<sup>184</sup> and then accordingly decorated a trophy with it on the battlefield in full view of the Spartans. After the Thebans' subsequent victory, they returned the shield to Trophonios.<sup>185</sup>

An inscription about this incident has been discovered on a statue base in Thebes, which some scholars, including Parke and Wormell, believe provides conclusive proof that the events took place.<sup>186</sup> Fontenrose asserts that the Trophonios oracle is dubious, but does admit it was likely that the Thebans consulted Delphi at this time.

The episode is another important illustration of the Oracle's influence in military strategy and tactics, and it once again demonstrates the practice of consulting several Oracles on major, high-risk military undertakings.<sup>187</sup> However, in addition, the incident also gives us an intriguing insight into the potential use of oracles as weapons in the psychological warfare between *poleis* in battle. If the Theban oracles were public knowledge, or were quickly spread through rumour, fanned no doubt with deliberate intent by Epaminondas, then the sight of Aristomenes' shield adorning the trophy on the battlefield in plain view of the Lakedaimonian army would have had a considerable impact on both Theban and Spartan morale, though clearly in opposite ways. It may explain why Epaminondas was so eager to dispatch Xenokrates to retrieve the shield, rather than just out of any personal religious obedience or zeal. Furthermore, the fact that it was Epaminondas' own personal decision to place the trophy in full view of the Spartan army (the oracle did not stipulate where the trophy was to be placed, simply that it should be set up)

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<sup>184</sup> Aristomenes' shield was housed in Trophonios' shrine as a result of an earlier oracular episode from the Second Messenian War: Oracle no. 7: Paus. 4.16.7; P-W 367; Fontenrose, Q19. Pausanias (4.16.6) records how Aristomenes, during a battle with the Lakedaimonians at a place called Boar's Grave in Stenykleros, Messenia, lost his shield as he was giving pursuit to the fleeing Spartans. Despondent about losing his shield, Aristomenes consulted the Delphic Oracle for advice on how to recover it. In response the Pythia bade him to go to the holy adyton of Trophonios at Lebadeia to retrieve his lost shield, which he did, and subsequently dedicated it to the sanctuary: see Paus. 4.16.7; 9.39.14. Aristomenes' shield plays not only a key role in his own life, but in Messenian history as a whole; for further discussion, see Langerwerf, L., 'Aristomenes and Drimakos: the Messenian Revolt in Pausanias' *Periegesis* in Comparative Perspective', in Hodkinson, S. ed., *Sparta: Comparative Approaches* (Swansea, 2009) 336

<sup>185</sup> Paus. 4.32.6.

<sup>186</sup> See Parke and Wormell, 1956b: 218; and P. Levi in Pausanias, *Guide to Greece, Volume 2: Southern Greece*, translated with an introduction by Peter Levi (London, 1979b) 180 n. 154. See also IG VII. 2462 (= M.N. Tod, *GHI* Vol. 2, no. 130).

<sup>187</sup> Cf. Croesus' consultation of numerous Oracles before his campaign Persia, *infra*, p. 248ff.; Athens before the Sicilian expedition, Oracle no. 43, *infra*, p. 246ff.; Agesilaos before his Persian campaign, Oracle no. 47, *supra*, p. 160ff.; Agesipolis before his invasion of Argos, Oracle no. 48, *supra*, p. 161ff.

suggests that he was using it as a psychological weapon. There is a real and plausible possibility, therefore, that Epaminondas, on the back of a very auspicious prophecy, also saw an opportunity to exploit the situation and use it to his advantage to strike a blow against his enemy's morale, in the hope of spreading fear and doom among the Spartan ranks, whilst at the same time strengthening his own men's hearts.<sup>188</sup> The suggestion once more from Pausanias is that the fulfilment of the oracle had the desired effect and had a direct impact on the outcome of the battle, for after the explanation of the oracle he immediately states that the Thebans were victorious and consequently returned the shield to Trophonios' shrine.<sup>189</sup>

### 3.5 Kroton and Lokris

Another such example can be seen with the Krotoniates' consultation of Delphi regarding their war with Epizephyrian Lokris c. 580 B.C.<sup>190</sup> According to Justin, during Kroton's war with the Lokrians, the Krotoniates sent ambassadors to the Oracle at Delphi asking for advice on how to achieve victory in the conflict and bring about a happy conclusion to the war. The Pythia responded by telling the delegates that the enemy must be conquered by vows before they could be vanquished by arms. Upon hearing this oracle, the Krotoniates immediately dedicated a tenth of the spoils to Apollo, but the Lokrians caught wind of the Pythia's prognostication and accordingly dedicated a ninth part of the spoils and kept the matter a secret, else they be outdone in vows. When the two sides subsequently met at the Battle of the Sagra, the 15,000 Lokrians were vastly outnumbered by the Krotoniates who purportedly numbered 120,000, but against the odds the Lokrians were victorious and were apparently helped by the Dioskouroi during the combat.<sup>191</sup>

Once again, this oracular tale is enlightening in several respects. Apart from the obvious consultation of an Oracle by a *polis* for advice in warfare, it provides another illustration of an oracular prophecy being treated as 'military intelligence' and used to gain a supernatural or psychological advantage in war. The acquisition of the oracular prophecy given to the Krotoniates benefited the Lokrians in several ways. Firstly, the Lokrians immediately set about surreptitiously bettering the Krotoniates' offer to the god in order to fulfil the oracle and undermine Kroton at the same time, thus ensuring victory. Secondly, in the desperate last stand

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<sup>188</sup> For further discussion of oracles and psychological warfare, see *infra*, p. 290ff.

<sup>189</sup> Paus. 4.32.6.

<sup>190</sup> Oracle no. 15: Just. *Epit.* 20.3.2; P-W76; Fontenrose, Q127.

<sup>191</sup> Just. *Epit.* 20.3.4-9.

battle against the superior Krotoniate force, one can presume that one of the things that may have helped the Lokrians to overcome seemingly insurmountable odds was the heartening knowledge that Delphic Apollo had ordained that victory would go to the side that conquered the other with vows and that they were the ones who had fulfilled the prophecy. The fact that the Lokrians secretly satisfied the conditions of the oracle but deliberately kept it to themselves is a clear indication that they truly believed the action gave them a distinct advantage over their enemies. It is proof once again, therefore, of the powerful psychological edge an oracle could give to troops in warfare.

### 3.6 The Spartans during the First Messenian War

A similar demonstration can be found in the Messenian saga. After several years of guerrilla warfare, the Messenians, in the fifth year of Aristodemos' reign, inflicted a significant defeat on Lakedaimonians in open battle on the slopes of Mount Ithome. In response, the Spartans, who were particularly aggrieved and worried by the defeat and their progress in the war, sent an embassy to Delphi to seek advice.<sup>192</sup> Although we do not have the specific question put to the Pythia, her reply was as follows:

Phoibos commands work not only at war:  
the people hold Messene by a trick;  
it shall be captured by the same cunning.<sup>193</sup>

Pausanias tells us that upon receiving this response the Lakedaimonians consequently schemed up several stratagems to trick the Messenians. A first attempt of sending a hundred apparent fugitives into Ithome, under a publicly-pronounced sentence of exile, to unearth what the Messenians were up to failed miserably when Aristodemos simply sent them away, saying that the Lakedaimonians invented new crimes but used old tricks.<sup>194</sup> Subsequently, the Spartans then attempted to break up the Messenian alliance by sending ambassadors first to Arkadia and then, when the Arkadians refused, to Argos. When Aristodemos discovered what the Spartans were up to he consulted the Delphic Oracle once again.<sup>195</sup>

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<sup>192</sup> Oracle no. 3: Diod. Sic. 8.13.2; Paus. 4.12.1; Oinomaos *ap.* Euseb. *Praep. evang.* 5.27, p. 221c & 5.26, p. 221a; P-W 363; Fontenrose, Q15.

<sup>193</sup> Paus. 4.12.1, trans. Peter Levi (*Guide to Greece*). This oracle is also quoted in the same verse by Diodorus (8.13.2) and Oinomaos (*ap.* Euseb. *Praep. evang.* 5.27).

<sup>194</sup> Paus. 4.12.2.

<sup>195</sup> Paus. 4.12.3; Oracle no. 4, *infra*, p. 285.

What is of key importance here is how the Spartans clearly made purposeful attempts to follow the guidance of the Oracle and fulfil the stipulations of the oracular prophecy, and how it affected their military decision-making. Once more the determined effort of the Lakedaimonians to satisfy the oracular prognostication suggests that the promise of victory that the oracle contained gave the Spartans a psychological boost knowing that if they fulfilled it they would conquer the Messenians.

### 3.7 Mardonius' speech before Plataea

A slightly different variation on this theme, but an important illustration nonetheless of the powerful impact of oracular prophecies on army morale, is Mardonius' deliberate *unfulfilment* of an oracular prophecy during the Persian invasion in 479 B.C. According to Herodotus, on the eve of the Battle of Plataea, when the Persians and the allied Greeks were in a ten-day standoff due to unfavourable omens for both sides to go on the offensive, Mardonius called his commanders together and the Greek officers who were serving under him, and asked if they knew of any prophecy that foretold the destruction of Persian troops in Greece.<sup>196</sup> Of the assembled commanders, nobody said a word, either through a genuine unawareness of the existence of any such oracle or through feigned ignorance out of fear for their own safety. However, in response, when no answer was forthcoming, Mardonius then declared that he was aware of such an oracle himself, which stated that the Persians would come to Greece, sack the temple at Delphi, and then perish to a man.<sup>197</sup> Subsequently, he proclaimed that, armed with the knowledge of this oracle, they would keep away from the sanctuary at Delphi and make no attempt to plunder it, thus avoiding destruction. He then declared that the Medised Greeks should rejoice at this news and accordingly be very sure of victory against the allied Greeks. Mardonius then issued orders to prepare for battle on the following day.

Although it is not specifically stated, we must surely presume that the oracle revealed by Mardonius to his commanders at the military briefing at Plataea was a Delphic prophecy as it

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<sup>196</sup> Hdt. 9.42.1.

<sup>197</sup> Oracle no. 33: Hdt. 9.42.3; P-W 98; Fontenrose, Q150. Parke and Wormell suggest that another oracle recorded by Herakleides Ponticus, which stated, 'Persian of many-coloured chariot, having seen, keep your hands off [keep your hands from the sacred?]' may in fact be part of this oracle as a warning to the Persians not to plunder Delphi. Although Fontenrose is not convinced, the two oracles do appear to meld neatly together: see Heraclid. Pont. *ap. Herodian*. P. 690 Lentz = *ap. Choer. in Theod. Can.* P. 163 Hilg.; P-W 99; Fontenrose, Q151; and Parke, H. W., 'An Emended Oracle', *The American Journal of Philology* 61, 1 (1940) 78-80.

predicts a sack of the sanctuary at Delphi by the Persians. Herodotus is our only source on this oracle and once again does not tell us explicitly that it was spoken at Delphi itself. In fact, Herodotus does not believe that the oracle referred to the Persians at all, but instead to the Illyrians and the Encheleans when they attacked Delphi in the distant past.<sup>198</sup> Although Fontenrose believes that the oracle is not genuine, Parke and Wormell disagree to a certain extent and make the convincing and rational argument that it would have been pointless to invent such an oracle after Plataea, as the Persians never attacked Delphi.<sup>199</sup> Therefore, it is very possible that Mardonius may have indeed heard an oracle deliberately spread by the Delphians to frighten off Persian attack. Such an oracle, hastily invented and promulgated by Delphi, may well have been based upon an older prophecy in which some other peoples, such as the Illyrians and Encheleans, featured as the attackers. As a result, it may well be an authentic reworking of an earlier Delphic prognostication.<sup>200</sup>

If we accept that the oracle was in fact a genuine Delphic pronouncement, hastily reworked from an extant oracle, and propagated by Delphi to ensure its own safety from the Persian invasion force, then there are several very significant implications. Firstly, the fact that Delphi would invent such an oracle means that it must have believed that it would have had a very real chance of warding off a Persian attack, which, by logical extension, infers that the Delphic Oracle must have been used to other such prognostications issued by itself being obeyed and adhered to by Greek *poleis*, and therefore illustrates the Oracle's influence in military and foreign policy affairs of Greek states. Secondly, Mardonius' use of the oracle is another compelling example of oracular prophecies being used for psychological purposes in warfare. In his speech to his divisional commanders and the Greek officers serving under him on the night before full-scale engagement was about to be initiated by the Persians against the allied Greeks, Mardonius uses the Delphic prophecy as a means to justify and rationalise his decision to his commanders, and to bolster the morale of the soldiers. Herodotus himself interprets the intent of Mardonius' speech to be one of raising troop morale, when he states: 'After Mardonius had asked his question about the oracles, and spoken the words of encouragement which I mentioned, darkness fell and the watches were set.'<sup>201</sup> In particular, the Delphic prophecy appears to have been employed by Mardonius to allay the fears of the 20,000 renegade Greeks

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<sup>198</sup> Cf. Apollod. *Bibl.* 3.5.4; Eur. *Bacch.* 1336. See also Fontenrose, 1960: 203-204.

<sup>199</sup> Parke and Wormell, 1956b: 174.

<sup>200</sup> Cf. the oracles of Bakis that Herodotus immediately quotes after this: Hdt. 9.43.2. See also Crahay, 1956: 336-337.

<sup>201</sup> Hdt. 9.44.1.



who had submitted to Persian sovereignty, who may have been becoming more and more disconcerted by the succession of unfavourable omens that had been received for ten days straight by the *manteis* working on the Persian side.<sup>202</sup> The fact that Mardonius was going to go against the negative battlefield omens obtained by the Greek seer, Hegesistratos, warning against any offensive action to take place, would most certainly have caused unease and anxiety amongst the Medised Greeks.<sup>203</sup> Therefore, it would have been prudent and shrewd generalship on Mardonius' part to use the prognostication from the Greeks' very own Delphic Oracle to assuage their consternation, and to instil confidence and courage in the forthcoming battle against their erstwhile countrymen.

It is possible that Mardonius had genuinely heard such a prophecy being circulated by Delphi, or, of course, he may have possibly invented it from scratch, simply for the purposes of positively affecting the psychology of his army on the eve of a crucial battle. Even if the oracle had been circulated by Delphi, Mardonius may very well have had little compunction in ignoring such a thinly veiled attempt to fend off Persian attack, but yet he would have been only too aware of the potential benefits of using such an oracle to his own advantage, as well as the benefits of staying clear of the Delphic sanctuary in order to ensure its support and assistance for after the conquest, which he no doubt believed he would soon achieve.

Furthermore, the oracular episode provides us with another example of where a prophecy issued by an Oracle carries more weight and authority than divination carried out by a seer; in other words, Oracles supersede *manteis* in terms of divinatory power.<sup>204</sup> In this instance, despite the fact that the omens divined by the seers were only good for defensive action, the Delphic oracle stating that the Persians would be victorious, providing they did not attack the shrine at Delphi, was used by Mardonius to override the advice of the battlefield diviners.

In either case, we see the Oracle's authority and influence being used and manipulated for political and military purposes by both Delphi itself and by the Persian general Mardonius: Delphi for self-preservation, Mardonius for the psychological benefits to his troops' morale and self-belief.

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<sup>202</sup> Hdt. 9.37.1, 9.38.2, 9.39.1, 9.41.1.

<sup>203</sup> Hdt. 9.41.4.

<sup>204</sup> Cf. Aristeides seeking oracular guidance in addition to the battlefield omens divined by *manteis* at Plataea: Oracle no. 36, *supra*, p. 169.

### 3.8 Non-historical examples

Deliberate fulfilment of, or rather direct obedience to, a conditioned prophecy promising victory can also be seen in the legendary oracular tale of King Erechtheus of Athens during the Eleusinian War.<sup>205</sup> In his speech *Against Leokrates*, the fourth-century B.C. orator Lykourgos tells the legend of how the Athenian king, Erechtheus, when Athens was about to be invaded by the Thracians under the command of Eumolpus, consulted the Pythia as to how he could assure a victory over the enemy. The Oracle told Erechtheus that if he sacrificed his daughter before the two sides engaged he would defeat the enemy. Acceding to this command, he consequently drove the invading force from Attica.<sup>206</sup>

There are several variations of this legend. In Philochorus' version, the Oracle simply commands that someone should kill himself for the city.<sup>207</sup> Whilst several sources do not specify which of Erechtheus' daughters was sacrificed, Pseudo-Demosthenes tells us specifically that it was his eldest daughter, while Apollodorus informs us that it was his youngest daughter and that the rest of her sisters killed themselves, whereas in Philochorus' version it was Aglauros who volunteered to be sacrificed.<sup>208</sup>

A similar legendary example can be found in the oracular tale of Kodros and Sparta, where the Athenian king deliberately fulfilled a Delphic prophecy that had been given to the Lakedaimonians, which stated that they would conquer Athens providing they did not kill Kodros; by tricking one of the Spartan soldiers into killing him, he successfully forced the Lakedaimonian army to cease military actions and return home.<sup>209</sup>

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<sup>205</sup> Oracle no. N2; Lycurg. *Leoc.* 1.98; Pseudo-Demosthenes 42.4J *ap. Sob. Flor.* 39.33; Lib. *Decl.* 14.12; Philoch. 328.105J *ap. Ulp. in Dem.* 19.903; Apollod. *Bibl.* 3.15.4; Schol. on Aristid. 13.118, p. 110 Dind.; Aristid. *Or.* 13.118-119; Varro *ap. Schol. in Cic. Sest.* 21.48; Hyg. *Fab.* 46.3; P-W 195; Fontenrose, L32.

<sup>206</sup> Cf. Agamemnon's sacrifice of his virgin daughter, Iphigenia, in order to fulfil the oracle of the *mantis* Kalchas, which prophesied that Artemis was angry and would send unfavourable winds preventing the Akhaians from sailing to Troy until the sacrifice was performed: see Aesch. *Ag.* 118-139, 185-198, 205-236; Eur. *IA.* 87-92, 513-534; Lefkowitz, M. R., *Euripides and the Gods* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016) 173-175.

<sup>207</sup> This is strongly reminiscent of the kingly sacrifices of Leonidas and Kodros: *q.v.* Leonidas, Oracle no. 29, *supra*, p. 178; Kodros, Oracle no. N23, *infra*, p. 212.

<sup>208</sup> Some versions of the legend make no reference to an oracle. For instance, there is no mention of an oracle in Phanodemos' version (Phanodemos 325.4J *ap. Phot. Lex.* 2.64 Nab. = *ap. Suda II668*). In Hyginus' version (*Fab.* 46) it was actually Eumolpus' father, Neptune/Poseidon, who ordered Erechtheus to sacrifice his daughter, after the Athenians had killed Eumolpus in battle. That being said, Hyginus (*Fab.* 238.2) also states that, 'Erechtheus, son of Pandion, killed Chthonia in accordance with oracles on behalf of the Athenians'. For further discussion of the different versions, see Fontenrose, 1978: 367-368.

<sup>209</sup> For a fuller discussion of this oracle see Oracle no. N23, *infra*, p. 212.

#### 4. Fulfilment of oracular prophecies: direct obedience to oracular advice on military strategy and tactics

Although thus far many of the above examples of oracular prognostications delivered to *poleis* on matters of war clearly produced positive encouragement, reassurance, and confidence in the consultant *polis* and its army, the prophecies themselves were typically ambiguous, often impalpable, responses that were very much open to the interpretation of the enquirers. This enabled the consultants a considerable amount of latitude in how they went about fulfilling the Oracle's directions. However, there is also a selection of war oracles where a *polis* or *strategos* consults an Oracle to ask for guidance before a war or during a conflict on how they might achieve victory against their enemy and are given much more specific strategic or tactical advice, which consequently has a significant impact on strategic and tactical decision-making. Moreover, in the eyes of the ancient sources when the consultant then obediently (and, it must be noted, correctly) carries out the Oracle's directions, it invariably produces success.

##### 4.1 The Akhaian siege of Phana

The most obvious example would be that of the Akhaians' consultation of the Delphic Oracle during a siege of Phana *c.* 189 B.C.<sup>210</sup> Pausanias describes how the Akhaians, when they were conducting a protracted siege against the Aetolian city of Phana, sought the counsel of the Delphic Oracle.<sup>211</sup> The Pythia gave the following response:

Akhaians, people of the earth of Pelops,  
you ask how you might take a citadel:  
ask from what water it has drinking water  
then take Phana, the village of towers.<sup>212</sup>

Initially unable to decipher what the Oracle meant, the Akhaians began to make ready to raise the siege and sail home. However, they subsequently observed a woman drawing water from a stream just outside the city walls. Realising that this must be the water referred to in the oracle,

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<sup>210</sup> Oracle no. 64: Paus. 10.18.2-3; P-W 181; Fontenrose, Q203.

<sup>211</sup> The exact location of Phana and the date of the siege are both uncertain, and Pausanias is the only writer who tells this story. Nevertheless, Woodhouse has identified a likely site and has suggested the dates 367 or 189 B.C. Woodhouse, however, argues for the later date of 189 B.C. and is supported by Schober and Bommeljé: see Woodhouse, W. J., *Aetolia: its geography, topography, and antiquities, Greek history* (New York: Arno Press, 1973) 141-144; Schober, F., 'Delphoi', *RE Suppl.* 5 (1931) 108; and Bommeljé, S., 'Aeolis in Aetolia: Thuc. 3.102.5 and the Origins of the Aetolian "ethnos"', *Historia* 37, 3 (1988) 311. Parke and Wormell, on the other hand, prefer the earlier date due to the style of the oracular response: see Parke and Wormell, 1956c: 78.

<sup>212</sup> Paus. 10.18.2, trans. Peter Levi (*Guide to Greece*).

they captured the woman and discovered that this was the only supply of water that the defenders had access to. The Akhaians therefore blocked up the spring and promptly captured the city.

Fontenrose believes that the oracle is not genuine and classifies it as ‘Quasi-historical’, but once more provides little explanation for doing so. Parke and Wormell, on the other hand, argue quite rightly that the story need not be rejected as unauthentic. It is indeed very plausible and possible that some Delphians may have possessed enough local knowledge of Phana to suggest the fairly simple and logical measure of cutting off the local water supply to the town. Furthermore, the archaeological evidence from the identified site of Phana dovetails neatly with the ancient account, particularly with regard to traces of the spring and the towers.<sup>213</sup>

The oracular episode is a particularly revealing incident. As well as providing us with yet another example of an Oracle being consulted for guidance during a siege or campaign, it clearly reveals how the Oracle’s response could have a direct impact on military tactics during battle and affect its final outcome. In this instance, the Akhaians were told by the Pythia, in fairly unequivocal terms, to uncover where the citadel took its drinking water from and that that would bring the *polis* to its knees. One can argue that any Oracle could make the commonsense suggestion to a *polis* or *strategos* seeking military advice or help during a siege to seek out and stop the water supply of the besieged city-state; after all, most sieges are won, of course, by starving the defenders out rather than by force,<sup>214</sup> and without water humans can only survive approximately three to five days at the most.<sup>215</sup> However, what is really intriguing here is the fact that it is highly likely that the Delphic Oracle would have had sufficient geographical knowledge of Phana to know that its water supply lay outside the citadel’s walls, not inside. A besieged *polis* with access to a spring within the walls of its Akropolis would obviously have been able to hold out for a considerably long time, but Phana did not possess

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<sup>213</sup> See Parke and Wormell, 1956b: 211-212.

<sup>214</sup> See Kern, P. B., *Ancient Siege Warfare* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999) 41, 54-55, 104, 114, 116, 136, 143, 151, 170; English, S., *The Sieges of Alexander the Great* (Barnsley: Pen & Sword Military, 2009) 10, 24; Skaarup, H., Aage, *Siegecraft - No Fortress Impregnable* (New York: iUniverse, 2003) 6, 10-11, 82-85; Warner, P., *Sieges of the Middle Ages* (Barnsley: Pen & Sword Military Classics, 2004) 12-13; Rogers, C., J., *Soldiers' Lives through History: The Middle Ages* (Portsmouth: Greenwood Press, 2007) 145; Robards, B., *The Medieval Knight at War* (New York: Barnes & Noble Books, 1997) 69.

<sup>215</sup> It is generally accepted medical fact that humans can survive for weeks without food, but a matter of a few days without water: see Piantadosi, C. A., *The Biology of Human Survival: Life and Death in Extreme Environments* (New York; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003) 43. For discussion of the vital importance of water supply during ancient Greek sieges, see Kern, 1999: 36-37, 42, 92, 116, 121, 130, 204, 298; Rawlings, L., *The Ancient Greeks at War* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007) 133.

this advantage and the Delphians would no doubt have been only too aware of this crucial piece of military intelligence. The fact that the Pythia guided the Akhaians to seek out the water supply of Phana so clearly in the oracular prophecy suggests that it must have been aware of this fact, otherwise it would have been impossible for the Akhaians to achieve the goal. Thus, directing the Akhaians to this vital piece of information would have clearly helped sway the outcome of the siege in Akhaia's favour.<sup>216</sup>

#### 4.2 Appius Claudius Pulcher and the Hollows of Euboea

The idea of Oracles being consulted for both divine sanction and strategic guidance, utilising the Oracles' unique knowledge of local geography and current affairs, is further supported by Appius Claudius Pulcher's consultation of the Delphic Oracle in 48 B.C. concerning the civil war between Caesar and Pompey.<sup>217</sup>

At the time of the outbreak of the Great Roman Civil War (49-45 B.C.), between Gaius Julius Caesar and the *Populares*, against Gnaeus Pompeius Magnus and the *Optimates*, Appius Claudius Pulcher, who had been elected *ensor* in 50 B.C. and had gone east with Pompey in early 49 B.C., had been put in charge of Greece. Whilst serving as the Roman governor of Akhaia, the civil war broke out. Appius, uncertain about which side to follow, consulted the Pythian Oracle regarding the conflict, despite the shrine falling into disuse after it had been severely damaged by an earthquake in 83 B.C. and the Temple being burned during several subsequent barbarian invasions.<sup>218</sup>

According to the sources, Appius forced the Priestess to descend into the innermost part of the *adyton* despite it being an unpropitious time and asked the god what the outcome of the civil

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<sup>216</sup> Cf. also Kimon's consultation of Zeus Ammon during the siege of Kition: Oracle no. 38; Plut. *Cim.* 18. Plutarch records how Kimon, whilst leading the Athenians on an expedition against Egypt and Kypros, was besieging the city of Kition when he dispatched emissaries to consult the Oracle at Ammon on a secret matter. Unfortunately, we will never know what question was going to be put to the Oracle, because as soon as the delegates approached the shrine the Oracle commanded them to depart, saying that Kimon himself was already with him. When the envoys returned to the Greek camp on the Egyptian coast they discovered that Kimon was dead, and that his death had taken place around the same time as the Oracle consultation, thus realising that the god had been alluding to their general's death. Although we do not know the exact nature of the question put to the Oracle, it is a fair assumption to make, when taking into consideration the other examples we have of Kimon's and other generals' customs on campaign, that it would most likely have been on a tactical or strategic matter, such as the progress of the siege itself, as in the case of the Akhaian siege of Phana, or the next objective of the expedition.

<sup>217</sup> Oracle no. 66: Luc. *BC* 5.194-196; Val. Max. 1.8.10; Oros. *Hist.* 6.15.11; P-W 436; Fontenrose, Q249.

<sup>218</sup> Parke and Wormell, 1956b: 278, 283, 408.

war would be, to which the Pythia replied: ‘This war does not concern you at all; you will possess the hollows [*Coela*] of Euboea.’ Although Orosius’ account in his *Historiae Adversus Paganos* ends there before he launches a vehement attack on the pagan shrine of Delphi, Lucan’s *Pharsalia*, which provides a much more detailed and colourful account of Appius’ consultation, goes on to explain how Appius, misunderstanding the oracular prophecy, subsequently withdrew from the civil war and hurried off to Euboea, with the intention of seizing control of Chalkis for himself.<sup>219</sup> However, upon arriving at Coela between the towns of Karystos and Rhamnous on the west coast of Euboea, a short distance from the Chalkidian strait, Appius caught a fever and died on the spot. Thus the oracle was fulfilled and a famous tomb was consequently built for him there at Coela, near the shore of the Euripos strait.<sup>220</sup>

Parke and Wormell consider the prognostication to be a genuine response of the Delphic Oracle. Indeed, they argue that the words of the Pythia may have been a bow drawn at a venture and that the death of Appius on Euboea conveniently gave them an intensity of meaning which they might otherwise have never possessed; thus after his death a deeper meaning was read into the Pythia’s words.<sup>221</sup> Consequently, the accidental fulfilment of the Oracle’s equivocal prophecy evidently provided great propaganda for Delphi and provided writers such as Lucan with melodramatic material for his epic poem. Fontenrose, on the other hand, argues that, aside from the oracular story being told about a historical person who died in Euboea, the story has an obvious folkloristic feel to it.<sup>222</sup> However, Fontenrose does acknowledge the possibility that Appius could feasibly have asked for Delphic sanction of a plan to occupy a position in Euboea and was granted it, although once more he does question whether a Roman commander would seek a Delphic sanction for his movements.<sup>223</sup> That being said, that is not the response Lucan and Valerius Maximus record. Furthermore, Fontenrose casts further doubt on the authenticity of the oracular story due to the fact that Cicero does not record the prophecy in *De Divinatione*, which mentions Appius Claudius and was only written three or four years after Appius’ death, therefore he would surely not have overlooked such a recent example of a truthful prophecy concerning a man who he referred to as ‘*meus amicus Appius*’.<sup>224</sup>

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<sup>219</sup> For other examples of misunderstood oracles, usually with tragic consequences, see *infra*, 244ff.

<sup>220</sup> For further discussion of Appius’ death at Coela on Euboea and the location of the Hollows, see Ellis, R., ‘The Riddle in Verg. Ecl. III. 104, 5.’, in Wright, W. A., Bywater, I., and Jackson, H. eds., *Journal of Philology: Vol. 17* (Cambridge, 2012); and Mason, H. J. and Wallace, M. B., ‘Appius Claudius Pulcher and the Hollows of Euboea’, *Hesperia* 41, 1 (1972) 131, 136-139.

<sup>221</sup> Parke and Wormell, 1956b: 408.

<sup>222</sup> Fontenrose, 1978: 66.

<sup>223</sup> Fontenrose, 1978: 66 n. 13.

<sup>224</sup> Cic. *Tusc.* 1.16.37.

It is not necessarily needed, however, to impugn Parke and Wormell's belief in the authenticity of the oracular consultation and response, particularly when we take into consideration Appius' well-documented superstition.<sup>225</sup> Mason and Wallace, for instance, acknowledge that Appius' remarkable reputation for religious reverence and belief in the supernatural must have played a part in his consultation of the Delphic Oracle and his subsequent decision to go to Euboea, although they also argue that strategic reasons must also have played a crucial part in helping shape his decision to relocate there.<sup>226</sup> They contend that it is difficult to believe that Euboea was somehow removed from the conflicts of the winter of 49-48 B.C.,<sup>227</sup> and, moreover, that it is unlikely that Appius would have been able to remain neutral in the war, as it would have been difficult for any public figure of that period to have remained apart from the conflict, particularly considering the fact that Appius' censorship in 50 B.C. would have made him many enemies among the Caesarians in Italy, and his daughters were married to Pompey's son and to Marcus Junius Brutus.<sup>228</sup> Furthermore, they argue that it would also have been difficult for Appius to withdraw to Euboea after he had accepted command in Greece in 48 B.C., and if he had had a change of heart and done so, then it is remarkable that neither Caesar nor Cicero comment upon it.

As a result, Mason and Wallace argue that the strategic importance of Euboea to an active Pompeian commander in 48 B.C. should not be underestimated. Although Pompey's strategy was 'Themistoklean', in that he aimed to use his large fleet based at Kerkyra to eventually retake Italy from Caesar,<sup>229</sup> his land forces were based mainly around Thessalonike and later on, as the conflict progressed, at Larissa. As a result, Pompey would have depended heavily on sea routes for supply and communication, and, in order to keep the north Aegean open and ensure his fleet's freedom of movement, he would have needed to have had control of a series of vital positions on land, such as the narrow entrance to the Corinthian Gulf, the Isthmus of

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<sup>225</sup> Appius was an augur and had a widely acknowledged expertise in augural lore, upon which he published: see Cic. *Brut.* 267; *Div.* 1.29.132; *Fam.* 3.4.1; fragments of his technical work on augury are also preserved in Festus, *Gloss. Lat.* 214, 382, 462-464 L.

<sup>226</sup> Mason and Wallace, 1972: 133.

<sup>227</sup> Mason and Wallace argue that Constans makes a dubious assumption when he asserts that Euboea was, 'loin du fracas des armes...une île tranquille de la Grèce': see Constans, L. A., *Un Correspondant de Cicéron: Ap. Claudius Pulcher* (Paris: Boccard, 1921) p. 115; Mason and Wallace, 1972: 133 n. 11.

<sup>228</sup> Although Appius' two daughters are not mentioned directly by name, Cicero states to Appius (Cic. *Fam.* 3.4.2, 3.5.5, 3.10.10), 'Pompeius, father-in-law of your daughter'; and regarding Brutus' marriage to Appius' eldest daughter, Cicero refers (Cic. *Brut.* 267, 324) to Appius as being Brutus' father-in-law (*socer*) in both passages.

<sup>229</sup> See Cic. *Att.* 8.10.4.

Corinth, key points in the Saronic Gulf, and the entrance to the Euripos. It is in this light that the strategic importance of Chalkis and Appius Claudius' function on Euboea becomes clear.<sup>230</sup> It is also possible, then, to understand why the Oracle told Appius that his place was at Chalkis, and also how the traditional misinterpretation of his withdrawal to Euboea arose.

However, all of this does not explain why Appius Claudius consulted the Oracle in the first place. If we accept that Appius did not remain neutral and did in fact relocate to Euboea to guard the Euripos for Pompey's fleet, then why did he feel the need to seek the Pythia's sanction or advice? The only logical explanation is that Appius' superstitious nature must have played a considerable part in his decision to consult Delphi. It therefore stands to reason that Appius must either have been seeking divine ratification for his plans to move to Euboea out of religious veneration, or perhaps for advice on where best to relocate, utilising the Delphic Oracle's knowledge of local terrain and intelligence.

Mason and Wallace may provide the solution to the conundrum when they make the salient point that the oracle did not specifically name Chalkis alone, but an area bounded off by Chalkis, Rhamnous, and Karystos. Indeed, the Euboean gulf narrows considerably off Rhamnous, therefore as a consequence it is a good topographical defining point for the approach to the Euripos. This, of course, would surely have been known to the Delphic Oracle and would have made good strategic sense to direct Appius there.<sup>231</sup> Furthermore, there may also have been strategic reasons for holding Karystos, as its port, Geraistos, controlled a major route to Asia Minor, where Metellus Scipio was active in the winter of 49-48 B.C.<sup>232</sup> In addition, Appius and the Claudii may even have had private interests in Karystos due to the thriving industry of Karystian marble.<sup>233</sup> The inscription discussed by Mason and Wallace, recording

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<sup>230</sup> For a fuller discussion of Pompeian strategy in the area and Appius' supposed neutrality, see Mason and Wallace, 1972: 133-134.

<sup>231</sup> There is further evidence of Appius' connection with Rhamnous and the surrounding area around this period. *I.G.*, VII, 428 associates Appius with Oropos, near Rhamnous, possibly in 49-48 B.C. Constans places the inscription in this period, and, indeed, even suggests that Appius visited the Oracle of Amphiaraos at Oropos concerning the same matter he consulted Delphi about, or regarding his health: see Constans, 1921: 114 n. 4. Mason and Wallace, however, argue that the absence of any official title on the inscription suggests that it was perhaps referring to Appius' visit to Greece in 61 B.C. when he had no official standing. On that particular visit Appius is also recorded as having plundered art treasures from nearby Tanagra: see Cic. *Dom.*, 43.111; Mason and Wallace, 1972: 134 n. 17.

<sup>232</sup> For Scipio's movements, see Caes. *B. Civ.* 3.31, 3.33; *S.I.G.*<sup>3</sup>, 757 (Pergamon). For the significance of Karystos on the route to Asia Minor, see Plut. *Brut.* 24.3: Plutarch tells us that it was at Karystos that Brutus intercepted Roman transport ships full of treasure en route from Asia. See also Mason and Wallace, 1972: 134-136.

<sup>233</sup> Pliny tells us that Marcus Vitruvius Mamurra, who was prefect of the engineers under Julius Caesar in Gaul, was the first person in Rome to adopt the practice of cladding all of his walls with marble, and that he used Karystian marble: see Plin, *H.N.* 36.7. It later became an imperial monopoly: see *C.I.L.* 563, VI, 8486.



the honours paid to Appius by the people of Karystos just before, or possibly just after, his death suggests, therefore, that Appius Claudius did in fact go to Karystos, and that he presumably had good reason for doing so. Consequently, Delphi's knowledge of this reason may also help explain the rationale behind the Pythia's choice of an imprecise and loose geographical reference to the Hollows, between Chalkis and Karystos.

Therefore, putting aside Fontenrose's scepticism, the evidence suggests that there is no real reason to doubt the veracity of the oracular consultation and response. Consequently, the oracular episode is very important for several reasons. Depending on which interpretation of the oracular prognostication we follow, we have either an example of a military commander seeking guidance on which side to enter a military conflict on, or seeking divine sanction for a tactical move to a new strategic position, which in this case was the Hollows of Euboea. The first interpretation, which is the one suggested by our literary sources, is that the negative prognostication issued by the Pythia, warning Appius to stay out of the civil war between Caesar and Pompey, was enough to persuade Appius to remain neutral in the conflict and to withdraw to Euboea. Although, on this occasion, it must also be noted that that Appius' decision to stay out of the war must have been further encouraged and sweetened by the perceived lure of winning Chalkis as his personal domain.

On the other hand, if we follow the persuasive argument put forward by Mason and Wallace, then it provides us with another concrete example of a military leader consulting an Oracle for divine sanction of a military venture or for advice on military strategy. A particularly intriguing and compelling theory is that besides Appius' well-known religious deference, another reason why Appius wanted to consult the Pythia was to use the Delphic Oracle as a sounding board for his proposed strategic relocation to Euboea. The Delphic Oracle, along with all the other Oracles in general, as focal points and hubs of activity in the ancient Greek world, would have been ideally suited to provide generals with up-to-date intelligence on current affairs, as well as fresh rumours and gossip on all the recent goings-on in the region, and to provide key information regarding local geography and topography. In this respect, it would have made strong sense for a shrewd military commander, particularly if they were not native to the land like Appius, to avail of such a wealth of knowledge to aid their military decision-making and to consult the local Oracles before devising or refining strategy and tactics.

The Pythia's response, therefore, in either interpretation, had the effect of, respectively, dissuading Appius from taking sides in the civil war and convincing him to remain neutral, or confirming, or even suggesting, that the move to the Hollows of Euboea was a good strategic decision. Either way, it clearly illustrates the tremendous influence and impact the Oracle could have on the military decision-making of a commander such as Appius.

The oracular stories, therefore, concerning the Akhaians' siege of Phana and Appius Claudius' relocation to Euboea raise another crucial aspect of the Oracle's role in ancient Greek warfare. Aside from genuine religious reverence and the importance of obtaining divine sanction for foreign policy and military decisions, by consulting the Oracle and asking how they could achieve victory, one can convincingly ratiocinate that the ancient Greeks did so also in the hope that the Oracles would supply them with some small piece of intelligence that would aid them in their war against their enemies. Oracles (particularly Delphi due to its geographical position), as places of pilgrimage, visited by travellers from over Greece and the wider Mediterranean, were perfectly positioned to be focal points of gossip and intelligence gathering in the ancient world. Furthermore, it would have been in the best interests of the oracular shrines and their attendants to make sure that they had an excellent grasp of current affairs and issues, since their own status and livelihood would have depended on the prestige of their Oracle and its ability to accurately predict the future. As Nilsson quite correctly argues:

‘Delphi war der Mittelpunkt der Griechenwelt, wo Leute aus all’ ihren Landschaften zusammenströmten...Die Delphier waren nicht dümmer als andere Griechen. Sie hatten eine einzigartige Gelegenheit, Nachrichten aus allen Teilen der Welt der Griechen zu erhalten, sie zu sammeln und zum Besten ihres Orakels zu verwenden. Der Prophetes muß einen großen Einfluß gehabt haben.’ (‘Delphi was the centre of the Greek world, where people from everywhere came together. The people of Delphi were not stupider than other Greeks. They had a unique opportunity to get news from all corners of the Greek world, to collate it and to use it to the advantage of their oracles. The prophet must have had a great deal of influence.’)<sup>234</sup>

Starr argues, too, that the temple personnel at Delphi must have had frequent contact with emissaries and private consultants from *poleis* all over Greece and would thereby have had key insights into current events.<sup>235</sup> Moreover, Parke and Wormell, when discussing the Delphic Oracle's role in colonisation, assert that the Delphic authorities must have possessed a considerable store of geographical knowledge accumulated from the many visitors to the shrine

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<sup>234</sup> Nilsson, M. P., 'Das delphische Orakel in der neuesten Literatur', *Historia* 7, 2 (1958) 244.

<sup>235</sup> Starr, C. G., *Political Intelligence in Classical Greece* (Leiden: Brill, 1974) 28.

from far and wide, and from the consultants themselves inadvertently supplying the attendants with information and descriptions about their prospective new lands.<sup>236</sup> Indeed, Russell, in his study of *Information Gathering in Classical Greece*, compares Delphi to that of Switzerland during World War II.<sup>237</sup> He argues that not only would people from all over the Greek world have visited Delphi to consult the god, but also to attend the Pythian Games under a divinely sanctioned truce; during this time there would be intense intelligence activity, which the oracular shrines could exploit to their advantage, while visitors from all over Greece would be able to discover what questions their rivals were putting to the gods. The same would also apply, of course, to the other Panhellenic festivals, such as the Dodonaean and Olympian Games. Thucydides, for instance, tells us that the Athenians obtained information about the secret negotiations taking place between the Lakedaimonians and the Chians while participating in the Isthmian Games.<sup>238</sup> Herodotus, on the other hand, records how Periander found out about the Lydian King Alyattes' poor state of health because he was present at Delphi when the Lydian ambassadors were consulting the Pythia on the issue, which he then passed on to his friend, and Alyattes' foe, Thrasyboulos, the King of Miletos.<sup>239</sup> Consequently, Russell concludes correctly that the ancient Greeks 'conceived of Delphi as a place to acquire information that was otherwise difficult to access' and argues that the same would also apply to the other oracular shrines scattered around ancient Greece.<sup>240</sup>

### 4.3 The Syedrans and Klarian Apollo

Another key example of an Oracle issuing specific strategic advice and thereby its powerful role in the formation of military strategy and *polis* decision-making can be seen with the Syedrans' consultation of the Oracle of Apollo at Klaros.<sup>241</sup> An inscription found on the site of

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<sup>236</sup> Parke and Wormell, 1956b: 50.

<sup>237</sup> Russell, F. S., *Information Gathering in Classical Greece* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1999) 89.

<sup>238</sup> Thuc. 8.10.1; Russell, 1999: 89.

<sup>239</sup> Hdt. 1.19-22. Cf. the Delphic prophecy delivered to Eëtion in response to his enquiry about his chance of an heir, which subsequently reached the ears of the Bacchiadae, about whose destruction it prophesied: Hdt. 5.92b.3; Kodros discovering the oracle given to the Spartans before their invasion of Attica, Oracle no. N23, *infra*, p. 212ff.; the Spartans being informed by a Delphian about the oracle given to the Messenians vis-à-vis victory being granted to the first *polis* that dedicated a hundred tripods to Zeus on Mt. Ithome, Oracle no. 5, *infra*, p. 294ff. Cf. also the Athenian ambassadors' open discussion of the gloomy oracle they had received from the Pythia in 481 B.C. concerning the Persian invasion and the subsequent advice given to them by an eminent Delphian, Timon, son of Androboulos, Oracle no. 31, *infra*, p. 275ff.

<sup>240</sup> Russell, 1999: 89-90.

<sup>241</sup> Oracle no. 65: Bean, G. E. and Mitford, T. B., *Journeys in Rough Cilicia in 1962 and 1963* (Graz: H. Böhlhaus, 1965) 21-3, no. 26; Price, 1999: 179-180; Sokolowski, F., 'Sur l'Oracle de Claros Destiné à la Ville de Syédra', *Bulletin de Correspondance Hellénique* 92 (1966) 519-522. For the dating of the inscription, see Robert, L., *Documents de l'Asie Mineure Méridionale: Inscriptions, Monnaies et Géographie* (Geneva: Droz, 1966) 91-100;

the ancient city of Syedra in Cilicia reveals how the Syedrans, who were being plagued by pirates in the first century B.C., in their distress asked the Oracle of Apollo at Klaros for divine guidance. The answer from the Klarian Oracle was twofold: they were told to erect a statue of Ares bound in the chains of Hermes, supplicating a figure of Dike, which would bring peace and prosperity; and also to fight with all their might against the pirates and to exact vengeance upon them, and that if they did this they would be victorious. The first part of Apollo's edict was to perform a magic binding ritual, aimed at weakening the pirates and at the same time giving the Syedrans a supernatural advantage over their foe. Faraone argues quite rightly that the binding ritual proposed by the Oracle was intended to tip the scales of the conflict in the favour of the Syedrans.<sup>242</sup> However, the second part of the oracular pronouncement was to instruct the Syedrans to engage in strenuous military action against the Cilician pirates, either driving them away or binding them in unbreakable chains, and that they should not, from fear, shirk from exacting terrible vengeance on the plunderers; if they did this they would escape every impairment.

Although the inscription reveals yet another instance of an oracular consultation by a *polis* before undertaking military action, and provides us with another example of an Oracle other than Delphi having an influence on *polis* military strategy, there are perhaps other less obvious political motivations for consulting the Klarian Apollo at work here. On face value, apart from advising the Syedrans to carry out a binding spell on a statue of Ares, the inscription clearly states that the Oracle directed the Syedrans to carry on with their own defensive military manoeuvres. However, the implication of the oracle is that the Syedrans must resist the pirates by military force or else suffer severe consequences. The priest's prognostication, though, is neither clear as to what form the resistance should take, nor specific about which quarter the Syedrans can expect retribution from if they fail to carry out the Oracle's instructions.

Philip de Souza, however, puts forward an intriguing and convincing argument that the *lex de provinciis praetoriis* of 100 B.C. may lie behind the Syedrans' consultation of the oracle and

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Wiseman, J., 'Gods, War, and Plague in the Times of the Antonines', in Mano-Zissi, D. and Wiseman, J. eds., *Studies in the Antiquities of Stobi* (Beograd, 1973) 174-179; Maroti, E., 'A Recently Found Versified Oracle against the Pirates', *Acta Ant.* 16 (1968) 233-238. Using numismatic evidence, Robert and Wiseman attempt unsuccessfully to redate the inscription to the reign of Lucius Verus. Maroti, however, presents a good refutation of Robert; it appears Wiseman was unaware of Maroti's article. For a fuller discussion, text, and translation of the inscription, see De Souza, P., 'Romans and Pirates in a Late Hellenistic Oracle from Pamphylia', *CQ* 47, 2 (1997) 477-481; and Meuli, K. and (Merkelbach, R., 'Die Gefesselten Götter', in Gelzer, T. ed., *K. Meuli: Gesammelte Schriften* (Stuttgart, 1975) 1077-78.

<sup>242</sup> See Faraone, 1991a: 9.

help explain the ambiguities of the oracular command.<sup>243</sup> The law, which clearly set out the responsibility of Rome's allies and friends to assist the Romans in their attempts to stamp out piracy, would clearly solve the issue of what nature the Syedran resistance should take. Syedra was probably too small a city to be able to engage in independent military action against pirates, but the inhabitants probably refused to allow pirates to use their harbour and town, and contributed in some manner to the Roman forces when they eventually came into this area, particularly those of Pompey *c.* 66 B.C.<sup>244</sup>

Furthermore, de Souza argues that it could have in fact been the promulgation of the law, and the campaign of Marcus Antoninus the orator which preceded it, or the events of the 80s and 70s B.C., particularly Publius Servilius Vatia Isauricus' highly successful campaign against piracy in Cilicia, which actually prompted the Syedrans to consult Apollo for guidance. All of these developments may have been the impetus for the Syedrans to seek divine advice on whether to support Rome or her piratical enemies. It therefore follows that the feared retribution may have in fact been that of Rome if the Syedrans failed to assist the Romans in their war against piracy. De Souza also makes the shrewd observation that in a time when Roman supremacy in Cilicia was far from guaranteed, it would have been prudent on the part of the Syedrans to make the public record of their decision to fight piracy as ambiguous as possible.

Intriguingly, de Souza goes further to suggest that the oracle may even have been used as a political tool to unite the Syedrans. He argues that the reference in the first line of the inscription to the Syedrans as a people 'who in the common land inhabit a fertile territory of people of mixed race' is probably an allusion to the presence of Pamphylia and Cilicians in the community. Considering that the neighbouring city of Korakesion was a notorious centre of piracy, which had previously resisted the Romans, particularly Pompey in 67 B.C.,<sup>245</sup> Syedra's decision to ally with Rome would have been a risky venture, with the potential to incur retribution from the pirates. Therefore, the consultation and public display of the oracle may have been a conscious attempt by the Syedrans to galvanise the people behind the decision to ally with Rome against the pirates; by giving the decision divine sanction it would have undoubtedly helped garner support and mollified citizens' fears.

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<sup>243</sup> See De Souza, P., *Piracy in the Graeco-Roman World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999) 139-40.

<sup>244</sup> Pompey has a tenuous link with Syedra in the 40s B.C. Lucan and Florus mention Syedra as the city where Pompey held his last council of war before his fatal journey to Egypt in 48 B.C.: see Luc. 8.259-60; Flor. 2.13.51.

<sup>245</sup> See Plut. *Pomp.* 28.1; Vell. Pat. 2.32.4.

Nevertheless, although there were possibly other political motivations behind the oracular consultation, the fact remains that the oracular command would have had a significant impact on the Syedran commanders' decision to continue their defensive military manoeuvres against the pirates, or indeed, as is implied by the oracle, to intensify their resistance, especially after receiving the assurance from the god that in doing so they would ultimately be victorious, coupled with the menacing threat that a failure to do so could bring about even more peril. This affirmation of victory from Apollo would also surely have had a considerable positive impact on the morale of Syedran army and citizen body, along with the comforting knowledge and belief that the binding spell as ordained by the god would also aid them in their struggle against the Cilician pirates and give them the upper hand in the conflict.

#### 4.4 Non-historical examples

Similar examples are also recorded in the legendary war oracles; for instance, the consultation of the Delphic Oracle by King Temenos of the Herakleidai before his planned invasion of the Peloponnese.<sup>246</sup> According to our sources, when the Herakleidai consulted Delphic Apollo to ask how they might conquer the Peloponnese, the Pythia directed them to 'Go through the road of the narrows'. However, upon receiving this instruction, Temenos protested, stating that their fathers had received the same instructions previous yet their expedition ended in failure,<sup>247</sup> to which the Oracle rejoined that the blame lay not with Apollo but with the Herakleidai who had misinterpreted the prophecy and that the god had meant the narrows of the sea, not the Isthmus of Corinth.

Consequently, we can see within the one oracular tale that the Delphic Oracle had been consulted by the Herakleidai twice for advice on how to achieve victory over their Peloponnesian enemies, as well as the fact that on both occasions in response to their request the Oracle had given direct guidance on where best to launch an attack from. That being said, the oracle's words were, of course, just vague enough to allow interpretation, and any fault, to lie with the consultant. Nevertheless, in the account given by the Scholiast on Aristeides, the Pythia's retort to Temenos' complaints about their fathers being given erroneous advice is much more specific, explicitly stating that the god was referring to the strait at Rion and Molykria rather than the Isthmus of Corinth. What is more, it is clear from the oracular story

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<sup>246</sup> Oracle no. N18: Apollod. 2.8.2; Oinomaos *ap.* Euseb. *Praep. Evang.* 5.20, p. 210d; Aristeides, 46.215; Schol. on Aristeides, p. 652 Dind.; Tryphon, *de Trop.* 4.8.738 Walz.; P-W 290; Fontenrose, L63; *infra*, p. 259ff.

<sup>247</sup> *Q.v.* Oracle no. N17, *infra*, p. 258.

that on both occasions the Herakleidai took on board the Oracle's guidance and implemented it in earnest, for the invasion force under Hyllos made its way into the Peloponnese by land through the Isthmus, whereas the expedition under the command of Temenos launched its attack from Naupaktos in Lokris.

Although it is a legendary tale, and as such any conclusions we draw from it must obviously be treated with caution and tentativeness, the inference is once again that to the ancient audience the time-honoured practice of military commanders consulting Oracles for divine guidance during a war and the Oracles' directives subsequently being complied with and sincerely acted upon must have been very much expected and accepted.

#### 4.5 Consultations for specific strategic guidance

In a slight variation to the examples we have seen thus far, where the consultants normally approach the Oracle with a general query on how to obtain victory over their enemies and are subsequently often given quite specific advice, there are also several examples of war oracles recorded by our ancient sources whereby a *polis* or *strategos* consults an Oracle for precise military guidance during a conflict on whether or not they should persist or desist with a campaign, and are accordingly encouraged or dissuaded by the Oracle's prognostication to continue or abandon the war effort. Clearly in such instances the potential impact upon army psychology and military decision-making is momentous. Indeed, the obedient fulfilment of the oracular commands by *poleis* and *strategoí* on such occasions illustrates once more just how powerful the influence of the Oracles could be in ancient Greek warfare, and, furthermore, how troop psychology and military strategy were inextricably linked.

We have already seen, for example, the Amphictyons' consultation of the Delphic Oracle during the First Sacred War to ask whether they should continue the war against Kirrha as a result of the plague they were enduring, and were subsequently told by the Pythia to continue the fight.<sup>248</sup> However, contrariwise, perhaps an even more remarkable instance of this type of counsel and response can be seen with Sparta's consultation of the Delphic Oracle during the Peloponnesian War.<sup>249</sup> According to several sources, in 404 B.C., after the decisive defeat of

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<sup>248</sup> Oracle no. 13, *supra*, p. 175.

<sup>249</sup> Oracle no. 44: Schol. Aristid. 13.196, pp. 341-2 Dind; Ael. *VH* 4.6; Ath. 5.187D, 6.254B; P-W 171; Fontenrose, Q198.

the Athenians at the Battle of Aigospotamoi, the Spartans asked the Delphic Oracle whether they should go on and destroy the city of Athens. The Spartans were consequently warned by the Pythia: ‘disturb not the common hearth of Hellas’. The Lakedaimonians duly paid heed to the Oracle’s words and did not attack the city itself, but instead imposed humiliating peace terms on the Athenians.

Fontenrose is fairly scathing on this oracle, dismissing it almost entirely out of hand. He argues that if this oracle was authentic then Xenophon would surely have mentioned it, and, furthermore, that it is unlikely that the Spartans would have asked the Delphic Oracle such a question; they simply would have destroyed the city.<sup>250</sup> However, Fontenrose’s argument is unfairly too critical. Silence on Xenophon’s part is not strong enough grounds to condemn the oracle outright as fallacious, nor is it unusual for *poleis* or *strategoï* to seek oracular advice on important strategical and tactical matters on campaign and on the battlefield, particularly pious Sparta.<sup>251</sup> Consequently, there is no sound justification for discarding the oracle as fictitious. Indeed, the fact that Greek *poleis* and military commanders would consult Oracles on such matters and then obediently accede to the Oracles’ advice to either continue or terminate their efforts is made all the more compelling when we take into account the instances where *strategoï* cease their military campaigns when an oracular prophecy is accidentally fulfilled.<sup>252</sup> Thus, if the oracle is to be taken at face value and regarded as authentic, then, once more we have a clear and compelling piece of evidence illustrating both the reliance of *poleis* on Oracles for guidance in warfare and the significant influence those same Oracles had on the military and foreign affairs of Greek city-states.

#### 4.5.1 *Non-historical examples*

The practice was also enshrined in ancient Greek legend. Herakles, for example, when he was about to launch an attack against Pisaia after his victory over Elis and Pylos, consulted the Delphic Oracle and was told by the god that Pisaia was Zeus’s concern and that it should be left alone.<sup>253</sup> In reverent obedience to the oracular command, Herakles did not make war upon

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<sup>250</sup> Fontenrose, 1978: 332.

<sup>251</sup> Cf. Kimon, Oracle nos. 36 & 37, *supra*, p. 169ff. & p. 70ff.; Agesipolis, Oracle no. 48, *supra*, p. 161ff.

<sup>252</sup> Q.v. *infra*, p. 205ff. Cf. also the Spartans’ acquiescence to a Delphic oracle that commanded them to let the Messenians go unharmed from Ithome c. 460 B.C.: Thuc. 1.103.1-3; P-W 115; Fontenrose, Q175; Hodkinson, 1983: 274.

<sup>253</sup> Oracle no. N7: Paus. 5.3.1; P-W 447; Fontenrose, L111. According to several versions of the ancient legend, Herakles’ subjugation of Elis coincided with his establishment of the Olympic Games. It seems that originally it



Pisaia and immediately ended his campaign, ceding all of the Eleian territory thus far gained to Phyleus. Yet again, the implication is that such consultations and actions would have been familiar and unremarkable to the contemporary audience of the legendary tales.

#### 4.6 Unsolicited pronouncements on foreign policy and military strategy

A unique historical example, quite apart from the legendary oracles, where an Oracle issues a command, unbidden, to a *polis* to embark upon a military venture, to which the consultant *polis* accedes, concerns the well-known prompting of the Lakedaimonians by Delphi to liberate Athens from the Peisistratidai. Herodotus records a story of how the exiled Alkmaionidai, an Athenian clan driven into exile the Peisistratidai, having failed to liberate Athens by force, resorted to bribing the Delphic Oracle in an attempt to remove the tyrant Hippias.<sup>254</sup> According to Herodotus, whilst on their stay at Delphi, the Alkmaionidai bribed the Priestess to tell any Spartans that happened to consult the Oracle that it was their duty to liberate Athens.<sup>255</sup> As a result of repeated enjoinders by the Oracle to do so, the Spartans finally acceded to the Oracle's commands and sent an army, led by King Anchimolios, to drive out the Peisistratidai. The expedition, however, was a failure and Anchimolios himself was killed. In response the Spartans sent another larger expedition under Kleomenes, which was successful in removing the Peisistratidai at the second attempt. The episode had long-term ramifications for Atheno-Spartan relations and, once more, illustrates the impact the Delphic Oracle could have in the military affairs of Greek *poleis*.

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was the Daktylos Herakles who supposedly founded the Olympic Games but that his namesake Herakles, the son of Zeus and Alkmene, eventually superseded him as the reputed founder of the Games: see Diod. Sic. 5.64.3; Strab. 8.3.30; Paus. 5.7.6-10, 5.13.8, 8.2.2; Suidas s.v. Allos houtos Herakles; Richardson, N. J., 'Panhellenic Cults and Panhellenic Poets', in Boardman, J., et al. eds., *The Cambridge Ancient History, Volume V, The Fifth Century B.C.* (New York, 1992) 227; Young, D. C., *A Brief History of the Olympic Games* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004) 12-13.

<sup>254</sup> Oracle no. 22: Hdt. 5.63.1; 5.66.1; 5.90.1; 5.91.2; & 6.123.2; Arist. *Ath. Pol.* 19.4; Schol. vet. on Ar. *Lys.* 1153; Plut. *Mor.* 860d; P-W 79; Fontenrose, Q124.

<sup>255</sup> This is but one of several references we have of allegations of bribery of the Delphic and other Oracles. Cf. Kleomenes' bribery of the Delphic Oracle (Hdt. 6.66-8; 6.75.3); and Lysander's attempts to bribe the Oracles at Delphi, Dodona, and Ammon: see Ephorus, F. Jacoby, *FGrHist* 70 F 206 = Plut. *Lys.* 25; Nep. *Lys.* 3.2-4; Diod. Sic. 14.13.5-8; Parke and Wormell, 1956b: 161, 204-205; Malkin, I., 'Lysander and Libys', *CQ* 40, 2 (1990) 541-542. Crahay, on the other hand, believes that the Alkmaionids did not bribe the Pythia to give this response to the Spartans, but rather used a more subtle approach of persuading the Delphians to take an anti-tyrannical stance by circulating a new kind of political literature which showed how the gods through Oracles had always opposed despots and tyrants: see Crahay, 1956: 165, 280-289; Fontenrose, 1978: 309. The alleged bribery of the Delphic Oracle in this case is denied by Plutarch (*De Malign. Herod.* 23), and How and Wells suggest that it may even be a fiction to cover a change in Spartan policy: see How and Wells, 1912: *ap.* 5.63.

Furthermore, Herodotus makes a compelling and most illuminating comment regarding the initial Spartan decision to send an army, when he says: ‘The Peisistratidai were good friends of theirs: but no matter – the commands of God were more important to them than human ties.’<sup>256</sup> Parke and Wormell argue that it is naïve to think that the Spartans were merely incited to action simply by pressure from the Delphic Oracle and that they must have had other motives for doing so.<sup>257</sup> Indeed, they suggest that ‘it is more probable that the Pythia’s responses were only the façade to cover a more elaborate political negotiation.’<sup>258</sup> It is true, if we are to believe Aristotle, that the Peisistratidai were allied with Argos, which would have given the Spartans extra motivation to remove them from power in Athens.<sup>259</sup> However, I do not feel that it is necessarily naïve or ingenuous to believe that the urging from the Apolline Oracle alone would have been sufficient enough cause to spur the Spartans into action, and I therefore agree wholeheartedly with Pritchett’s view on the issue that, on the contrary ‘there was no more powerful pressure than that from the god.’<sup>260</sup> We must take into account the very real and serious fear in the ancient Greek world of ignoring the dictate of the gods and being subsequently punished for doing so.<sup>261</sup> As discussed above, the literary sources are littered with references to situations where mortals have ignored or disobeyed the wishes of the gods at their own peril. Therefore, the pressure by the Delphic Oracle in this instance, particularly as it was persistent badgering, could have easily been incentive enough on its own to make the Spartans remove the Peisistratidai from power.

Moreover, Pritchett argues that, in the eyes of the Spartans, the Pythia was clearly taking the initiative, and that oracles must have been given to that effect. As a result of these oracular commands, the Lakedaimonians first sent Anchimolios, and then later King Kleomenes, with an army to drive out the tyrant Hippias. Forrest also fervently supports this viewpoint and berates Klees for underplaying this fact when he says: ‘Nor is Klees wholly justified in setting aside the Pythia’s prompting of the Spartans to liberate Athens. The Spartans did not know at

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<sup>256</sup> Hdt. 5.63.

<sup>257</sup> Parke and Wormell, 1956b: 146-147.

<sup>258</sup> Parke and Wormell, 1956b: 147.

<sup>259</sup> Arist. *Ath. Pol.* 19.4. Martin Ostwald (*CAH IV*<sup>2</sup>: 301-2) and John Marincola tend to agree with this view. For Marincola, see Herodotus, *The Histories*, translated by A. de Sélincourt, revised with an introduction and notes by J.M. Marincola (London, 2003) 658 n. 32. For the rivalry and tense relations between Sparta and Argos, see Forrest, 1968: 26, 32, 35 f., 67, ch. 6 *passim*, 90, ch. 9 *passim*; Cartledge, 2002a: 85, 109, 128-131, ch. 11 *passim*, 194, 216, 220, ch. 13 *passim*; Cartledge, P., *Spartan Reflections* (London: Duckworth, 2001) 32, Cartledge, P., ‘Hoplites and Heroes: Sparta’s Contribution to the Technique of Ancient Warfare’, *JHS* 97 (1977) 25.

<sup>260</sup> Pritchett, 1979: 309.

<sup>261</sup> Q.v. *supra*, p. 36ff.

the time that the Alkmaionidai were responsible; in their eyes, then, the Pythia was taking the initiative.<sup>262</sup>

Regardless of whether or not the Lakedaimonians had secondary or ulterior motives for removing the Peisistratidai, Herodotus' comment still gives us a valuable insight into the psyche of the ancient Greeks and the magnitude of the Oracle's influence on *polis* foreign policy. Moreover, the occasional accusation of bribery levelled at the Delphic Oracle raises a crucial point about the power of the Oracles in the ancient Mediterranean world, for if their prognostications did not carry political weight and psychological clout in ancient Greece, then why attempt to bribe them in the first place? It is the act of bribery itself which illustrates unequivocally that the Oracles wielded significant power and influence over the foreign policies and mindsets of ancient Greek *poleis* and their respective citizens and warriors.

## **5. Accidental fulfilment of oracular prophecies: effects on psychology and military decision-making**

Closely related to the direct commands from an Oracle to continue with or cease a war, are those oracles which lead indirectly to the cessation of a military conflict by the accidental fulfilment of a prophecy. This is a particularly illuminating feature of war oracles, both in terms of its impact on army psychology and military decision-making, as well as its potential use as a stratagem or political tool.

### **5.1 Kleomenes and Argos**

The most remarkable historical illustration of this in action is perhaps Kleomenes' termination of military operations against Argos *c.* 494 B.C. when he realised he had inadvertently fulfilled the prophecy given to him by the Delphic Oracle prior to him launching his campaign.<sup>263</sup> Herodotus relates how Kleomenes, before embarking upon his campaign against Argos, consulted the Delphic Oracle and was told by the Pythia that he would take Argos.<sup>264</sup> During the campaign, after the Spartan victory at Sepeia, fleeing Argive troops had taken refuge in a

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<sup>262</sup> Forrest, W. G., 'Review of Hans Klees: Die Eigenart des griechischen Glaubens an Orakel und Seher', *Gnomon* 38 (1966) 629; Klees, H., *Die Eigenart des griechischen Glaubens an Orakel und Seher*, *Tübinger Beitr.* 43 (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer, 1965) 39.

<sup>263</sup> Oracle no. 28: Hdt. 6.76-82; P-W 86; Fontenrose, Q136.

<sup>264</sup> Hdt. 6.76.1.

nearby wood, which was then surrounded by Kleomenes' army. After tricking fifty of the Argive men out of the wood with false declarations that their ransoms had been paid and subsequently butchering them, Kleomenes lost patience and ordered that the wood be burnt down to the ground. However, unbeknownst to Kleomenes until it was too late, and the fire was already raging, the wood was in fact sacred to the hero Argos. Consequently, upon making the discovery, Kleomenes was reputed to have exclaimed: 'Apollo, O God of Prophecy, you did indeed deceive me when you said I should take Argos, for now I believe that your prophecy to me is fulfilled.'<sup>265</sup> Thus Kleomenes, believing that he had unwittingly fulfilled Apollo's prophecy, decided not to attack the city of Argos itself for fear of provoking the god's anger, and sent the greater part of the Lakedaimonian army home, whilst he sought further counsel from the gods on the issue by making sacrifice at the Temple of Hera.<sup>266</sup> However, when he failed to obtain a favourable sign from the sacrifice that he would be granted further success, Kleomenes decided to end the campaign and return to Sparta.

There are two elements to the story, which are of vital importance. The first is the fact that it is a clear example of an oracle constraining and curtailing military action. The second is the fact that even the frequently irreverent Kleomenes appears to have paid heed to the prophecy and feared the repercussions of going beyond what the god had ordained for him.<sup>267</sup> It must be noted that Kleomenes was prosecuted for not following up the success of Sepeia when he returned home and charged with bribery. Kleomenes, of course, as was the norm for him, used religious reasons for his defence.<sup>268</sup> In his defence, Kleomenes stated that after he had unintentionally fulfilled the prophecy by burning the sacred copse of Argos down, he did not dare make an attempt on the actual town of Argos until he consulted the god again and found out whether he would be granted further success.<sup>269</sup> Kleomenes then stated that when he offered sacrifice in the temple of Hera, a flame shot out from the breast of the goddess' statue, which he interpreted to mean that he had achieved all that he was supposed to. Had the flame come from the statue's head, Kleomenes argued, he would have taken that to mean that he should take the city.<sup>270</sup> The story was deemed a credible and reasonable defence by the Spartan Ephors and he was fully acquitted.

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<sup>265</sup> Hdt. 6.80. For a similar homonymic misunderstanding concerning Cambyses and 'Smerdis', see Hdt. 3.63-4.

<sup>266</sup> Hdt. 6.81.

<sup>267</sup> Cartledge states aptly that Kleomenes had a 'remarkably flexible, not to say unorthodox, attitude to religion: see Cartledge, 2002a: 126.

<sup>268</sup> Hdt. 6.82. See also Forrest, 1968: 90.

<sup>269</sup> Hdt. 6.82.1.

<sup>270</sup> Hdt. 6.82.2.

Herodotus makes the comment that he could not be sure whether Kleomenes' defence was true or false.<sup>271</sup> Certainly, many modern historians do not believe his defence was sincere and have proposed various ulterior secular reasons for Kleomenes' abrupt *volte-face* and his decision to leave the city of Argos unscathed after Sepeia. How and Wells, for instance, suggest that Kleomenes was conscious of the Spartans' lack of skill in siege warfare and that the loss of life in storming the walls would have been too great.<sup>272</sup> Forrest, on the other hand, suggests that Kleomenes may have decided not to attack the city itself, with the intention of installing a puppet government, or because he preferred expansion by alliance rather than subjugation.<sup>273</sup> Grundy argues along similar lines that Kleomenes was unwilling to destroy Argos, because a strong Argos frightened her neighbours into seeking Sparta's protection.<sup>274</sup> Burn, meanwhile, suggests that Kleomenes chose not to destroy the city, as Sparta did not have the men to colonise the plain and that an old and now weakened Argos would have been less of a problem to them than a new Argos colonised from neighbouring *poleis*.<sup>275</sup>

Fontenrose believes that the story of the oracle and its fulfilment are pure legend, although he does believe Kleomenes' attack on Argos to be historically true. Aly also agrees with Fontenrose and sees little else in the tale but plentiful folklore motifs.<sup>276</sup> However, I am in accord with Parke and Wormell, who are not so dismissive. They make the persuasive argument that, although it would be potentially easy to regard it all as fiction, there is one important fact that makes it more plausible to suppose that there is a foundation of truth, which is the fact that after Kleomenes' return he was put on trial by the Ephors for failing to capture Argos.<sup>277</sup> As a result, one may extrapolate that before the impending campaign both Sparta and Argos as usual sent embassies to the Delphic Oracle about their prospects of success, and that, although the oracle has not been preserved, the Spartans must have received a decidedly favourable response, which encouraged them to launch the invasion. The Pythia's prophecy, of course, would have undoubtedly been couched in the usual ambiguous language, which

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<sup>271</sup> Hdt. 6.82.1.

<sup>272</sup> How and Wells, 1912: *ap.* 6.80.

<sup>273</sup> Forrest, 1968: 90, 92.

<sup>274</sup> Grundy, G. B., 'The Population and Policy of Sparta in the Fifth Century', *JHS* 28 (1908) 85; and Grundy, G. B., *Thucydides and the History of his Age* (London: J. Murray, 1911) 223.

<sup>275</sup> Burn, A. R., *Persia and the Greeks* (London: Oxford, 1962) 231.

<sup>276</sup> See Fontenrose, 1978: 69 n. 19; Aly, W., *Volksmärchen, Sage und Novelle bei Herodot und seinen Zeitgenossen; Eine Untersuchung über die volkstümlichen Elemente der altergriechischen Prosaerzählung* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1921) 157-158.

<sup>277</sup> Parke and Wormell, 1956b: 159-160.

Kleomenes could have interpreted as prophesying the capture of Argos. It then seems that after his victory at Sepeia, whether for genuine religious reasons or perhaps for reasons of strategy or policy, Kleomenes decided it unwise to attempt to press home his success and attack the city itself and returned to Sparta. As a consequence of this, he was subsequently put on trial by the Ephors to explain why he had failed to fulfil the oracular prophecy. The accidental fulfilment of the oracle thus served as genuine religious justification for the premature end of the campaign, or, and perhaps more likely if we take into account Kleomenes' track record in religious affairs, a convenient and conventional excuse. Indeed, one might even venture that Kleomenes could have, while feigning ignorance, deliberately set fire to Argos' sacred grove in order to fulfil the oracle and provide an acceptable divine line of defence for the inevitable examination when he returned to Sparta.

Two notable examples from sacrificial divination, carried out by *manteis* on military campaign, provide us with further evidence that divination could be used by *strategoï* as a convenient way to justify ending a campaign or ordering a retreat. In 396 B.C., for instance, Agesilaos aborted his campaign into Phrygia when he obtained bad omens from a sacrificial victim.<sup>278</sup> According to Xenophon, the day after the Greeks had been defeated by the Persians in a cavalry battle, Agesilaos offered sacrifices with a view to advancing further but the victim lacked a lobe, and that upon receiving this sign, he turned and marched to the sea.<sup>279</sup> However, Xenophon immediately goes on to state: 'He realised that without an adequate force of cavalry he would be unable to campaign in the plains, and so decided that he must acquire such a force rather than have to fight a campaign in which he must always be, as it were, on the run.'<sup>280</sup> As a consequence, it is clear from Xenophon's account that, aside from the negative sacrificial omen, Agesilaos clearly had practical strategic and tactical reasons for not advancing inland any further in the face of superior Persian cavalry, therefore the adverse omen provided Agesilaos with an expedient excuse for turning back. Yet, Xenophon does not see any inconsistency here. The implicit logic in the text is that Agesilaos did not receive favourable omens from the gods simply because of the fact that his cavalry force was not strong enough to proceed any further.

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<sup>278</sup> Xen. *Hell.* 3.4.15; Plut. *Ages.* 9.3.

<sup>279</sup> Xen. *Hell.* 3.4.15.

<sup>280</sup> Xen. *Hell.* 3.4.15.

The same attitude towards divination can be seen in Alexander's reaction to the mutiny of his troops at the Hyphasis in 326 B.C. According to Arrian, after the Macedonians refused to cross the river and to go any further,<sup>281</sup> Alexander took to his tent, where he spent the next three days sulking.<sup>282</sup> However, after Alexander's seclusion failed to have the desired effect on his troops and they refused to change their minds, Ptolemy, the son of Lagus, offered sacrifice and received unfavourable omens to cross the Hyphasis. After this, Alexander then decided to turn back.<sup>283</sup> Similar to the example of Agesilaos, Alexander must have known that it would have been impossible for him to cross the Hyphasis and advance to the Ganges by himself, therefore the unpropitious omen provided him with an opportune excuse to cease the advance and march back again. Thus on both occasions, as Flower asserts, 'negative omens could be a convenient means for a commander to save face.'<sup>284</sup> However, as Flower quite rightly argues, too, it was perfectly possible to carry out the rites of divination in such a way to obtain an apt result without contrivance or compromising religious belief.<sup>285</sup> In both examples there is no need to suggest foul play or conscious manipulation on the part of commanders, nor was there any accusation of such by Agesilaos' and Alexander's contemporaries. In reality, in both cases, it was entirely acceptable and convenient for the *strategoï* to stop sacrificing once the negative omen they desired had been obtained. Moreover, to the ancient Greeks: 'the gods were not stupid; they had good strategic sense',<sup>286</sup> hence why they precisely did not give Agesilaos and Alexander favourable omens to advance.

However, whether or not Kleomenes truly believed in what he was saying himself, is not really the issue. The crucial point is that, obviously, as proven by his acquittal, the Spartans did, which illustrates clearly that it must have been commonplace for oracles to have a direct impact on strategy in this manner during a campaign. Furthermore, this is not the only example we have of a trivial or accidental fulfilment of a prophecy impacting upon foreign policy or military decision-making. We can see below, for instance, how Kodros' stratagem to fulfil the Oracle's

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<sup>281</sup> Arr. 5.25.3. Cf. Curt. 9.3.19-19; Plut. *Alex.* 62.3.

<sup>282</sup> Arr. 5.28. Cf. Diod. Sic. 17.93.2-95.2; Just. 12.8.10-17; Plut. *Alex.* 62; Curt. 9.2.1-3.19; Strab. 15.1.27, 32. This was a regular tactic of Alexander's, which worked prior to and after this episode: with success after he killed Cleitus, see Plut. *Alex.* 50-52.4; Arr. 4.8.1-9; Curt. 8.1.19-2.13; Just. 12.6.1-18; and likewise when his troops defied him at Opis: see Arr. 7.8.1-12.4; Diod. Sic. 17.108.3, 109.1-3; Plut. *Alex.* 71.1-5; Just. 12.11.5-12.10; Curt. 10.2.8-4.2. For a fuller discussion of Alexander's wont to employ this tactic, see Carney, E., 'Artifice and Alexander History', in Bosworth, A. B. and Baynham, E., J. eds., *Alexander the Great in Fact and Fiction* (Oxford, 2000) 236-285, esp. 273ff.

<sup>283</sup> Arr. 5.28.

<sup>284</sup> Flower, 2008: 174. For an insightful analysis of these two episodes, see Flower, 2008: 173-175.

<sup>285</sup> Flower, 2008: 173.

<sup>286</sup> Flower, 2008: 174

prophecy forced the Spartans to abandon their campaign against the Athenians.<sup>287</sup> Moreover, a dream interpretation story recorded by Herodotus concerning Astyages, the King of Media, reveals to us the ancient perspective on such issues; from the account both Astyages and his *Magi* clearly believed that even ominous prophecies very often came true in trivial and harmless ways.<sup>288</sup> Fontenrose sums it up neatly when he says: ‘If a prophecy has been fulfilled literally, according to some meaning of the words used, though in an unexpected and disappointing way, the recipient can expect no better thereafter – that is a rule of the game.’<sup>289</sup> What is more, Pritchett makes the astute point that modern historians’ theories of Kleomenes’ practical and political motives for ending his campaign do not explain why the invasion was undertaken in the first place, and that they fail to truly appreciate the religious background of the time.<sup>290</sup>

### 5.1.1 *Tiribazos and Artaxerxes II*

With regards to the Delphic Oracle being used as political defence, an interesting *comparandum* can be made with Tiribazos’ trial after his alleged revolt against Persia. After Euagoras, the King of Kyprian Salamis, refused to sign the Peace of Antalkidas in 387 B.C., which ended the Corinthian War in Greece between Sparta and Athens, hostilities carried on between Kypros and Artaxerxes II Mnemon for several years until Persia invaded the island in 385 B.C. Despite the Persian invasion force, under the command of two Persian generals, Tiribazos and Orontes, being much larger than the Kyprian army, Euagoras was able to cut their supplies off and force a rebellion from the starving troops. The war turned in Persia’s favour after Euagoras’ fleet was destroyed at the Battle of Kition; however, despite being forced to flee to Salamis and being heavily blockaded there, Euagoras managed to hold out, and consequently was able to take advantage of a quarrel between Tiribazos and Orontes to conclude a peace in 376 B.C.<sup>291</sup>

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<sup>287</sup> Oracle no. N23, *infra*, p. 212.

<sup>288</sup> Hdt. 1.120. According to Herodotus, Astyages, as a result of a dream, feared that his unborn grandson, Cyrus, would usurp his throne and become king. However, after Cyrus, at the age of ten, was chosen to be ‘king’ during a game with other village boys, Astyages asked the *Magi* to interpret his dream again, to which they responded: ‘Even our regular prophecies are sometimes fulfilled in apparently small incidents, and as for dreams – they often work out in something quite trivial.’ Astyages wholeheartedly agreed and, as a result, decided to let Cyrus live as he no longer considered him a threat to the throne.

<sup>289</sup> Fontenrose, 1978: 68-69.

<sup>290</sup> Pritchett, 1979: 311.

<sup>291</sup> For an account of the events surrounding Euagoras’ war with Persia and the Revolt of the Satraps, see Brosius, M., *The Persians: An Introduction, Peoples of the Ancient World* (New York: Routledge, 2006) 6-31 *passim*; Gershevitch, I., ed., *The Cambridge History of Iran, Volume 2, The Median and Achaemenian Periods*, 2nd ed.,



According to Diodorus' account of this dispute between the two Persian generals, Orontes became jealous of Tiribazos and sent letters back to Artaxerxes accusing Tiribazos of delaying capturing Salamis when he was capable of doing so, and that he was instead making secret alliances with both Euagoras and the Lakedaimonians to aid him in a revolt against the Great King. Moreover, Orontes also claimed that Tiribazos had sent to Delphi to enquire of the god regarding his plans for insurrection, and that he was also attempting to win over the commanders of the troops for his rebellion through acts of kindness, and by promising them gifts and honours.<sup>292</sup> Although Diodorus is not specific about the exact question put to the Oracle, it surely would have been to ascertain the prospects of success for such a venture or to obtain divine sanction for the proposed coup. Artaxerxes evidently believed Orontes' allegations, for he arrested Tiribazos and imprisoned him awaiting trial. In Tiribazos' subsequent trial, however, he denied all the charges made against him, and, with respect to the alleged consultation of Delphic Apollo, stated that the god as a general rule did not deliver responses regarding death, and invoked all the Greeks present as witnesses to the veracity of this tenet. In other words, Tiribazos' defence was that he could not have enquired of the Oracle about a revolt against Artaxerxes, as a revolt, if successful, would have necessitated the death of the King, and therefore the Oracle would not have responded to such a request. Fontenrose, who believes that Diodorus probably took this story from Ephorus, classifies this oracular episode as Historical and consequently regards it to be authentic.

There are several important points to be gleaned from this alleged oracular consultation. Firstly, if we take Orontes' accusation to be true, then it is another clear example of an army commander consulting an Oracle before embarking upon a military venture, which in this case was a proposed insurrection against the Persian Great King. Moreover, it is also another example of a foreign military leader consulting a Greek Oracle.<sup>293</sup> Secondly, and perhaps more significantly, if we examine Tiribazos' trial, we see another instance of an oracle being used to add credence and substance to a military commander's defence. The argument that the Delphic Oracle was evidently known not to pronounce prophecies regarding a person's death was used

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vol. 2 (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1985) 368-370; Heskell, J., *The North Aegean Wars, 371-360 B.C.* (Stuttgart: F. Steiner, 1997) 94; Frye, R. N., *The History of Ancient Iran*, vol. 3 (München: C.H. Beck, 1984) 87-136 *passim*; Hornblower, 2002: 256-260.

<sup>292</sup> Oracle no. 49: Diod. Sic. 15.8.4, 15.10.3; P-W 176; Fontenrose, H73.

<sup>293</sup> Cf. Croesus (Oracle no. 19, *infra*, p. 248); Arkesilaos (Oracle no. 20, *infra*, p. 252); and Mardonius (Oracle no. 35, *infra*, p. 233); as well as Licinius (Oracle no. 66, *supra*, p. 191); and Julian (Oracle no. 67, *infra*, p. 273) consulting Didyma.

to add cogency to Tiribazos' rebuttal of the charges made against him. Moreover, it seems to have been effective and achieved the desired result, for Diodorus informs us that it was by means of such a defence that Tiribazos was cleared of the charges by the unanimous vote of the judges.<sup>294</sup> Therefore, the fact that an oracular consultation could be used as substantiation for both Orontes' accusation and Tiribazos' defence, illustrates once more the political and legal influence the Oracles wielded in the ancient world.

## 5.2 Non-historical examples

The same theme is recorded in several of the legendary war oracles. In the oracular tale of Kodros and Sparta, for instance, we see an example of an oracle being deliberately fulfilled by a military commander on one side of the conflict in order to bring about the end of a war, and the subsequent impact on the opposing side's morale and military decision-making process.<sup>295</sup> Lykourgos describes how the Peloponnesian Dorians in the eleventh century B.C.,<sup>296</sup> who had decided to march against Athens after their crops had failed, asked the Delphic Oracle whether or not they would capture the city, whereupon they were told that they would be successful so long as they did not kill Kodros, the King of Athens. However, one of the Delphians, Kleomantis, secretly disclosed the oracle to the Athenians. Kodros, upon hearing this oracle, heroically tricked an invading soldier into killing him in order to assure the safety of Athens. When the Spartans realised that they had accidentally fulfilled the words of the oracle, they promptly ended their invasion and returned home. In gratitude for his actions, Kleomantis and his descendants were granted the honour of being allowed to dine nightly in the town hall of Athens.

Lykourgos' version of the legend is an obvious manifest addition to the ancient legend of Kodros, particularly with respect to the appearance of Kleomantis, which is perhaps a later

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<sup>294</sup> Diod. Sic. 15.10.4.

<sup>295</sup> Oracle no. N23: Hellanikos, *FGrH* 4 F 125; Lycurg. *Leoc.* 1.84-87; Pherec. *FGrH* 3 F 154; *Suda*, E3391; Schol. vet. on Pl. *Symp.* 208d; Demon 327.22J (or Eudemos) *ap. Phot. Lex.* 1.223 Nab. = *ap. Suda*. E3391 = *ap. Apost.* 8.6; Conon, 26; Just. *Epit.* 2.6.17; Sostratos, 23.2J *ap. Plut. Mor.* 310a = *ap. Stob. Flor.* 7.66; Schol. vet. on Lyk. 1378; Paus. 7.25.2; Lib. *Decl.* 14.12, 17.80; Vell. Pat. 1.2; Val. Max. 5.6 ext 1; Polyaeus, *Strat.* 1.18; Zen. 4.3; Schol. on Aristeides 13.119, p. 113 Dind. & 46.237, p. 685 Dind.; Cic. *Tusc.* 1.48.116; Serv. *Ecl.* 5.11 = Vat. Myth. 1.161, 2.189; Tzetz. *Chil.* 1.192-193; Schol. on Hor. *Carm.* 3.19.2; Prokl. *Rep.* p. 175 Kroll; P-W 215; Fontenrose, L49.

<sup>296</sup> This tentative chronology is based upon Hellanikos' *Atthis*, which states that Kodros succeeded his father, Melanthes of the Neleid family, who was made King of Athens by the last Theseid king, Thymoites, and that he was in turn succeeded by his son, Medon: see Hellanikos, *FGrH* 4 F 125; *FGrH* 4, 323a; *FGrH* 4 608a; *Brill's New Pauly & OCD* s.v. *Codrus*; Harding, P., *The Story of Athens: the Fragments of the Local Chronicles of Attika* (London; New York: Routledge, 2008) 78-79; and Jacoby, F., *Atthis: The Local Chronicles of Ancient Athens* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1949) 88f., *passim*.

Delphic invention.<sup>297</sup> In an earlier version of the legend recorded by Hellanikos, Delphi is in fact not explicitly referred to, only ‘a divine oracle’, which had predicted to the Dorians that they would capture Athens, provided they did not kill Kodros the King, and there is no mention of Kleomantis’ role.<sup>298</sup> Furthermore, in Lykourgos’ version, Kodros, dressed as a beggar, went outside Athens’ walls and began collecting firewood, and when questioned by some Spartans about conditions within the city, killed one of them with a sickle, thus invoking their retribution. Whereas, in Hellanikos’ version, Kodros dressed himself as a woodcutter and approached the enemy armed with a pruning knife with the same result. Other versions vary slightly in several aspects, but in essence tell the same tale. In Valerius Maximus’ account, for instance, it is Kodros himself who receives the oracle saying that the war would end victoriously for the Athenians if he should be killed by an enemy.<sup>299</sup> However, subtle differences aside in all the versions, it is always the King’s deliberate fulfilment of the oracle, which accomplishes the Spartan retreat.

Parke and Wormell are convinced that there is no substance to the oracle and that the legend appears to have grown up comparatively late, mainly due to the fact that even as late as the mid-fifth century B.C., Kodros was still being represented by Attic vase painters as a warrior wearing ordinary hoplite armour. They argue, therefore, that the legend is ‘an ingenious combination of two motives – the voluntary victim and the king killed in disguise – and has been worked up to produce the maximum of dramatic effect.’ Thus, the part played by Kleomantis and his subsequent reward were cleverly invented to simply make the story more convincing.<sup>300</sup>

However, this legendary episode, along with the other legendary war oracle recorded by Lykourgos concerning Erechtheus’ sacrifice of his daughter during the Eleusinian War,<sup>301</sup> is particularly revealing in several ways. In terms of the authenticity of the actual oracles they are

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<sup>297</sup> See Jacoby, 1949: 255 n. 87.

<sup>298</sup> Hellanikos, *FGrH* 4 F 125.

<sup>299</sup> In some versions it is the Dorians who receive the oracle, stating that they will take the city if they refrain from killing the King (i.e. Hellanikos, *FGrH* 4 F 125; Lycurg. *Leoc.* 1.84-87; Pherec. *FGrH* 3 F 154; *Suda*, E3391; Schol. vet. on Pl. *Symp.* 208d; Demon 327.22J (or Eudemos) *ap.* Phot. *Lex.* 1.223 Nab. = *ap.* *Suda*. E3391 = *ap.* Apost. 8.6; Conon, 26; Just. *Epit.* 2.6.17; Sostratos, 23.2J *ap.* Plut. *Mor.* 310a = *ap.* Stob. *Flor.* 7.66; Schol. vet. on Lyk. 1378); in others the Oracle prophesies that Athenians will win if their king is killed, or that the side whose king is killed will win (i.e. Vell. Pat. 1.2; Val. Max. 5.6 ext 1; Polyaeus, *Strat.* 1.18; Zen. 4.3; Schol. on Aristeides 13.119, p. 113 Dind. & 46.237, p. 685 Dind.; Cic. *Tusc.* 1.48.116; Serv. *Ecl.* 5.11 = Vat. Myth. 1.161, 2.189; Tzetz. *Chil.* 1.192-193; Schol. on Hor. *Carm.* 3.19.2).

<sup>300</sup> Parke and Wormell, 1956b: 297. Parke and Wormell also argue that in legends of this type there is, with one partial exception, never any verse prophecy cited or any attempt to reproduce the original words of the Pythia.

<sup>301</sup> Oracle N2, *supra*, p. 188.

both almost certainly fictitious, shown by the fact that they occur too early before the existence of an oracular shrine at Delphi,<sup>302</sup> and that several different versions of the legends exist due to the stories being clearly added to and embellished as they were passed on to each generation, as seen with Valerius Maximus' account of the Kodros legend. Nevertheless, they are still vitally important as they reveal to us the prevalent attitudes to the Delphic Oracle in fourth-century Athens. The obvious corollary is that Athenians in the fourth century must have found the stories believable or else there would have been no point in Lykourgos using them in his rhetoric. Viewed in this light, the oracles illustrate, to the fourth-century Greek mind at least, what was expected and accepted about the impact the Delphic Oracle could have on the tactics and outcome of battle. In both examples, the Athenians adjusted their tactics in accordance with the Pythia's prophecies in order to secure victory. Likewise, in the case of the Kodros legend, the Spartans, encouraged by the seemingly straightforward caveat of the oracle, proceeded with the invasion of Attica and then abruptly ended their campaign against the Athenians once the prophecy was accidentally fulfilled. A comment by Pausanias on the episode with the Spartans and Kodros also hints at the powerful psychological blow such accidental fulfilment of an Oracle's words could deal, when he states that, on learning of the death of Kodros and of the manner of it, the Spartans departed from Attica because the oracle from Delphi made them 'despair of success in the future'.<sup>303</sup> Furthermore, in the case of the purported role of Kleomantis and his clandestine actions, it almost has the feel of espionage between *poleis*, and that once again knowledge of oracular prophecies could be used as powerful military intelligence to gain the upper hand in war.<sup>304</sup> Moreover, the fact that such legends were widely known and readily accepted is not only an indication of how common the practice of consulting the Oracles on military matters was, but also of how much authority the Oracles' utterances carried.<sup>305</sup>

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<sup>302</sup> According to Fontenrose, Delphic Apollo's sanctuary was not established on its historical site until c. the mid-eighth century B.C.: Fontenrose, 1978: 4. For discussion of the mythical and historical dates for the foundation of the Delphic Oracle, see Fontenrose, 1978: 1-4; Parke and Wormell, 1956b: 3-8; and Roux, G., *Delphes: son oracle et ses dieux* (Paris: Belles Lettres, 1976) 19-34.

<sup>303</sup> Paus. 7.25.2.

<sup>304</sup> Cf. Kleisthenes against the Kirrhaeans, Oracle no. 12, *supra*, p. 175ff.; Lokris and the 'vows oracle' against Kroton, Oracle no. 15, *supra*, p. 183ff.; Sparta and the 'tripods oracle' against the Messenians, Oracle no. 5, *infra*, p. 294ff.; see also *supra*, p. 197.

<sup>305</sup> See Pritchett, 1979: 305.

### 5.2.1 *The Herakleidai's invasion of Arkadia*

Another legendary oracular story concerning the Herakleidai's invasion of the Peloponnese records a further example of an accidental fulfilment of a prophecy leading to a cessation of war.<sup>306</sup> In this instance, although the exact question is not recorded, the Herakleidai were instructed by an Oracle that they 'should not make war on those with whom they eat.'<sup>307</sup> According to Polyaeus, Kypselos, the King of Arkadia, had somehow gained intelligence of the oracle given to the Herakleidai, and as a result, engineered it so the Herakleidai would be forced into becoming allies with the Arkadians. He did this by ordering the husbandmen in harvest season to leave their reaped corn in the highway as a present to the soldiers of the Herakleidai, who availed themselves readily of it. Afterwards, Kypselos went out to meet the Herakleidai and offered them presents of hospitality, which they refused keeping in mind the words of the oracle. However, Kypselos then pointed out to the Herakleidai that they had no need to refuse, as their army had already accepted the Arkadians' presents of hospitality by taking their corn. When the Herakleidai realised that they had unwittingly fulfilled the prophecy, they were reconciled to peace and obediently entered into an alliance with the Arkadians.

Several other legendary war oracles further illustrate the psychological boost that a sudden and fortuitous fulfilment of an oracular prognostication could give to an army. For instance, in the *Odyssey* we see Agamemnon's spirits being greatly raised when a Delphic oracle, which had prophesied that he would take Troy when 'the noblest of the Akhaians would quarrel', was realised after Odysseus and Achilles had a falling out.<sup>308</sup> Likewise, according to Apollodorus and Pausanias, when the Herakleidai were suffering a series of calamitous setbacks before their invasion of the Peloponnese c. 1104 B.C., they consulted the Pythia and were told that they would overcome their current predicaments and be successful in their invasion if they took the 'Three-eyed one' as a guide for their invasion.<sup>309</sup> They subsequently gained a boost to their morale and hopes when they by chance met an Elaeian exile, Oxylos, who was sitting on a horse

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<sup>306</sup> Oracle no. N20: Polyaeus. *Strat.* 1.7; Schol. on Aristeides 13.111, pp. 80-81 Dind.; P-W 295; Fontenrose, L67.

<sup>307</sup> Polyaeus. *Strat.* 1.7. Although Delphi is not explicitly referred to, it is fair to assume that it was the Delphic Oracle that was being referred to, taking into consideration all the oracular episodes of the saga which tie the Herakleidai so closely with Delphi: cf. Oracle nos. N15, N16, N17, N18, N19, N21.

<sup>308</sup> Hom. *Od.* 8.78-81; Oracle no. N10, *supra*, p. 162.

<sup>309</sup> Apollod. 2.8.2; Oracle no. N18, *infra*, p. 259.

and had lost one eye from an arrow.<sup>310</sup> Oxylos, of course, consequently led the Herakleidai on to their successful subjugation of the Peloponnese.

### 5.3 Conclusions

These oracular episodes, taken at face value, clearly illustrate the momentous power Oracles had, in that *poleis* and *strategoï* evidently had a genuine fear of going beyond their divine remit and what had been ordained for them, enough so that they would simply terminate a military campaign when they believed they had achieved what the god had prophesied for them. However, they also reveal war oracles being used by *poleis* and *strategoï* in a more guileful way too. In the legendary stories of Kodros and Kypselos, we see the oracles being used as stratagems in warfare; the oracles being utilised as religious intelligence and exploited to force an end to the conflict. In the historical example of Kleomenes, we see rather the oracle being used, perhaps, as justification and grounds for defence for ending a military campaign prematurely. In either case, the esteem with which the Oracles were held and the solemn power that they exuded is unmistakable. On one hand, the inference is that the gravity of the Oracles' prognostications was such that it could end a war when its prognostications were simply fulfilled, hence why generals and city-states endeavoured to use them a part of their military strategies, whilst on the other hand the suggestion is that an Oracle's prophecies carried such influence and political weight that they could be used by Kleomenes as concrete grounds for defence, and, crucially, with great success.

Whether or not, of course, a *strategos* simply feared the detrimental effect it would have on his troops' mentality if he were to continue beyond the mandate of the god, or whether he was purely using the inadvertent fulfilment of the oracle as an excuse and divine justification to put an end to hostilities to suit his own agenda is impossible to tell, but even if the military commander was manipulating events for his own ends, part of the pretext for doing so, especially when faced with questions upon returning home, must still have been to protect the morale of his men and to avoid disaffection.

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<sup>310</sup> Paus. 5.3.5.

## 6. Advice on military alliances

It is also clear that Oracles had an important role to play in the foreign affairs of *poleis* through the advice they issued regarding military alliances. Indeed, eighteen of the ninety-one war oracles in this study are concerned with military alliances. Although only eight of the oracular consultations directly ask the Oracle for advice with whom they should make a military alliance,<sup>311</sup> the Oracle seems to have freely issued advice on the formation of military alliances, asked or unasked for, which, as we shall see, played an important part in shaping *polis* foreign policy and, in turn, would have had the potential to significantly influence the outcome of military conflicts.<sup>312</sup>

### 6.1 Miletos and Karia

Several oracular consultations clearly illustrate the powerful influence of the Oracles in such matters. In the case of Croesus' consultation of Delphi and the Oracle of Amphiaraos at Knopia,<sup>313</sup> he explicitly asked the Oracles whether he should strengthen his invasion force with an ally, and on the back of the Oracles' similar responses decided to ally with Sparta.<sup>314</sup> The Karians, on the other hand, c. 500 B.C., asked Didymaeon Apollo directly whether they should ally themselves with the Milesians against the Persians.<sup>315</sup> According to Zenobius, when King Darius made war upon the Karians, they, in accordance with an ancient oracle which had told them to ally themselves with the mightiest, went to the Oracle of Apollo at Didyma and asked the god whether they should ally themselves with the Milesians.<sup>316</sup> The god replied that: 'Once upon a time the Milesians were mighty.'<sup>317</sup> Whilst we are not told by our sources what the Karians' exact actions were in response to this oracle, the Oracle's encouraging advice that the Milesians had once been a powerful people, would likely have confirmed to the Karians that

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<sup>311</sup> Oracle nos. 19, 25, 30, 32, 40, 55, 65, N21.

<sup>312</sup> See, for example, Oracle nos. 1, 6, 9, 18, 23, 35, N13, N18, N19, N20, N21.

<sup>313</sup> Oracle no. 19. For further discussion of this oracle, see *infra*, p. 248ff.

<sup>314</sup> Hdt. 1.53.1; 1.53.3; 1.56.2; 1.69.1.

<sup>315</sup> Oracle no. 25: Zen. 5.80; Prov. Bodl. 776; Demon 327.16J ap. Schol. vet. in Aristoph. *Plut.* 1002; Schol. vet. on Aristoph. *Plut.* 1002; Diod. Sic. 10.25.2; Schol. vet. on Aristoph. *Plut.* 1075; *Suda*, H572; Fontenrose, D40.

<sup>316</sup> Zenobius informs us that the ancient oracle telling the Karians to ally themselves with the mightiest came from an earlier *chrêsmos*, but he does not tell us who spoke it.

<sup>317</sup> Zenobius and the Bodleian Proverbs identify this response as Didymaeon. Demon and Schol. vet. on Aristoph. *Plut.* 1002, attribute it only to Apollo, whilst the other sources do not state any oracular site or specific god at all.

forming an alliance with Miletos would be a prudent move; at any rate they were certainly not openly dissuaded from entering into such an alliance.<sup>318</sup>

Fontenrose believes that this oracle was in fact originally a proverb, which has been employed by Zenobius for narrative purposes. However, it is extremely difficult to say with any certainty which oracles originated from proverbs and vice versa.<sup>319</sup> In this case, according to Zenobius and the Aristophanic Scholiast, the trimeter line was found in the poetry of Anakreon; however, it is impossible to know if Anakreon himself believed it to be a true oracular response, or whether he perhaps made use of a contemporary proverb, or even simply invented it. That being said, Aristophanes does quote it twice in *Plutus* (1002 & 1075) and in both cases only as a proverb.

Several sources also differ on the details of the combatants and consultants. According to Demon, the Karians were at war with the Ambrakiotes, but Fontenrose believes that this was probably an error of the Scholiast who cites him or of a copyist. Alternatively, the Schol. vet. on Aristoph. *Plut.* 1075 states that the consultants were the Kypriotes, whereas, according to the *Suda* the consultant was Polykrates, and neither of them tells us whom they wanted help against. In any case, regardless of who the consultants were, the episode provides us with another revealing example of an oracle playing an important role in the decision-making process of forming a military alliance.

## 6.2 Epidamnos during her war with the Illyrians

The consultation of the Delphic Oracle by Epidamnos during her war with the Illyrians also presents us with a particularly useful insight into the role that Oracles played with regards to military alliances.<sup>320</sup> Thucydides records how, in 435 B.C., Epidamnos, having recently undergone a democratic revolution, found herself under attack from the combined forces of the

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<sup>318</sup> There seems to be some confusion surrounding the events from our sources. The occasion seems most likely to have been concerning the Ionian Revolt, and indeed, according to Demon, the response was delivered just before the Ionian Revolt began in 499 B.C. However, Zenobius, the Scholiast, and Diodorus say that the Karians wanted Milesian help after Darius had attacked them, which, of course, does not make sense, considering the fact that the Ionian Revolt was instigated by Miletos and spread to Karia, whereas this story makes it sound as if the Milesians were not yet engaged in war with the Persians. As a result, it is most likely confused reference to the events of 499-494 B.C. or perhaps reference to earlier or later events in Darius' reign (521-486 B.C.): see Fontenrose, 1988: 215.

<sup>319</sup> On the narrative use of proverbs as oracular statements, see Fontenrose, 1978: 83-87.

<sup>320</sup> Oracle no. 40: Thuc. 1.24-26; P-W 136; Fontenrose, H4.



exiled oligarchs and the Illyrians.<sup>321</sup> As a result, Epidamnos appealed to her mother-city, Kerkyra, for help, but was refused.<sup>322</sup> Consequently, the people of Epidamnos, at a loss of what to do next, considered appealing to Kerkyra's own mother-city, Corinth, for aid instead. Epidamnos therefore sent envoys to Delphi to enquire whether or not they should undertake such a course of action. The resulting oracle told them to hand over their city and accept the leadership of Corinth.<sup>323</sup> In obedience to the oracle, the Epidamneans sent envoys to Corinth, submitting Epidamnos to Corinthian leadership and entreating for military assistance. Corinth consequently gathered an expedition force and rescued the city, albeit for only a short period of time.

This is one of the relatively small number of oracles which Fontenrose classifies as historical. What is of particular import to note, however, is the fact that it is clear from Thucydides' account that the Epidamnean envoys blatantly used the sanction from the Delphic Oracle as powerful leverage to convince the Corinthians to take action on their behalf.<sup>324</sup> Although there was already ongoing animosity between Corinth and Kerkyra, and Corinth clearly had her own personal reasons for getting involved in the conflict,<sup>325</sup> the Delphic Oracle sanction certainly seems to have helped persuade the Corinthians to come to the aid of Epidamnos, once again illustrating the influence that Oracles possessed in *polis* foreign policy and military affairs. The divine sanction, if not directly urging the Corinthians into action, at the very least gave the Corinthians the excuse and moral justification to prosecute the war they so eagerly coveted. Furthermore, the fact that the Corinthian intervention in the dispute would trigger off a series of events that would heighten tensions between Athens and Sparta and ultimately start the Peloponnesian War, shows the enormous impact the Delphic Oracle could have in the military affairs of the entire Greek world.<sup>326</sup>

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<sup>321</sup> Thuc. 1.24.5.

<sup>322</sup> Thuc. 1.24.6-7.

<sup>323</sup> Thuc. 1.25.1.

<sup>324</sup> Thucydides (1.25.2) states that 'the Epidamneans went to Corinth, and delivered over the colony in obedience to the commands of the Oracle. They showed that their founder came from Corinth, and revealed the answer of the god; and they begged them not to allow them to perish, but to assist them.'

<sup>325</sup> See Thuc. 1.25.3-4.

<sup>326</sup> Corinth's involvement in the dispute over Epidamnos led to war and defeat at the hands of Kerkyra, which in turn led to the Potidaean revolt. Sparta and Athens soon became embroiled in these disputes involving their respective allies, leading to a further deterioration in their relations and the outbreak of the Peloponnesian War in 431 B.C. For a narrative of the events, see Thuc. 1.31-65.

### 6.3 Chalkidike and Philip of Macedon

A very clear example of an Oracle being consulted for divine sanction of a proposed military alliance is that of the treaty of alliance between Chalkidike and Philip of Macedon. According to an inscription of Olynthos, the Delphic Oracle was approached in 356 B.C. by the Chalkidians and Philip and asked whether it would be better if they concluded an alliance.<sup>327</sup> The Pythia responded by telling the joint embassy that it would be better that they become friends and allies to the terms agreed upon; and that they should make sacrifice to Zeus Teleos and Hypatos, Apollo Prostaterios, Artemis Orthosia, and Hermes; and pray that the alliance may be successful, and give thank-offerings and gifts to Apollo at Pytho. Copies of the alliance were set up at Delphi, the temple of Artemis at Olynthos, and the sanctuary of Zeus Olympios at Dion. The oracle is classified unequivocally as ‘Historical’ by Fontenrose.<sup>328</sup>

The key thing to note about this oracular consultation is that it is clear from the wording on the stele that the Pythia was not being consulted about the mere possibility of an alliance between Philip and the Chalkidians, but that both parties concerned had clearly already made advances and drawn up the agreements prior to consulting the god.<sup>329</sup> Consequently, as the alliance had been pretty much already decided by both sides, it appears that the consultation of the Oracle was needed simply to obtain a divine seal of approval for the military pact.<sup>330</sup> As Bayliss states: ‘the alliance was therefore not only witnessed by the gods, but also actively endorsed by them.’<sup>331</sup> Once more this ties in with the primary psychological reasons for consulting the Oracles in the first place; that is, to obtain divine sanction for foreign policy decisions, and with it hopefully divine support and aid in the forthcoming conflict.<sup>332</sup> The subsequent overt public display of the alliance terms, of course, at three prominent locations of Delphi, Dion, and Olynthos, would have had the added benefit of letting their enemies know that the gods

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<sup>327</sup> Oracle no. 55: Inscription of Olynthos, Tod, M. N., ed., *A Selection of Greek Historical Inscriptions to the End of the Fifth Century B.C.*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1946) 2.158; Robinson, D. M., ‘Inscriptions from Olynthus, 1934’, *Transactions and Proceedings of the American Philological Association* 65 (1934) 103-122; P-W 260; Fontenrose, H19.

<sup>328</sup> Fontenrose, 1978: 250.

<sup>329</sup> See Robinson, 1934: 108.

<sup>330</sup> For further discussion of the procedures surrounding interstate oaths, and the role of the divine in military alliances, see Sommerstein, A. H. and Bayliss, A. J., *Oath and State in Ancient Greece, Beiträge zur Altertumskunde* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2012) 147-204.

<sup>331</sup> See Sommerstein and Bayliss, 2012: 172.

<sup>332</sup> See *supra*, p. 53ff.

were clearly on their side and had sanctioned the military union, which would hopefully spread doubt and fear among their foes.

## 6.4 Persian Wars alliances

Several of the oracular consultations regarding the Persian invasion of 480 B.C. are also concerned with the important question of military alliances. Herodotus tells us that when word reached Hellas that Persia's invasion preparations were well under way and the Persian army was on the move, a call went out from Sparta, as the acknowledged leaders of Greece and head of the Peloponnesian League, to those Greek *poleis* who had not yielded to Xerxes' demands for submission to attend a conference at the Isthmus of Corinth to discuss the defence of Greece.<sup>333</sup> The plenipotentiaries assembled at the Congress subsequently agreed to unite, put all feuds aside, and make their stand against Xerxes' invasion force.<sup>334</sup> As well as ceding Sparta overall command of both the military and the navy, and agreeing to send spies to Asia, the newly allied Greeks also determined to send envoys to Argos, Syracuse, Kerkyra, and Crete in the hope of persuading them to join the united Greek cause.<sup>335</sup>

### 6.4.1 Argos

According to Herodotus, the Argives, as soon as they became aware of the Persian preparations against Greece, knew only too well that the anti-Persian Greeks would try to enlist their help

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<sup>333</sup> For debate on other possible sites for the meeting of the Congress, see Cartledge, P., *Thermopylae: The Battle that Changed the World* (London: Macmillan, 2006) 99-103. Cartledge believes, however, that Herodotus' assertion that the Congress met at the Isthmus of Corinth is indeed the correct one.

<sup>334</sup> Hdt. 7.145.1. Approximately thirty-one *poleis* formed the Greek alliance. The figure of thirty-one comes from the 'Serpent Column' war memorial at Delphi, which records the names of thirty-one city-states who had united and fought against the Persians (*SIG*, ed. 3, no. 33). Plutarch also records that there were only thirty-one states who had taken part in the war against Xerxes: see Plut. *Them.* 20.3-4. A second inscription, however, on a bronze statue of Zeus at Olympia reported by both Herodotus (9.81) and Pausanias (5.23.1-2), which also listed the members of the Greek alliance, differs slightly from the Serpent Column list. The list of states inscribed on the bronze Zeus at Olympia as recorded by Pausanias, for instance, does not include Thespiiai, Eretria, Leukas, and Siphnos, whilst Herodotus' record does not mention any of the cities of Euboea. However, it is generally believed that Serpent Column list was the first version and master-copy (for the original inscription on the column by King Pausanias, see Thuc. 1.132-3). Furthermore, several *poleis*, such as Naxos, Tenos, and Potidaea, although present on the Serpent Column list, initially mobilised for Xerxes but then switched to the Greek side later on, so they would not have been part of the original congress (for Naxos see Hdt. 8.46.3; for Tenos see Hdt. 8.66.2, 8.82.1; and for Potidaea see Hdt. 7.123.1, 8.129.1-3, 9.28.3). For further discussion on the Greek alliance members and on the epigraphical evidence, see: Brunt, P. A., 'The Hellenic League against Persia', *Historia* 2, 2 (1953) 135-163; Meritt, B. D., McGregor, M. F., and Wade-Gery, H. T., eds., *The Athenian Tribute Lists*, 4 vols., vol. 3 (Princeton, N.J.: American School of Classical Studies at Athens, 1950) 95-100.

<sup>335</sup> Hdt. 7.145.2.

against Xerxes, therefore they immediately sent to Delphi for advice upon what action, under their present circumstances, would be best for them to take.<sup>336</sup> The reason the Argives themselves gave for taking this step was because they had recently lost 6,000 of their men in battle against the Spartans under Kleomenes at Sepeia.<sup>337</sup> The Pythia gave the following response to the Argives' request:

Loathed by your neighbours, dear to the immortal gods,  
Hold your javelin within and sit upon your guard.  
Guard the head well, and the head will save the body.<sup>338</sup>

The meaning of the oracular prophecy was, understandably, clear to the Argives that they should not join the anti-Persian alliance and should instead stay at home on the defensive.<sup>339</sup> According to the Argives, they had already received this oracle, when the envoys from the anti-Persian league arrived and entered the council-chamber in Argos to deliver their message. The Argives consequently agreed to support the allied Greek cause providing they obtained a thirty years' truce with Sparta, and they shared joint and equal command of the confederate forces with Sparta.<sup>340</sup> The Spartans replied to the demands of the Argives by stating that they would refer the question of the truce to their own government when they returned home, but on the question of joint command it would not be possible as it would not be acceptable to deprive either of the Spartan kings of their command, although, that being said, there would be nothing to prevent the Argive king from expressing his views in conjunction with the two Lakedaimonian monarchs. The Argives, of course, found the Spartan attitude to be arrogant and presumptuous, and rather than give way to it, stated that they would prefer to submit to foreign domination, and ordered the envoys to leave before sunset or be regarded as enemies.<sup>341</sup>

Herodotus, however, goes on to suggest another reason for Argos' medising, which was circulating Greece during his time, that Xerxes had sent an emissary to Argos before his army had started on its march, urging them to remain neutral in the conflict and not to side with the rest of the Greeks. Apparently, Argos, impressed by Xerxes' message and offer, decided to

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<sup>336</sup> Oracle no. 30: Hdt. 7.148.3; Anth. Pal. 14.94; Oinomaos *ap.* Eus. *PE* 6.7. p. 255cd; Chalcid. *Tim.* 168; Fontenrose, Q144; P-W 92.

<sup>337</sup> *Q.v.* Oracle no. 27, *infra*, p. 266; Oracle no. 28, *supra*, p. 205.

<sup>338</sup> Hdt. 7.148.3, trans. Aubrey De Sélincourt (*Herodotus: The Histories*).

<sup>339</sup> The reference to εἶσω τὸν προβόλαιον ἔχων ('with spear drawn in') would surely have been interpreted to mean abstaining from the conflict against Persia. The reference to κεφαλὴν πεφύλαξο ('guard the head') perhaps meant the ruling class, while the σῶμα probably referred to the remainder of the population: see How and Wells, 1912: *ap.* 7.148.3.

<sup>340</sup> Hdt. 7.148.4.

<sup>341</sup> Hdt. 7.149.2-3.

stay out of the Pan-Hellenic alliance.<sup>342</sup> Moreover, when the allied Greeks came looking for Argos' support against Persia, Argos deliberately made the demand for equal share of the command of the army precisely because they knew that the Spartans would never agree to it, thereby giving them an excuse for taking no part in the war, while at the same time concealing their medism.<sup>343</sup>

Fontenrose, and the ever-cynical Crahay, both believe that the oracle is not authentic, as they also believe is the case for all of the oracular prophecies concerning the Persian Wars.<sup>344</sup> However, there is no real need to doubt the veracity of the oracle. First and foremost, the idea that Delphi would have suggested such a course of action to Argos in the face of an imminent invasion by a massive Persian horde is wholly unsurprising and more than plausible. Indeed, the Pythia's first response to the Athenians on the same issue is also extremely dissuasive.<sup>345</sup> Furthermore, the fact that the oral record of this oracle was circulating c. 440 B.C., only thirty or forty years after the Persian Wars, suggests perhaps that there would be less chance of it being completely fabricated with contemporaries and veterans of the Persian Wars still living. How and Wells, too, argue convincingly that there is no sufficient reason for doubting the genuineness of the oracle, which in Herodotus' opinion was delivered about 482 B.C., but which How and Wells argue may even date back to the earlier Persian invasion and the sending of Darius' heralds in 491-490 B.C.,<sup>346</sup> for if the oracle had been an Argive fabrication it would have been disowned by Delphi after the defeat of Xerxes. Moreover, the oracle's advice to Argos is consistent with the attitude of the Delphic priesthood before the war, which was, whether from fear or perfidy, one of hostility towards the Pan-Hellenic alliance.<sup>347</sup>

However, the oracular consultation, whether it is genuine or not, is very illuminating for several reasons. Firstly, it is, if it is indeed authentic, at the most basic level, another clear-cut example of a *polis* consulting an Oracle on an important foreign policy issue and being subsequently guided by the Oracle on what to do; in this case not to go to war with Persia. However, when one delves deeper, there are several other layers of significance that can be gleaned from the episode. The consultation is, in essence, regarding a question of military alliance: should Argos

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<sup>342</sup> Hdt. 7.150.1-2.

<sup>343</sup> Hdt. 7.150.3.

<sup>344</sup> Fontenrose, 1978: 128; Crahay, 1956: 321-324.

<sup>345</sup> *Q.v.* Oracle no. 31, *infra*, p. 275.

<sup>346</sup> *Q.v.* Hdt. 6.49.

<sup>347</sup> See How and Wells, 1912: *ap.* 7.148.2.

form an alliance with the rest of the anti-Persian Greeks or side with Persia? The Oracle's response, of course, is clearly that Argos should not join the allied Greeks against Persia. However, the real import of the oracular episode is how Argos used the consultation and response as political justification for staying out of the war and, in fact, and perhaps more importantly, as defence against later accusations of medising when Xerxes had been defeated by the allied Greeks. There is certainly evidence suggesting that Argos did in fact strike a deal with Persia around this time. Herodotus tells us, for instance, that the accusation that Argos had made a secret alliance with Persia was borne out by a remark made long afterwards by Xerxes' son, Artaxerxes, to an Argive embassy at Susa in 448 B.C., which had been sent to ask Artaxerxes if the friendly relations that the Argives had established with his father still held good. Artaxerxes' reply, apparently, was that there was no other city that he believed to be a better friend to him than Argos.<sup>348</sup> Argos' medism is further confirmed by the message they sent to Mardonius at Athens when the Spartan army took to the field under Pausanias in 479 B.C., which patently implies that Argive co-operation had been promised to Persia.<sup>349</sup> Argos is further inculpated by Herodotus later on in his history when he is discussing the different races and *poleis* of the Peloponnese who remained out of the conflict with Persia, and states: 'Of these seven peoples all the communities except the ones I mentioned [i.e. the Lakedaimonians, the Arkadians, Elis, Corinth, Sikyon, Epidauros, Phleious, Troizen, and Hermione] remained neutral in the war – which, to put it bluntly, is as good as saying that they were on the Persian side.'<sup>350</sup> The condemnatory remark is a clear attack against the Argives, who are mentioned directly by name in the prior passage.

The fact that Argos used the Delphic Oracle's prognostication to help vindicate and defend their decision to stay neutral in the war, and to later deflect accusations of their medising, is extremely revealing about the political weight and influence that Oracles could wield in the ancient Greek world. Indeed, the Argives' first line of defence when the allied Greek emissaries arrived at Argos to ask for their assistance against Xerxes was to declare that they had been explicitly forbidden by the Delphic Oracle to make an alliance with the anti-Persian Greeks and that they must remain neutral.<sup>351</sup> However, it is also very interesting to note that the Argives declared that, although the oracle expressly forbade them to enter into the conflict, and despite

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<sup>348</sup> Hdt. 7.151.1. See also How and Wells, 1912: *ap.* 7.151.1.

<sup>349</sup> Hdt. 9.12.1-2.

<sup>350</sup> Hdt. 8.73.3. See also How and Wells, 1912: *ap.* § 30 *e.*

<sup>351</sup> Hdt. 7.149.1.

their great fear of disobeying the Oracle, they would be willing to join the confederacy on the condition that they obtained a thirty-year peace treaty with Sparta and joint command of the allied Greek forces. They argued that the opportunity to give their sons the chance of growing up during a period of peace would be worth the risk of defying the god.<sup>352</sup> There are two key implications from this. Firstly, it is another example of a *polis*' conscious decision to go against an Oracle's commands or advice, which suggests that such noncompliance was not unknown and indeed must have happened in reality, although it must of course be noted once again that such disobedience clearly caused a great deal of trepidation and consternation.<sup>353</sup> Secondly, the considerable danger and threat of defying the directions of the Oracle was clearly exploited and played upon by the Argives in order to obtain very substantial concessions from the Spartans, which once more infers the solemnity and gravity that oracular pronouncements carried in ancient Greece. Of course, the Argives' show of solidarity with their fellow Greeks is a moot point as they clearly would have known that the Spartans would never have agreed to their provisos, therefore their pretence of risking the incurrence of Apollo's wrath for the good of Greece may have been merely a hollow sham. Nevertheless, it does suggest once more that city-states could, and would, reject or defy an Oracle's commands when the risk and reward were great.

#### 6.4.2 *The Cretans*

Closely connected to the oracular episode concerning Argos above was the Cretan consultation of the Delphic Oracle also in relation to the imminent Persian invasion.<sup>354</sup> According to Herodotus, when the emissaries dispatched by the allied Greek Congress had arrived in Crete and had made their appeal to the Cretan people to join the anti-Persian league, the Cretans decided to seek the guidance of Delphi on whether or not it would be to their advantage to help the Greeks.<sup>355</sup> The Pythia responded by asking the Cretan envoys: 'Foolish men, do you not still resent all the tears that Minos in his anger caused you to weep after you helped Menelaos, because the Hellenes did not help you to avenge his death at Kamikos, while you helped them to exact revenge for the stealing of that woman from Sparta by a barbarian?'<sup>356</sup> The ironical question posed by the Priestess, reminding the Cretans how they had suffered in the past for

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<sup>352</sup> Hdt. 7.149.1.

<sup>353</sup> Cf. Athens and the occupation of the Pelargikon: Oracle no. 42, *infra*, p. 281.

<sup>354</sup> Oracle no. 32: Hdt. 7.169.2, 7.171.2; Anth. Pal. 14.95; Fontenrose, Q145; P-W 93.

<sup>355</sup> Hdt. 7.169.1.

<sup>356</sup> Hdt. 7.169.2.

embarking upon a previous allied Greek campaign against Troy was enough to persuade the Cretans to stay out of the conflict.

Fontenrose and Crahay believe once more that the oracle is a *post-eventum* fabrication, designed by Crete to exculpate their conduct in the war. The main reason for their scepticism stems from the fact that the oracle recorded by Herodotus is in iambic metre rather than the usual dactylic-hexameter verse used by the attendant priests at Delphi,<sup>357</sup> and they suggest that some astute Cretan must have later thought of the old legend of King Minos' death in Sicily at the house of Kokalos and built their apology round it.<sup>358</sup> This is also the view shared by Stein and Busolt, who likewise suspect it to be a later forgery mainly because it is in iambic metre, and compare it to the Delphic response given to the Knidians concerning the approaching army of Harpagos *c.* 545 B.C.,<sup>359</sup> which also appears to be an *ex post facto* excuse for non-resistance.<sup>360</sup> Parke and How and Wells, however, are not so dismissive of the oracle's authenticity. Parke believes that the Pythia's answer, preserved in a prose paraphrase by Herodotus, shows traces of the original verses, which were in iambic metre appropriate to scornful and negative replies.<sup>361</sup> Likewise, How and Wells believe that the words *τιμωρημάτων Μίνως ἔπεμψε μηνίων δακρύματα* seem to have been taken directly from the oracular response, and argue furthermore that Herodotus clearly believed that it was a genuine Delphic response and that it is probably for that precise reason that he does not reproach the Cretans for refusing their help.<sup>362</sup> Moreover, How and Wells also argue that, although the Cretans would undoubtedly have had no scruple in later inventing an oracle to vindicate themselves, the purported oracle given here to the Cretans by Delphi is of the same tenor as the better attested response to Argos discussed above,<sup>363</sup> and as a consequence may well be in substance genuine.

This oracular consultation, therefore, is in many respects very similar to the consultation of the Delphic Oracle by Argos prior to the Persian invasion. If the consultation of the Oracle by the Cretans was simply out of religious respect and reverence then we have another clear example

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<sup>357</sup> See Fontenrose, 1978: 6.

<sup>358</sup> See Fontenrose, 1978: 316; Crahay, 1956: 324-325.

<sup>359</sup> Hdt. 1.174.5.

<sup>360</sup> See Busolt, 1885-1904: II.658 n. 6; P-W 63; Fontenrose, Q112; How and Wells, 1912: *ap.* 1.174.5.

<sup>361</sup> Parke and Wormell, 1956b: 166.

<sup>362</sup> How and Wells, 1912: *ap.* 7.169.2. How and Wells also compare this quotation from the oracular response to other instances where Herodotus' prose paraphrase contains hexameter phrases most likely taken directly from original oracular responses or dedicatory inscriptions on thank-offerings at Delphi: *cf.* Hdt. 4.163.3 = Oracle no. 20, *infra*, p. 252; Hdt. 5.79.1 = Oracle no. 23, *infra*, p. 229; Hdt. 7.178.2 = Oracle no. 31, *infra*, p. 275.

<sup>363</sup> Oracle no. 30, *supra*, p. 222ff.



of a *polis* consulting an Oracle for guidance on foreign policy matters, and then subsequently deferring to its wisdom and acceding to its commands. However, once again, what is perhaps more telling is the fact that, whether fabricated or genuine, the oracle was used by the Cretans politically as justification for staying neutral in the conflict and to exonerate themselves from the moral guilt of taking such a stance. What is more, it is extremely important to note that Herodotus seems to be only too willing to accept the Cretan's *apologia* as an entirely acceptable defence, which in itself is particularly revealing about the power and influence of the Oracle in such matters.

## 6.5 Unbidden advice on alliances

However, as mentioned above, the Oracles did not necessarily need to be asked directly for their advice on military alliances, for them to still heavily influence *polis* foreign policy by issuing unsolicited commands on the matter. There are a series of instances where the Oracle, unbidden, issued directives initiating military alliances between *poleis*, which could obviously have far-reaching ramifications in the outcome of wars in the ancient Greek world. Several war oracles show how certain *poleis* and individuals, when seeking advice and divine sanction, or asking about their chances of success in a forthcoming conflict, were given an oracular command to form an alliance with another city-state. Furthermore, on several of these occasions the Oracle delivers a conditioned prophecy to the consultant *polis*, stating that they will achieve victory if they obtain help from a certain *polis* or individual. It is clear from our sources that in each of these episodes a psychological boost is gained from this knowledge, and success in the war is achieved when the oracle is fulfilled and help of the ally is secured.

### 6.5.1 Phigaleia and Oresthasion

In his description of Phigaleia, for instance, Pausanias records how the Phigaleians in 659 B.C., after their city had fallen to the Lakedaimonians and they had taken flight, sought the counsel of the Delphic Oracle regarding their return home.<sup>364</sup> The Delphic Oracle subsequently informed the Phigaleian refugees that they would not be able to regain their city by themselves, but if they took one hundred picked men from the city of Oresthasion, although the

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<sup>364</sup> Oracle no. 9: Paus. 8.39.3-5; P-W 30; Fontenrose, Q87. Pausanias dates the event as occurring in the year following the thirtieth Olympics. Parke and Wormell, however, believe that Pausanias' date is perhaps too early. W.G. Forrest, on the other hand, disagrees and places the event in the 660s: see Forrest, 1968: 71. Cartledge accepts the traditional date of 659 B.C. for the Spartan defeat at Phigaleia: Cartledge, 2002a: 118.

Oresthasians would die in the fighting, they would enable the Phigaleians to recapture their city.<sup>365</sup> The Phigaleians duly obtained the band of Oresthasians, and in a fulfilment of the prophecy, defeated and drove out the Spartan garrison and recovered their city.<sup>366</sup>

Unfortunately, as Pausanias is the only extant written source for the existence of the oracle, there must be doubts raised about its authenticity, especially when we are relying exclusively on such a late source for such an early event. Fontenrose certainly believes that although it may be true that the Oresthasians died as allies of the Arkadians against the Spartans, the oracle itself must be *post eventum*, and he argues that it is probable that Pausanias found it in Ariaithos' Arkadian history.<sup>367</sup> However, either way the oracle story is very revealing. If we accept the historicity of the Phigaleian-Spartan conflict,<sup>368</sup> then it is entirely reasonable and plausible to imagine that the Phigaleians would have, as a matter of course, consulted the Delphic Oracle for advice on the war. If that was the case, and the subsequent oracle directed the Phigaleians to seek an alliance with Oresthasion, then it illustrates once again how influential the Oracle could be in military affairs and is a clear example of the Delphic Oracle directly affecting a *polis'* military strategy. However, if the oracle is in fact a *post-eventum* fabrication as Fontenrose contends, it is still important for two reasons. Firstly, if the oracle was a later invention, the question of whether it grew up as a local legend over time, was recorded in Ariaithos' *Arkadika* and then subsequently recounted by Pausanias, or whether it was simply invented by either of the writers, is not really the issue. The fact is that the story of the oracular consultation, its resulting directive, and the Phigaleians' subsequent compliance and change of strategy must surely have been commonplace enough to have been believable to the ancient Greek audience. Secondly, the episode reveals once more the psychological effect of oracular prognostications on the psyche of the ancient Greeks. Pausanias details how the Oresthasians, when they heard of the oracle delivered to the Phigaleians, 'all vied with one another in their eagerness to be one of the picked hundred and take part in the expedition to Phigaleia.'<sup>369</sup> The clear inference is that such oracular prophecies had the power to stir fervent

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<sup>365</sup> Paus. 8.39.4.

<sup>366</sup> Paus. 8.39.5.

<sup>367</sup> Fontenrose, 1978: 297.

<sup>368</sup> The historical authenticity of the events is widely accepted by historians: see *supra*, p. 227 n. 364. Furthermore, Pausanias (8.41.1) attests that in his day the Phigaleians had a *polyandrion* of the elite corps, the Oresthasians, in their marketplace, and that every year sacrifices were made to them as heroes: see Pritchett, W. K., *The Greek State at War: Part IV* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985) 160; Currie, 2005: 102-103; Nilsson, 1967-74: Vol. 1, 718, 718 n. 5. For a slightly different perspective, see Robertson, N., *Festivals and Legends: The Formation of Greek Cities in the Light of Public Ritual* (Toronto; London: University of Toronto Press, 1992) 244-249.

<sup>369</sup> Paus. 8.39.4.

emotion and excite soldiers to action, even if, as prophesied in this case, it would most likely lead to their own destruction in the process.

### 6.5.2 *Thebes and Aigina*

A similar psychological boost would have been obtained from the oracular response given to the Thebans during their war with the Athenians *c.* 506 B.C.<sup>370</sup> Herodotus records how the Thebans, after suffering a major defeat at the hands of the Athenians at the Euripos strait, were hungry for revenge against Athens and therefore sent to Delphi for advice. The Pythian Priestess accordingly told the Theban ambassadors that they would be unable to get their revenge if they tried to act alone, and that they must instead bring the matter forward to be discussed by ‘the many voices’, and ask their ‘nearest’ to help them. When the Theban delegates returned, the Theban magistrates called a general assembly to discuss the oracle.<sup>371</sup> Although the Theban people acknowledged that their nearest neighbours were Tanagra, Koroneia, and Thespiiai, they believed that as they had always been Thebes’ allies the Delphic Oracle must have meant someone else.<sup>372</sup> An individual in the assembly then interpreted the oracle to mean Aigina, as the river-god Asopus had two daughters, Thebe and Aigina.<sup>373</sup> With no other better solution being offered, the Thebans promptly sent to Aigina and asked for their aid against the Athenians, to which the Aiginetans duly complied.

Fontenrose classifies the oracle as Quasi-Historical but does not offer any elucidation on why he classifies it as such.<sup>374</sup> However, there is no need to doubt that such an oracle could have been delivered to the Thebans; after all it was only the very selective interpretation of the Oracle’s typically ambiguous prognostication on the Thebans’ part which led them down the road to an alliance with Aigina, rather than an unequivocal directive by the Pythia to do so.

Once more, however, the historicity of the oracle is not really of that much importance here. Regardless of the oracle’s authenticity, the episode reveals several important issues. The fact that the oracle was debated in front of the Theban assembly illustrates how important a part oracles could have in the decision-making process of *poleis* and the formulation of their foreign

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<sup>370</sup> Oracle no. 23: Hdt. 5.79.1; P-W 81; Fontenrose, Q130.

<sup>371</sup> Hdt. 5.79.2.

<sup>372</sup> Hdt. 5.79.2.

<sup>373</sup> Hdt. 5.80.1.

<sup>374</sup> Fontenrose, 1978: 311. See also Crahay, 1956: 272-273.

policies.<sup>375</sup> Furthermore, it is another example of an Oracle having significant input into Greek warfare by influencing *poleis* to form certain military alliances, which could obviously help make or break a military conflict. Moreover, it provides yet another instance where it is the interpretation of the Oracle's ambiguous words by the *polis* or an individual which is ultimately key in making those decisions. In this case it is the conscious and deliberate interpretation of the oracle by an individual, which is then subsequently ratified by the assembly, to ignore Thebes' nearest neighbours and seek out Aigina as an ally, even though the *polis* is roughly 50 miles away and most certainly not her 'nearest' neighbour geographically. It would have surely been known to Thebes that there was strong animosity between Aigina and Athens and that they were bitter enemies, and it would therefore have made perfect sense to seek out Aigina as an ally.<sup>376</sup> Consequently, it would have been extremely convenient for the Thebans to interpret the oracle in such a way as to point towards Aigina as the *polis* Delphic Apollo had intended.<sup>377</sup>

This interpretation would have had several significant benefits for the Thebans. Firstly, the proposed alliance would subsequently carry divine sanction and approval, which would help persuade the Aiginetans to agree to the pact.<sup>378</sup> Certainly, Herodotus tells us that (no doubt in conjunction with the Aiginetans' already existent hatred of Athens) the Aiginetans eagerly responded to the Theban call for assistance and, unusually, began making raids on the Attic coast without a formal declaration of war, or, for that matter, consulting an Oracle themselves.<sup>379</sup> Aside from a desire to catch the Athenians off guard, the inference why the Aiginetans proceeded with hostilities so swiftly without going through the normal procedures is that they considered the divine mandate from Delphi sufficient enough justification and authority to launch an attack against Athens.

Secondly, the Thebans would have received a considerable psychological boost knowing that they had fulfilled the oracular command, which promised revenge against the Athenians if they obtained aid from their 'nearest.' The significant losses and vicissitudes in fortune Athens experienced during several ongoing wars with Aigina during the period 506-487 B.C., would

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<sup>375</sup> For further discussion of the importance of oracles in *polis* decision-making, see *infra*, pp. 332-338.

<sup>376</sup> Herodotus (5.82-8) tells us in depth the reasons for the longstanding feud between Athens and Aigina.

<sup>377</sup> Fontenrose aptly uses the term a 'spiral twist' (a term applied by Mark Twain's uncle to the subject of Biblical exegesis, which in essence refers to a forced interpretation of a text) to describe the Theban interpretation of the Oracle's words; i.e. the Thebans interpreted the 'many-voiced' straightforwardly enough to mean the assembly, but they chose to interpret 'the nearest' as Aigina, since Aigina was a sister of Thebe: see Fontenrose, 1978: 71.

<sup>378</sup> Cf. Phigaleia and the Oresthasians, Oracle no. 9, *supra*, p. 227ff.; Corinth persuading the Peloponnesian League to go to war with Athens, Oracle no. 41, *supra*, p. 59ff.

<sup>379</sup> Hdt. 5.81.2, 5.89.1.

have no doubt appeared to the Thebans to be confirmation that the oracular prophecy had come true: they had indeed obtained appropriate revenge.<sup>380</sup> Furthermore, for both parties the interpretation of the oracle meant that both Thebes and Aigina could go into the conflict with Athens, taking the moral high ground that they had been commanded to form the alliance against the Athenians by Apollo himself, and may have even had the added boon (if it was made common knowledge) of spreading fear and doubt amongst the Athenian forces in the forthcoming war. It is certainly clear from Herodotus that Athens' response to the Aiginetan attacks was to first consult the Delphic Oracle for advice on what to do,<sup>381</sup> which may be an indication of Athenian anxiety over the oracle delivered to the Thebans. Moreover, the subsequent oracular prophecy delivered to the Athenian ambassadors, in essence, warned the Athenians that if they commenced hostilities with the Aiginetans they would ultimately be victorious but they would endure thirty years of hardship in the process,<sup>382</sup> which may have been a subtle way of letting the Athenians know that the god had already promised the Thebans revenge and they would have to simply grin and bear it.

### 6.5.3 *Sparta and the Messenian War*

A similar example, albeit of dubious authenticity coming from the Messenian saga, can also be found during the Second Messenian War. In this case, according to Isokrates, during their war with the Messenians the Lakedaimonians sent to the Delphic Oracle *c.* 685 B.C. to enquire about how to achieve victory in the war.<sup>383</sup> The Pythia responded by declaring that they should get a counsellor from Athens to advise them in the war and instructed them on what sacrifices they should perform to ensure victory. Diodorus, Strabo, and Justin tell us that the Oracle directed the Spartans to obtain a commander from Athens, whilst Pausanias records that the Oracle enjoined them to procure a counsellor.<sup>384</sup>

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<sup>380</sup> For further discussion of the 'Heraldless War' of 506 B.C. and the chronology of the ongoing conflicts between Athens and Aigina during the late fifth century and early fourth century, see Figueira, T. J., 'Herodotus on the Early Hostilities between Aegina and Athens', *The American Journal of Philology* 106, 1 (1985) 49-74; Andrewes, A., 'Athens and Aegina, 510-480 B.C.', *The Annual of the British School at Athens* 37 (1936) 1-7.

<sup>381</sup> Hdt. 5.89.2.

<sup>382</sup> *Q.v.* Oracle no. 24, *infra*, p. 314.

<sup>383</sup> Oracle no. 6: Isoc. *Or.* 6.31; Diod. Sic. 8.27.1; Just. *Epit.* 3.5.4; Paus. 4.15.6; Schol. vet. on Pl. *Leg.* 629a; Suda T1206; Kallisthenes 124.24J *ap.* Strab. 8.4.10, p. 362; P-W 297-299; Fontenrose, Q18(A) & 18(B).

<sup>384</sup> Parke and Wormell (P-W 297) separate Isokrates' *Or.* 6.31 from the other sources cited because Isokrates does not state that the Spartans were commanded to obtain help from Athens specifically, only that they were told what city to summon help from. However, taking into account the other sources' accounts on this issue, Isokrates must surely have been referring here to the command to summon a leader from Athens.

The Spartans subsequently sent a messenger to announce the prophecy to the Athenians. Despite being worried about helping to make the Spartans more powerful, the Athenians were more worried about disobeying the god, therefore they sent Tyrtaios to assist the Spartans, who were eventually victorious against the Messenians with Tyrtaios' help.<sup>385</sup>

For the Spartans, the fulfilment of the oracle would have carried with it all the associated psychological benefits for their side, while at the same time inflicted a psychological blow against their Messenian adversaries, which would have been exacerbated further by the negative response the Messenians themselves obtained from the Pythia at the same time as the Spartan consultation, which essentially rebuffed their appeal for deliverance from the Lakedaimonians.<sup>386</sup> It is also important to note Pausanias' comment about the Athenians' fear of not complying with the Oracle's directives overriding their strong reluctance to help Sparta against Messenia.<sup>387</sup>

#### **6.5.4 The Eleians and Sparta**

The Eleians, on the other hand, when asking permission from Delphi to help their Spartan allies against Helos, sometime shortly after 776 B.C., were warned against doing so and told to keep out of the war, and instead to stay neutral and remain friends to all Hellenes.<sup>388</sup>

Fontenrose classifies this oracle as a Quasi-Historical response and states that it is 'not genuine', though he does not provide any explanation as to why he arrives at this judgment. One must assume that Fontenrose believes the oracle to be false as it appears to be part of the aetiological myth for the renewal of the Olympic Games by King Iphitos and the Eleians.<sup>389</sup> However, the oracular story itself is revealing, as it suggests yet again that, to the ancient Greek mindset, it must have been a common occurrence for a *polis* to ask for divine advice and sanction on a military venture and to be subsequently given counsel from the Oracle on matters of military alliances.

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<sup>385</sup> See Paus. 4.15.6, 4.16.6; Diod. Sic. 8.27.2; Just. 3.5.4.

<sup>386</sup> Isoc. *Or.* 6.31.

<sup>387</sup> Paus. 4.15.6.

<sup>388</sup> Oracle no. 1: Phleg. *Olymp.* 1.9; Euseb. *Chron.* 1.192 Schoene; P-W 489; Fontenrose, Q5. Cf. Oracle no. 66, *supra*, p. 191: according to the sources, Appius Claudius Pulcher, worried about which side to take in the Roman civil war, consulted the Delphic Oracle to ask what the outcome of the civil war would be, only to be told by the Pythia that the war did not concern him and that he should stay out of it and withdraw to Euboea.

<sup>389</sup> Cf. Paus. 5.4.6; Phleg. *Olymp.* 1.3, 1.6, 1.7; Schol. vet. on Pl. *Rep.* 465d.

### 6.5.5 *Mardonius and Athens*

Another oracular episode concerning the question of military alliances during the Persian invasion, only this time from the Persian side of the conflict, was that of Mardonius' consultation of several Greek Oracles in the winter of 480/79 B.C., in particular that of Ptoion Apollo at Akraiphnia.<sup>390</sup> Herodotus tells us that following the naval defeat at Salamis, the Persian army decided to retreat from Attica to Thessaly in order to accompany Xerxes on his way home and to regroup there to ready themselves for a new spring offensive the following year.<sup>391</sup> Evidently, while wintering there, Mardonius sent out an envoy, a Karian man called Mys, to consult all the Oracles of Greece.<sup>392</sup> Although Herodotus does not know precisely what Mardonius asked of the Oracles, for there was no record of it, he postulates that he must have been enquiring about his current circumstances, presumably meaning the present military position of the Persian expedition.<sup>393</sup> He goes on to record that Mys visited the Oracle of Trophonios at Lebadeia, the Oracle at Abai in Phokis, the Oracle of Apollo Ismenios at Thebes, the Oracle of Amphiaraos at Knopia, and the Oracle of Apollo Ptoios near Akraiphnia on Mount Ptoion in Boiotia.<sup>394</sup> The Scholiast on Aristeides also states that Mardonius sent to many Oracles, including those of Amphiaraos and Trophonios. It was during the consultation of Apollo Ptoios at Akraiphnia, however, that a remarkable prophecy was delivered to the Persian envoy. Herodotus tells us that Mys entered the shrine of Apollo Ptoios with three men from Thebes, who had been officially appointed to take down whatever answer the god might give. However, once Mys had made his enquiry, the prophet of the sanctuary delivered his oracles in a foreign language instead of Greek, much to the astonishment of the three Thebans.<sup>395</sup> Mys, however, snatched from the Thebans the tablet they had brought with them to record the oracle on, and wrote the words spoken by the prophet down himself, declaring that the god's response had been delivered in his native Karian. Mys then immediately returned with haste back to Mardonius in Thessaly. Upon receiving the oracle from Mys, Mardonius at once sent Alexander I of Macedon, the son of Amyntas, to Athens to deliver a proposal of an alliance with Persia.<sup>396</sup> Once more, although Herodotus does not know the exact response given to Mys

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<sup>390</sup> Oracle no. 35: Hdt. 8.133-136 & 8.141.1; Aristid. *Or.* 13.144 and Schol. p. 189 Dind.; P-W 103; Fontenrose, Q155.

<sup>391</sup> Hdt. 8.113.

<sup>392</sup> Hdt. 8.133.

<sup>393</sup> Hdt. 8.133.

<sup>394</sup> Hdt. 8.134.

<sup>395</sup> Hdt. 8.135. Cf. Paus. 9.23.6.

<sup>396</sup> Hdt. 8.136.1-2.

by Apollo Ptoios, he logically presumes that the Oracle had advised an Athenian alliance, and that it was in obedience to it that Mardonius had sent Alexander on his mission.<sup>397</sup>

Although Herodotus does not explicitly state which Oracle delivered the advice on the alliance between Persia and Athens (although it does appear in his account to perhaps be the Oracle of Apollo Ptoios, whose response delivered in Karian sparked Mys's hasty return to Mardonius), the Scholiast on Aristeides states that the prognostication came from Delphi in direct response to a query from Mardonius asking how could he take Hellas.

Herodotus goes on to recount how the news of Alexander's visit to try and bring about an alliance between Persia and Athens caused severe consternation in Sparta, and that the Lakedaimonians, remembering a prophecy that the Dorians were destined to be driven from the Peloponnese by the Medes and the Athenians, and greatly fearing that an alliance might be concluded, immediately sent representatives to Athens.<sup>398</sup> Aristeides, on the other hand, states that the Delphic Oracle had previously delivered a prophecy proclaiming that if the Athenians joined the Persians, then the rest of Hellas would fall.<sup>399</sup> The Athenians, anyway, rebuffed Mardonius' offer and sent Alexander back to him with a declaration that they would never make peace with Xerxes, and subsequently requested that the Spartans dispatch their army into the field post-haste in order to face Mardonius in Boiotia.<sup>400</sup>

With regards to these remembered oracles, Herodotus mentions only *logia* which the Lakedaimonians had heard. How and Wells suggest that the *logia* mentioned here could possibly be referring to those utterances taken by Kleomenes from the Athenian Akropolis c. 510 B.C., which prophesied forthcoming disasters for the Lakedaimonians at the hands of the Athenians,<sup>401</sup> but it surely must have been a more recent creation, as prior to 480/79 B.C. the possibility of a league between Persia and Athens would have been unthinkable.<sup>402</sup>

The oracular stories concerning Mardonius in the prelude to the Battle of Plataea are most intriguing and illuminating. If we take the oracular prophecies at face value, and consider the

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<sup>397</sup> Hdt. 8.136.3.

<sup>398</sup> Hdt. 8.141.1.

<sup>399</sup> Aristid. *Or.* 13.144.

<sup>400</sup> Hdt. 8.144.

<sup>401</sup> Hdt. 5.90.2.

<sup>402</sup> See How and Wells *ap.* 8.141.



consultations and responses to be genuine, then it appears that the Oracles' prognostications evidently prompted Mardonius to seek an alliance with Athens. If that is the case, then it is yet another clear example of the Oracles being an influential force in the formation of military alliances, not only between Greek *poleis*, but in the wider Mediterranean world. Furthermore, we see once again the Greek Oracles being consulted on military matters not just by the Greeks themselves but by the leaders of Asia Minor and Persia.<sup>403</sup> On the other hand, both Fontenrose and Parke and Wormell are sceptical about the authenticity of these oracles. However, there is no need to be so dismissive of the oracles for several reasons. Firstly, such a prognostication from the Oracles suggesting an alliance between Persia and Athens would have made good strategic sense. Although the Persian navy had been defeated at Salamis, Attica had fallen to the Persian land forces and Athens had been sacked. Therefore, in the winter of 480/79 it would have been an obvious and prudent strategy for Mardonius to adopt a policy of 'divide and conquer' in order to destroy the Greek alliance and bring about a Persian victory. As Herodotus points out, Mardonius, armed with a newly-acquired respect for Athenian naval prowess after their exploits at Salamis, would have expected that if he could form an alliance with the Athenians he would have no difficulty in obtaining mastery of the sea, while he was already confident of his own superiority on land.<sup>404</sup> Indeed, in order to circumvent the Greek position at the Isthmus, Mardonius now needed the Athenian fleet so that he could send troops beyond the wall fortifications into the Peloponnese.<sup>405</sup> Thus, if he could obtain an Atheno-Persian alliance, Mardonius would have been sure that the defeat of Greece would have been well within his grasp.

The rest of Greece must have been very aware of the danger of such an alliance as well, hence the Lakedaimonians' anxiety when they heard of Alexander's mission to Athens, which prompted them to hastily send their own ambassadors to dissuade the Athenians from entering into such a pact. Indeed, as Herodotus later points out, the Athenians, while on exile on Salamis during Mardonius' second invasion of Attica and second occupation of the Athenian Akropolis in 479 B.C., were only too aware that the Spartans and the rest of the Peloponnesians were more concerned with defending the Isthmus and were far from eager to help Athens reclaim her

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<sup>403</sup> Cf. Croesus (Oracle no. 19, *infra*, p. 248); Arkesilaos (Oracle no. 20, *infra*, p. 252); and Tiribazos (Oracle no. 49, *supra*, p. 211); as well as foreign rulers consulting Didyma: Licinius (Oracle no. 67, *infra*, p. 273) and Julian (Oracle no. 68, *infra*, p. 255).

<sup>404</sup> Hdt. 8.141.3.

<sup>405</sup> See Sealey, R., *A History of the Greek City States, ca. 700-338 B.C.* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976) 221-222.

territory from the Persians.<sup>406</sup> This would not have gone unnoticed amongst the rest of Greece as well. Therefore, the possibility of such a military alliance would have been clearly obvious to Delphi and the other oracular shrines in Greece, and would have undoubtedly helped ensure their safety and survival in the post-invasion Greek world if such a proposed marriage did indeed prove successful.

Secondly, there is an alternative, and perhaps more palatable possibility for those of more sceptical persuasion, that the oracle or oracles suggesting an alliance between Persia and Athens may have been simply invented outright by Mardonius, or indeed the Oracles coerced by the Persian emissaries to provide the apposite prognostications, in order to be used as a makeweight to sway the outcome of the alliance negotiations. Either way, the fact that Mardonius would go to the lengths to fabricate such an oracle, or dragoon the Oracles themselves to deliver the appropriate responses, to be used as a negotiating asset and tool of persuasion in diplomatic mediation between the Persian Empire and Athens, shows the political clout and authority once more of the Oracles in the ancient Greek world in matters of foreign policy and warfare.

The oracular episode is consequently of particular importance for several key reasons. First and foremost, is the oracle being utilised for political purposes by Mardonius. If we accept that the oracle was genuinely uttered by one or more of the oracular shrines, Mardonius certainly exploited the opportune, god-sent recommendation. Although it is not impossible that Mardonius may have simply employed this strategy out of religious obedience, it is much more pragmatic and likely to envisage that when he received the oracle or oracles commending an alliance with Athens he saw an ideal opportunity to destroy the fragile Greek coalition and seized the chance. There is also the possibility, of course, that Mardonius may even have cynically invented the oracles, or strong-armed the Oracles to give the appropriate responses he desired, in order to apply pressure to the Athenians at the negotiating table. Whether or not Mardonius believed in the Oracles' power himself is impossible to tell; however, he must have clearly known, as any shrewd general would have, that the Greeks did, and therefore used it to his advantage as best he could.

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<sup>406</sup> See Hdt. 9.7.β2.

With regards to the earlier prophecy delivered by Delphic Apollo to the Lakedaimonians, which stated that an alliance between Persia and Athens would result in their destruction,<sup>407</sup> two things should consequently be noted: the fear which an old oracle concerning a future Perso-Athenian alliance caused Sparta; and secondly, the way in which Athens used the fear of that oracle to stir Sparta from her inactivity and spur her into action.<sup>408</sup> It is abundantly clear from Herodotus' account that this remembered prophecy had the Spartans so flustered when they heard about Alexander's visit and Mardonius' proposal that it roused them to immediately send representatives to Athens with all speed.<sup>409</sup> Moreover, the Athenians clearly played on the Spartans' fear, orchestrating it so that the Spartan envoys and Alexander had their audience at the same time, and then after making the Spartans fret an appropriately long time, making their demand for the Spartans to put their army into the field and meet the Persians in Boiotia.<sup>410</sup> What is more, although it seems very likely that Mardonius used the oracle as an inducement to help persuade the Athenians to assent to the alliance, Macan makes the very plausible suggestion that the Athenians may have even invented the oracle in order to mobilise the Spartans to her side. He states: 'The expulsion of the Lakedaimonians and all the other Dorians to boot from the Peloponnesos by the Medes and Athenians, i.e. the complete reversal of the Dorian conquest and its effects, was not a bad idea to conjure with, and has rather a Themistoklean touch about it: perhaps it was not an offer made by Mardonios to attract the Athenians, but a bogle devised in Athens to terrify the Spartans.'<sup>411</sup> Either way, whether Mardonius used the oracle as leverage in the alliance negotiations or whether the Athenians exploited (or even invented) the oracle to force Sparta's hand, the episode clearly illustrates how the Oracles wielded great influence in foreign policy affairs of *poleis* in the ancient Greek world and the powerful psychological impact their prognostications had on military decision-making.

## 6.6 Non-historical oracles

The same themes regarding the Oracles' roles in military alliances are recorded in several legendary oracular episodes. In the case of the Delphic Oracle's preordination that the Herakleidai would conquer the Peloponnese (or, according to several of our sources, the Lakedaimonians would be victorious against Amyklai) if they took the Aigeidai as their

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<sup>407</sup> Hdt. 8.141.1.

<sup>408</sup> Hdt. 8.144.4-5.

<sup>409</sup> Hdt. 8.141.1.

<sup>410</sup> Hdt. 8.141.2; 8.144.4-5.

<sup>411</sup> Macan, R. W., *Herodotus: the Seventh, Eighth, & Ninth Books* (London: Macmillan, 1908) *ap.* 8.141.

allies,<sup>412</sup> we see yet another example of an Oracle being asked directly for advice on a military alliance, as well as the psychological ramifications of such a preconditioned prophecy being issued and subsequently fulfilled.

There are two slightly varying accounts of this oracle, stemming perhaps from some confusion over two emigrations of the Aigeidai from Thebes to Sparta. According to the Scholiast on Pindar,<sup>413</sup> the Herakleidai consulted the Delphic Oracle before their invasion of the Peloponnese about whom of the Hellenes they should take as their allies. The Pythia's response was that they should ally themselves with those men whom their father, Herakles, had helped, but foremost of these, the Aigeidai.<sup>414</sup> The Herakleidai assumed that the god was instructing them to go to Athens first since they knew that Herakles had helped Theseus, the son of Aigeus, most of all. However, Aristodemos, the brother of Temenos, whilst passing through Boiotia, met some Thebans sacrificing along the way, and when he heard the herald praying for good things for the Aigeidai, he grasped the oracle's meaning. Since the help from the Aigeidai of Athens had failed to arrive thus far, Aristodemos made allies with the Thebans and subsequently took the Peloponnese.

In the second version, it was the Spartans who consulted the Oracle in their war against Amyklai about what they should do in the conflict. The Pythia informed them that if they took the Aigeidai as their allies they would be victorious.<sup>415</sup> Although it looks at first sight like there are perhaps two distinct oracular consultations and responses here, the conclusion of both versions is that an alliance is eventually made with the Aigeidai of Thebes after both the Herakleidai and the Spartans made the initial mistake of thinking that the god meant the Aigeidai of Athens.

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<sup>412</sup> Oracle no. N21: Schol. on Pind. *Pyth.* 5.69/92; Ephorus 70.16J *ap.* Schol. vet. in Pind. *Pyth.* 5.76/101; Schol. vet. on Pind. *Isthm.* 7.12/18; Pind. *Isthm.* 7.12-15; Arist. fr. 532 Rose *ap.* Schol. vet. in Pind. *Isthm.* 7.12/18; P-W 146; Fontenrose, L15. For the Heraklid date of c. 1104 B.C., Thucydides (1.12.3) tells us that eighty years after the fall of Troy the Dorians and the descendants of Herakles made themselves masters of the Peloponnese: see Oracle no. N18, *infra*, p. 259 n. 493. According to Pausanias (4.3.3), it occurred two generations after the fall of Troy, which tallies fairly closely with Thucydides' estimate. Velleius Paterculus (1.2.1) agrees with Thucydides' date, and adds that the return took place 120 years after Herakles' apotheosis, which further supports Thucydides' date. As a result, taking the starting point from the approximate end of the Trojan War, c. 1184 B.C., this oracle has been dated 80 years later, and the earlier war oracles of N15, N16 & N17 have therefore been dated fifty years before the final return of the Herakleidai. If we believe that it was the Spartans consulting the Oracle regarding Amyklai, then the date for Amyklai's absorption by Sparta is c. 750 B.C.: see Forrest, 1968: 31-32; Cartledge, 2002a: 81, 90-93, 295.

<sup>413</sup> Schol. on Pind. *Pyth.* 5.69/92.

<sup>414</sup> Ephorus 70.16J *ap.* Schol. vet. in Pind. *Pyth.* 5.76/101.

<sup>415</sup> Schol. vet. on Pind. *Isthm.* 7.12/18; Pind. *Isthm.* 7.12-15; Arist. fr. 532 Rose *ap.* Schol. vet. in Pind. *Isthm.* 7.12/18.

In both versions the Oracle wields considerable influence by advising the consultants whom they should take as military allies; however, the Spartans would also have gained the additional psychological boost of being assured success when they forged the said alliance. That being said, even in the Herakleidai version, the inference from the Oracle's advice is that if they ally with the Aigeidai they will successfully subjugate the Peloponnesians, which once more would have provided a significant boost to belief and morale.

Similarly, in the instances of Kalchas before the Trojan War, who was told by the Pythia that he would join the Akhaians in their war against Troy and advise them during the siege,<sup>416</sup> and Oxylos before the Heraklid invasion of the Peloponnese, who was told that he should join the Herakleidai as a guide for the invasion and also seek out help from a descendant of Pelops to aid them in their war,<sup>417</sup> we can see once again the Delphic Oracle spontaneously issuing prognostications on military alliances, which the consulters obediently acceded to.

Another important implication, or indeed moral, contained within these legendary oracles is the fact that in all of the episodes the city-state or individual always acquiesces in obedience to the Oracle's dictum and forms the proposed alliance.<sup>418</sup> The inference must surely be that the ancient Greek audience and the ancient storytellers who were perpetuating these *mythoi* must have believed that this deference to the divine will was the fitting and proper course of action. This is certainly not the first time we have seen such unequivocal and reverent submission to the Oracle's will from the oracular stories.<sup>419</sup> The suggestion is once more that if this was the case, then the Oracles' influence on the foreign policies of *poleis* and ancient Greek warfare must have been considerable.

## 6.7 Conclusions

From the series of war oracles concerning military alliances we are able to obtain an invaluable insight into the role and influence of Oracles in ancient Greek warfare. In particular there are several clear examples of *poleis* consulting an Oracle for guidance and/or sanction for their

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<sup>416</sup> Oracle no. N13, *supra*, p. 163.

<sup>417</sup> Oracle nos. N18 & N19, *infra*, pp. 259 & 260.

<sup>418</sup> Cf. also the contrived alliance between the Herakleidai and Arkadia: Oracle no. N20, *supra*, p. 215.

<sup>419</sup> Cf. Oracle no. 28, *supra*, p. 205; Oracle no. 44, *supra*, p. 201; Oracle no. N7, *supra*, p. 202, Oracle no. N20, *supra*, p. 215; Oracle no. N23, *supra*, p. 212.

foreign policy decisions; for example, the Karians' consultation of Didyma regarding their proposed alliance with Miletos, or Epidamnos' consultation of Delphi during her war with the Illyrians to ask if it would be acceptable to request military aid from Corinth, which are then subsequently formed in response to positive affirmation received from the Oracles on the proposed accord.

Similar inquiries seeking guidance and sanction can be seen with the consultations of the Delphic Oracle by Argos and Crete before the Persian invasions. In both cases, of course, the advice of the Pythia was to remain neutral and apart from the conflict, to which both *poleis* acquiesced. However, what is perhaps more revealing, is the fact that in both instances, both Argos and Crete used the Delphic Oracle's prognostications advising them against joining the war against Persia as political justification for their neutrality. More importantly, this defence appears to have been entirely acceptable to Herodotus, who does not derogate either state for acceding to the Oracle's directives on the issue. Indeed, although Herodotus subtly expresses doubt about the sincerity of the Argives' claims that they were acting solely in accordance with the commands of Delphic Apollo, and suggests that they were perhaps using the oracular prophecy to cover up their medism, he does not criticise the nature of the apology itself. What is more, if Argos was consciously and deliberately using the Delphic Oracle's response to help augment and give credence to their defence politically, then it clearly demonstrates the power and influence that Oracles exerted in the ancient world, and the esteem and authority with which their prophecies were regarded: a truth further borne out by the fact that Philip and the Chalkidians felt it necessary to obtain divine sanction for their military alliance even though they had clearly already decided upon it well in advance.

Furthermore, we have also seen how the Oracles could often, in response to general queries on matters of war, issue unsolicited advice on alliances, which more often than not led to the proffered military alliances being obediently formed by the consultant *poleis*, which could significantly influence the balance of power in the ancient Greek world and sway the outcomes of inter-*polis* warfare. Moreover, those oracular prophecies which promised victory to the *poleis* if they formed the specified alliance, were quickly and eagerly fulfilled by the relevant *poleis* involved in order to satisfy the divine mandate and to avail of all the psychological benefits that would follow from such action.<sup>420</sup>

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<sup>420</sup> For example, Phigaleia and the Oresthasians, Oracle no. 9, *supra*, p. 227ff.

Vitally important in all of this, however, is the recurring theme of how the ancient Greek *poleis* used the oracular prognostications to their advantage. It appears very unlikely that the Oracles simply commanded and initiated alliances arbitrarily and that the ancient Greeks submissively obeyed; even in the rare instances where it did indeed occasionally occur out of religious reverence, it must be considered to be the exception rather than the norm. What does appear abundantly clear, however, is that once *poleis* received an oracle, asked or unasked for, regarding military alliances, they used it shrewdly to their benefit as a diplomatic tool either for political persuasion or defence, or as a psychological device. This is perhaps best illustrated by the oracle given to the Thebans seeking counsel from Delphi after suffering a setback against Athens, where they were told that they would be unable to achieve victory alone and that they must ally with their ‘nearest’ to aid them in the war.<sup>421</sup> The importance of this oracle, as discussed above, is the fact that the Thebans chose to interpret the oracle to mean the Aiginetans as the *polis* they should ally with, even though she was clearly not her nearest neighbour. However, as in the case of Epidamnos and Corinth or Mardonius and Athens, the Thebans subsequently used the Delphic prognostication as a negotiating asset when trying to persuade the Aiginetans to assent to the military alliance, and equally the Aiginetans, who no doubt did not need much persuasion to go to war with Athens, used it to justify entering the war on Thebes’ side. This, of course, also would have had significant psychological benefits for the Theban-Aiginetan alliance, and been damaging to the morale of their mutual enemy, Athens.

## **7. Fulfilment of oracular prophecies: psychological effects on enemy morale**

In all of these instances so far, the affirming, positive prophecies uttered by the Oracles could only have had, if anything, a beneficial effect on *polis* and army morale and belief, and helped mollify any fears or doubts. Of course, as already discussed above, such positive oracular prophecies also could have, in fact, played a major role in the decision-making process of the city-state and military; if that was not the case in every instance, then, at the very least, they would still have provided the consultant *polis* or *strategos* with encouragement and affirmation that their current course of action, if they had already decided upon it, was indeed the correct one.

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<sup>421</sup> Oracle no. 23, *supra*, p. 229ff.

Clearly, however, in the instances where the Oracle foreordained victory for one side in the conflict whenever a certain condition was fulfilled, it would have had twice the impact on the *poleis* involved, especially when the oracle was made common knowledge in the Greek world. The utilisation of this knowledge by the ancient Greeks for purposes of psychological warfare will be dealt with in more detail below in Chapter 4.<sup>422</sup>

## 8. Conclusions: deliberate fulfilment of oracular prophecies

Although, as Goodman and Holliday correctly argue, there are clearly occasions where a *polis* or *strategos* obediently obeys an Oracle's dicta out of simple religious deference, which consequently directly affects military strategy and tactics (even if it appears likely that it will be to their detriment),<sup>423</sup> there is also running concurrently a desire to fulfil the commands of the Oracle in order to reap the psychological benefits from such an act. Also, similarly, alongside a desire to avail of the omniscience of the gods and hopefully catch a glimpse into the future, there is, at the same time, a more secular reason at play, where *polis* and *strategos* hope to take advantage of the Oracles' local knowledge and unique position in the ancient Greek world as centres of gossip and intelligence, which can then be put to practical use in warfare.

It seems clear, therefore, from the many examples recorded in the ancient sources that oracular consultation on matters of war and the consequent ready and eager compliance with their prognostications was carried out for a *mélange* of different motivations and reasons: religious reverence, divine guidance, temporal tactical advice, and potent psychological benefits; all of which, I would argue, were at work simultaneously, but were all geared towards achieving the same end – that is to obtain a supernatural, psychological, and practical tactical military advantage over their enemies. It is no surprise to find that the consultations often take place when the war is prolonged or when the *polis* and its army are enduring difficult times. As Socrates advocated himself to his followers: if the way forward was clear, then as far as humanly possibly people should act on their own volition, but in times of great uncertainty when the consequences of decisions could not be foreseen, man should seek the counsel of the

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<sup>422</sup> Chapter 4, *infra*, pp. 290-327.

<sup>423</sup> Goodman and Holladay, 1986: 152.



Oracles.<sup>424</sup> This was never more so than in the realm of warfare where the outcome of one's decisions lay so precariously in the balance.

The wealth of evidence discussed above clearly demonstrates a strong desire on the part of the ancient Greeks from earliest memory through to the Hellenistic period to implement the oracular commands and directives of the gods, and, on another level, to utilise the same oracular prophecies for their own utilitarian purposes in warfare. Once more, it is extremely difficult to tell in many of the oracular episodes, whether the deliberate and enthusiastic fulfilment of the oracular prognostications was performed out of divine reverence and obedience, or for the more earthly motives of bolstering one's own morale or damaging the confidence and spirits of the enemy: it is most likely in all cases an intricate combination of both. Consequently, like the multifaceted motivations behind oracular consultations in the first place as discussed above,<sup>425</sup> there were also manifold, interrelated motivations behind the fulfilment of the prophecies uttered by those same Oracles; the common thread which is clear to be seen throughout all of war oracles thus far, however, is the patent psychological impact the fulfilment of the utterances of the gods had on the *polis* and army in times of war.

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<sup>424</sup> Xen. *Mem.* 1.1.6.

<sup>425</sup> Q.v. *supra*, p. 36ff.

## SECTION TWO: MISLEADING AND NEGATIVE ORACULAR RESPONSES AND THE FULFILMENT OF ORACULAR COMMANDS

### 9. Fulfilment of oracular prophecies: lulled into false hope and erroneous military decisions by misleading prophecies

It is also clear from several oracular episodes recorded by the ancient authors that Oracles could have an equally major impact upon ancient Greek warfare by unintentionally persuading or encouraging *poleis* and individuals to embark upon a disastrous course of action in war. That being said, interpretation of the Oracle's words is once again vital in these instances.

Closely related to the examples above where a *polis* or individual decides to go to war on the back of a positive prophecy from the Oracle and is subsequently victorious, there are numerous instances where a city-state or individual goes to war believing they have been given *carte blanche* to launch an invasion and an affirmation of success from the Oracle, only to soon find themselves badly mauled and defeated, and sometimes irrevocably ruined. The disastrous outcome, of course, is always blamed on the misinterpretation of the consulter, never on the fallibility of the Oracle.

#### 9.1 Sparta and Arkadia

One of the clearest examples we have of this in action is Sparta's consultation of the Delphic Oracle before their invasion of Arkadia *c.* 580 B.C.<sup>426</sup> According to Herodotus, the Spartans sought the counsel of the Pythia over their designs to conquer the whole of Arkadia. In response, the Oracle warned against attempting such a grand scheme, but instead advised:

Arcady? Great is the thing you ask. I will not grant it.  
In Arcady are many men, acorn-eaters,  
And they will keep you out. Yet, for I am not grudging,  
I will give you Tegea to dance in with stamping feet  
And her fair plain to measure out with the line.<sup>427</sup>

On the back of this ostensibly positive oracle the Spartans, understandably, decided to attack Tegea, with high hopes of victory. Indeed, so confident were the Spartans of their success, that

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<sup>426</sup> Oracle no. 14: Hdt. 1.66; Diod. Sic. 9.36.2; Paus. 3.3.5 & 8.47.2; Dio Chrys. *Or.* 17.16; Polyæn. *Strat.* 1.8; P-W 31; Fontenrose, Q88.

<sup>427</sup> Hdt. 1.66, trans. Aubrey De Sélincourt (*Herodotus: The Histories*).

they carried chains with them to shackle their defeated foes. However, the Spartans had failed to perceive the true meaning behind the ambiguous language of the oracle and in fact lost the battle, with the Spartan prisoners being fettered in their own chains and forced to work the land of Tegea.<sup>428</sup> Thus, it can be argued that the false hope and misplaced optimism which the Pythia's words had given to the Spartans led to them undertaking a disastrous military expedition, which ended in defeat and humiliation.

Parke and Wormell certainly believe the oracle to be genuine and state that it is 'evidently authentic and was delivered under approximately the circumstance which Herodotus records.'<sup>429</sup>

This oracle is important for several reasons. Firstly, it shows us another clear example of a *polis* consulting an Oracle on an important issue of foreign policy (i.e. should they embark upon a campaign of conquest?). Secondly, bolstered by the Oracle's words, the Spartans decided to launch an offensive against Tegea. Thirdly, it is a key example of, as Crahay expresses it, an *avertissement incompris*,<sup>430</sup> in which the Spartans crucially misinterpreted the oracle and failed to perceive the warning hidden in the Pythia's reply, much to their detriment.

It was the Oracle's use of enigmatic and ambiguous language that meant that her prognostications were open to diverse interpretations by different *poleis* and individuals. However, it was this very ambiguity and cryptic nature of the Oracle's responses which ensured its infallibility in the eyes of the ancient Greek world. As Parke and Wormell state: 'Happily for the Pythia her metaphorical language could lend itself to other interpretations, and when the current opinion was that the gods expressed their meaning darkly, a devious construction could plausibly be put on the prophecy after the event.'<sup>431</sup> In this case, the Spartans' lot, as Herodotus suggests, fulfilled the prophecy neatly. The Spartan captives were consequently made to 'dance' in chains and 'measure out with the line' the plain of Tegea as labourers. As a result, the Pythian Apollo's repute for infallible prophecies was thus maintained.

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<sup>428</sup> According to Herodotus (1.66), these infamous chains could still be seen in his own lifetime hanging from the temple of Athena Alea in Tegea. Pausanias (8.47.2) also states that he saw the same chains in the second century A.D., though they had been virtually destroyed by rust by that stage.

<sup>429</sup> Parke and Wormell, 1956b: 94.

<sup>430</sup> Crahay, 1956: 50; Fontenrose, 1978: 62, 100.

<sup>431</sup> Parke and Wormell, 1956b: 94.

## 9.2 Athens and the Sicilian Expedition

One of the most striking examples of a seemingly positive oracular prognostication leading to a disastrous military venture being undertaken by a *polis* is that of Athens and the Sicilian expedition.<sup>432</sup> When deciding upon undertaking an expedition to Sicily in 415 B.C., the Athenians consulted several Oracles regarding the proposed venture. According to Plutarch, the Pythia's response directed the Athenian envoys to 'bring the priestess of Erythrai to Athens', which the Athenians obediently did. However, when the priestess arrived it was discovered that her name was 'Quiet' (*Hesychia*). Consequently, Plutarch, equipped with the benefit of hindsight of course, suggests that the oracle had been misinterpreted and that the god was in fact advising the Athenians to bring 'quiet' or 'peace' to Athens instead of launching the expedition.<sup>433</sup>

Plutarch also details how envoys were sent to Ammon as well on the same issue.<sup>434</sup> He states that the envoys returned from the shrine with an oracle declaring that the Athenians would capture all the Syracusans, but that at the same time they concealed other unpropitious prophecies out of fear of jinxing the expedition.<sup>435</sup> It appears that Athens also sought the counsel of the Oracle at Dodona for the expedition. Pausanias states that Dodonaean Zeus told the Athenians to colonise Sicily,<sup>436</sup> whilst Dio Chrysostom records that they were told to attach Sicily to their city.<sup>437</sup> However, as with Plutarch, both authors suggest the oracles were interpreted wrongly and that the Athenians were in fact being advised against making the expedition. Pausanias, for instance, states that the Sicily Zeus referred to was not the island but in fact a small hill not far from the city of Athens. Parke believes that the consultation of Dodona was indeed real,<sup>438</sup> but it once more illustrates the homonymic equivocation so commonly attributed to oracles *post eventum*.<sup>439</sup>

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<sup>432</sup> Oracle no. 43: Plut. *De Pyth. or.* 19; Plut. *Mor.* 403b; Plut. *Nic.* 13.4; Paus. 8.11.12; Dio Chrys. *Or.* 17.17; *Suda* s.v. *Hannibal*; P-W 166; Fontenrose, Q193.

<sup>433</sup> Plut. *De Pyth. or.* 19; Plut. *Nic.* 13.4.

<sup>434</sup> Plut. *Nic.* 13.1.

<sup>435</sup> Plut. *Nic.* 13.1.

<sup>436</sup> Paus. 8.11.12.

<sup>437</sup> Dio Chrys. *Or.* 17.17.

<sup>438</sup> Parke, 1967: 136-137.

<sup>439</sup> There is a plethora of similar examples of this from the ancient writers. For example, Pausanias (8.11.10) details various individuals' misinterpretation of oracles and their inability to escape their prophesied dooms. Epaminondas, for instance, became terrified to board warships or travel on merchant ships after the Delphic Oracle warned him to beware of *pelagos*, only to die in a wood called Pelagos on the battlefield of Mantinea. Hannibal, on the other hand, became complacent when Ammon told him that when he died the Libyssa earth would cover him, which he took to mean that he would retire to Libya after defeating the Romans and die of old age. However,

Once again these military consultations demonstrate the essential role that Oracles played in the decision-making process of *poleis* in matters of war. In this case, all three of the major Oracles of Delphi, Ammon, and Dodona played a significant part in persuading Athens to embark upon the disastrous expedition. Even if the Athenians did misinterpret the oracles they received, as several later writers suggest, the fact remains that it was the contemporary interpretations of the time, that they were getting a divine ‘green light’ for the venture, which indeed encouraged them to undertake the campaign.

It is important to note also that Plutarch and the other sources are accusatorial of the Athenians in their accounts of the episode. The impression from the sources is that the Athenians, blinded by ambition, carried on regardless of the omens they received, as they were so determined to go,<sup>440</sup> or at least certain influential individuals, such as Alkibiades were.<sup>441</sup> Thus, it is not only the accidental misinterpretation of the oracles that brings about the disaster for the Athenians, but also their deliberate disregard for the warnings from the gods, as a result of their being blinded by greed and ambition, which brings about their downfall, and therefore has an element of divine punishment and retribution for their disdain and disrespect of the divine will. That being said, the fact that so many Oracles were consulted suggests that they were slightly uneasy about undertaking such a major campaign,<sup>442</sup> and that it was perhaps only what appeared to be

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he died from an infected wound and was buried at Libyssa in Bithynia (*cf.* Plut. *Flam.* 20). Philip of Macedon, who was warned by the Pythia to beware of chariots, had every chariot in his realm dismantled, but was killed by a sword that had a chariot engraved on its hilt (see Val. Max. 1.8.9; Ael. *VH* 3.45; *cf.* Poseidonius, in Cic. *Fat.* 3). Likewise, according to the Suda, Archidamos, son of Agesilaos, was warned by an Oracle to beware of Sicily. As a result, he avoided the island of Sicily, but fell in battle at a hill named Sicily in Attica, which is thought to be a small rocky hill south of the Ilissus. *Cf.* Kleomenes and Argos, Oracle no. 28, *supra*, p. 205ff.; Croesus, Oracle no. 19, *infra*, p. 248ff. For more examples and analysis, see Fontenrose, J. E., 'The Oracular Response as a Traditional Narrative Theme', *Journal of Folklore Research* 20, 2/3 (1983) 113-120; Fontenrose, 1978: 59 n. 3; and Harrison, S. J., 'Cicero and 'Crurifragium'', *CQ* 33, 2 (1983) 453-455.

<sup>440</sup> Plutarch (*Nic.* 2-3) suggests that Athens paid the price for ignoring warnings about undertaking the expedition to Sicily; he lists omens such as the mutilation of the Hermae in Athens, the violation of the altar of the Twelve Gods, and ravens attacking a Palladium at Delphi that had been dedicated by Athens from the spoils of the Persian Wars. It was Dio Chrysostom's belief also that the Athenians paid the ultimate price for misinterpreting the prophecy of the Oracle on account of their avarice: see Dio Chrys. *Or.* 17.17. Thucydides (6.27-28) tells us that the defamation of the Hermae was taken as an ill omen for the expedition, and then, to make matters worse, revelations surfaced of young men holding mock celebrations of the Mysteries in private houses, with Alkibiades being named as one of the perpetrators. Yet, in spite of these extraordinary events, the expedition was pushed ahead as planned without the religious sacrileges being formally dealt with beforehand. In fact, Thucydides states that Alkibiades' enemies did all they could to stop the trial taking place because he was so popular at that particular time and had just persuaded the Argives and the Mantineans to join the expedition: see Thuc. 6.29. For a summary of the extensive debate surrounding the mutilation of the Hermae and the profanation of the Mysteries, see Hornblower, 1991: introductory n. to 6.27-29, pp. 367-372; *ap.* 6.27.3.

<sup>441</sup> Maximus of Tyre (11.6) records a story of Alkibiades consulting the Delphic Oracle about the Sicilian expedition, whilst Plutarch (*Nic.* 13.1) states that Alkibiades 'had other diviners in his private service, and from sundry oracles reputed ancient he cited one saying that a great triumph would be won by the Athenians in Sicily.'

<sup>442</sup> It seems to be the case when it was a very important issue or large undertaking that the practice was to consult as many Oracles as possible to be sure of the right course of action: *cf.* Croesus' testing of the oracular shrines of

unanimous support and approval from the divine that led the Athenians to make the final decision to go to Sicily, with devastating consequences.<sup>443</sup>

Also very revealing is the reaction of the Athenians to the Sicilian disaster. Thucydides records how they ‘became angry with the prophets and the soothsayers [*chresmologoi* and *manteis*] and all who at that time had, by various methods of divination, encouraged them to believe they would conquer Sicily.’<sup>444</sup> This provides us with an important insight into the extent to which divination was involved in the decision-making processes of *poleis*, and further reinforces the argument that such prophecies could heavily influence matters of foreign policy and war.<sup>445</sup>

### 9.3 Croesus

A similar episode, this time involving an individual rather than a *polis*, can be seen with King Croesus’ famous consultation of Delphi regarding his proposed invasion of Persia c. 548 B.C., which would result in his utter destruction.<sup>446</sup> In this oracular episode, Croesus asked the Delphic Oracle and the Oracle of Amphiaraos at Knopia in Boiotia whether he should embark upon an invasion of Persia and whether it would be wise to seek an alliance.<sup>447</sup> When both Oracles returned a similar answer, that if Croesus attacked the Persians he would destroy a great empire, and that he should find out which of the Greek states was the most powerful and

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Greece and Libya, *infra*, p. 248 n. 446; Agesilaos before his Persian campaign, Oracle no. 47, *supra*, p. 160ff.; Agesipolis before his invasion of Argos, Oracle no. 48, *supra*, p. 161ff.; the Thebans before Leuktra, Oracle no. 51, *supra*, p. 181ff.

<sup>443</sup> The failure of the expedition was to have disastrous, long-lasting effects on Athens from which she was never fully able to recover. Thucydides (7.87) states that the Sicilian expedition was ‘to the victors the most brilliant of successes, to the vanquished the most calamitous of defeats; for they [the Athenians] were utterly and entirely defeated; their sufferings were on an enormous scale; their losses were, as they say, total; army, navy, everything was destroyed, and, out of many, only few returned.’ The failure of the Sicilian expedition was one of the major reasons why Athens ultimately lost the Peloponnesian War. The Athenian losses severely weakened the Athenian navy, which loosened her grip on her empire and allies, encouraged Persian intervention on behalf of the Spartans, and sparked off the oligarchic coup of 411 B.C.: see Thuc. 2.65; Hornblower, 2002: 163-183; Meiggs, R., *The Athenian Empire* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972).

<sup>444</sup> Thuc. 8.1.1. Cf. Paus. 10.9.5: the Athenians used the oracle of the *chresmologos*, Mousaios, to blame their generals of corruption after their defeat at Aigospotamoi. For further discussion, see Powell, C. A., ‘Religion and the Sicilian Expedition’, *Historia* 28, 1 (1979a) 15ff.

<sup>445</sup> For further analysis, see *infra*, p. 334ff.

<sup>446</sup> Oracle no. 19: Hdt. 1.53.1; Arist. *Rh.* 1407a 38; Diod. Sic. 9.31.1; P-W 53; Fontenrose, Q100. Prior to this consultation Herodotus tells us (1.46.2-1.49.1) that Croesus set out to test the knowledge of the greatest Oracles of Greece (as well as that of Ammon in Egypt) by sending them all the same extremely specific question. Croesus’ delegates were to ask each of the seven oracles at the same designated date and time what Croesus was doing at the exact moment. To make the test even more difficult, Croesus had chosen the bizarre and obscure task of cutting up a tortoise and lamb and boiling them together in a bronze cauldron with a bronze lid. Apparently only the Oracles of Delphi and Amphiaraos passed the test.

<sup>447</sup> Hdt. 1.49.1, 1.53.1.

make an alliance with it,<sup>448</sup> Croesus was justifiably overjoyed with the seemingly sanguine prognostications and consequently formed an alliance with Sparta and launched his campaign against Persia.<sup>449</sup> However, once again, the Oracles' enigmatic words had been misinterpreted and the warning misheeded, and unfortunately for Croesus the destruction of a great empire referred to his own.

Once more, therefore, the Oracles' responses can be blamed for encouraging a commander to embark upon an unwise military campaign, which, in this case, led to the destruction of Croesus' empire and his subsequent imprisonment following the capture of Sardis.<sup>450</sup> Indeed, according to Herodotus, Croesus himself admitted to Cyrus after he had been captured that it was his belief in the prophecies he had received from the Oracles that had emboldened him to invade Persia.<sup>451</sup> Yet, once again, it is extremely important to note that the blame is put squarely on the shoulders of Croesus, not the Oracles. Herodotus crucially tells us later the story of Croesus in captivity sending his envoys to Delphi again to ask the god if he was not ashamed to have encouraged Croesus through his prophecies to invade Persia in the confident hope of destroying the power of Cyrus.<sup>452</sup> The Pythia responded to the envoys' accusatory question by declaring that Croesus had no right to find fault with the oracle, as the god had told him that if he attacked the Persians he would bring down a mighty empire, and that the wise thing to do with an answer like that would have been to send again to enquire which empire was meant, Cyrus' or his own; however, as he misinterpreted what was said and chose not to make a second enquiry, then the fault was solely his own. When the Lydian envoys returned to Croesus and informed him of the Priestess' answer, he admitted that Apollo was indeed blameless and that he only had himself to blame.<sup>453</sup> Thus, once again the Oracle proved itself to be irreproachable.

Klees argues that the stories of Croesus' consultations of the Pythian Apollo must have a historical foundation, although they may have been rather elaborated upon over time by Delphi.<sup>454</sup> Parke and Wormell, however, disagree to a large extent with this viewpoint. They

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<sup>448</sup> Hdt. 1.53.1-3. Cf. Arist. *Rh.* 1407a 38.

<sup>449</sup> Hdt. 1.54.1, 1.69, 1.71.1.

<sup>450</sup> Hdt. 1.91.

<sup>451</sup> Hdt. 1.90.3. Cf. Hdt. 1.87.3.

<sup>452</sup> Hdt. 1.90.4. See P-W 56; Fontenrose, Q103.

<sup>453</sup> Hdt. 1.91.4-6.

<sup>454</sup> Klees, 1965: 91. Parke strongly disagrees with Klees on this issue: see Parke, H. W., 'Review of Hans Klees: Die Eigenart des griechischen Glaubens an Orakel und Seher', *JHS* 88 (1968) 210-211. See also Forrest, 1966: 628-629; and Pollard, J., 'Review of Hans Klees: Die Eigenart des griechischen Glaubens an Orakel und Seher', *The Classical Review* 16, 1 (1966) 82-84. For more discussion on the oracle telling Croesus he would destroy a great kingdom, see Crahay, 1956: 198; and Delcourt, 1955: 105.

argue that the actual oracle which forms the nucleus of the story is clearly not genuine. Their suspicions for doubting its authenticity lie mainly in the fact that Herodotus, for some strange reason, does not give the Pythia's answer in its conventional hexameter form, but instead merely offers a prose paraphrase in indirect speech – an incidence made even more curious by the fact that in all other instances of oracles delivered to Croesus, Herodotus quotes them in their correct verse form.<sup>455</sup> They do, however, temper their argument somewhat with the acknowledgement that it may have been possible that Delphi did in fact send Croesus oracles about the success of his military ambitions and the permanence of his dynasty, but, if that was the case, then these were certainly not the words given.<sup>456</sup> Furthermore, they argue that it is reasonable to suppose that the kernel of truth which lay behind the later Delphian narrative was an actual consultation of the Oracle by Croesus seeking guidance on the question of military alliances. Fontenrose advocates this theory too.<sup>457</sup> In addition, Fontenrose makes a strong case for the oracle being a later invention. He points out that this oracle is often cited by scholars as a typical example of Delphi's clever ambiguities, illustrating how, whatever the outcome, the Oracle will be proved right. However, Fontenrose contends that that argument is flawed in this case as it is based on the premise that every war must be decisive, which indeed is frequently not the case. Consequently, Fontenrose argues that Croesus' campaign could have ended without the destruction of either kingdom, thus proving that the oracle is clearly a *post-eventum* composition.<sup>458</sup>

However, irrespective of whether or not the oracle is to be believed to be entirely genuine, Croesus' story is revealing in several ways. On one hand, the narrative itself provides us with another clear example of how, to the ancient Greek mind, it was plainly accepted that an Oracle's prognostication could massively affect the psychology, strategy, and destiny of kings and city-states. On the other hand, it is a cautionary tale about the dangers of misinterpreting the counsel of the gods, and provides us with an intriguing insight into the ancient Greek view of the infallibility of the Oracle.

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<sup>455</sup> See Parke and Wormell, 1956b: 133.

<sup>456</sup> See Parke and Wormell, 1956b: 135. See also Fontenrose, 1978: 113.

<sup>457</sup> Fontenrose, 1978: 112.

<sup>458</sup> Fontenrose, 1978: 114.



## 9.4 Kylon

Likewise, c. 630 B.C., Kylon's consultation of the Pythia regarding his planned coup d'état of Athens and his subsequent misinterpretation of the oracle's words led him too to disaster.<sup>459</sup> Thucydides recounts how a powerful Athenian noble, Kylon, who had been a victor in the Olympic Games and had married the daughter of the Megarian tyrant, Theagenes, had designs on becoming tyrant of Athens himself. Consequently, Kylon consulted the Priestess at Delphi regarding his plans to take over Athens. The Pythia responded by telling Kylon that he should seize the Athenian Akropolis during the great festival of Zeus. Kylon naturally interpreted the oracle to mean that he should attack during the Olympic festival in the Peloponnese, believing also that this was a particularly pertinent occasion for him considering he had previously won a victory at the Olympic Games. Subsequently, when the time arrived for the Olympic festival, Kylon assembled a force composed of his friends and troops provided by his father-in-law and seized the Akropolis in an attempt to establish a tyranny. However, as Thucydides points out, Kylon had failed to consider the possibility that the festival referred to by the Oracle may have actually been in Attica or elsewhere, and that the oracle itself did not offer any illumination. Thucydides, armed with the benefit of hindsight, goes on to explain that the Oracle had in fact meant the Athenian festival, the Diasia, which the Athenians called the great festival of Zeus the Gracious. As a result, his attempt to seize power ended in disaster. When the Athenians discovered what had happened they opposed Kylon's party and blockaded them on the Akropolis. Kylon and his brother managed to escape into exile, but his followers were eventually put to death.<sup>460</sup>

Although Fontenrose classifies this oracle as quasi-historical and states that it is not genuine in the catalogue of Delphic responses, he acknowledges elsewhere that it has generally been considered an authentic pronouncement of the Delphic shrine.<sup>461</sup> The fact that the Pythia advised Kylon to make the attack on the Akropolis and that the subsequent attempt failed, suggests that the oracle was indeed genuine, as it appears that it made a mistake. It is in fact very possible, and likely, that the oracle was actually referring to the Olympic festival, keeping in mind that Kylon was an Olympic victor, and, as he was a powerful Athenian noble with the added advantage of having the support of the Megarian tyrant, Theagenes, Delphi may have believed that it would be a safe gamble that he would be successful in his takeover. Therefore,

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<sup>459</sup> Oracle no. 10: Thuc. 1.126.4; Schol. vet. on Aristoph. *Eq.* 445; P-W 12; Fontenrose, Q64.

<sup>460</sup> See Thuc. 1.126.4-11; Hdt. 5.71; Plut. *Sol.* 12.1.

<sup>461</sup> Fontenrose, 1978: 68.

once more, it is only the reinterpretation of the oracle with hindsight which protected the integrity of the shrine and ensured that the infallibility of the Oracle remained untarnished.

This oracular tale is illuminating for several reasons. Firstly, it is another example of an individual seeking counsel from the Oracle prior to embarking upon a military venture. Although we do not have the exact question put to the Oracle, it must surely have been to obtain divine sanction, or advice on how to obtain victory, or both. Secondly, the Oracle's positive response to Kylon, providing him with explicit guidance on when to attack the Akropolis, must have been taken by Kylon to mean that he had the god's approval and that his coup would be a success, and consequently must have provided him with a psychological boost and encouraged him to proceed with his plans. One can also imagine that he would have used the positive prognostication from the Oracle to persuade his followers and Theagenes to aid him in his attempt. Lastly, once again, we can see the importance of interpretation and misinterpretation of the Oracle's equivocal responses in keeping the repute of the Oracle unblemished.

## 9.5 Arkesilaos and Kyrene

A similar oracular episode can be seen with Arkesilaos III's consultation of the Delphic Oracle concerning his proposed attack on Kyrene.<sup>462</sup> As per Herodotus, Arkesilaos III, the King of Kyrene, had fled in exile to Samos as a result of civil strife in the city. Whilst on Samos, Arkesilaos began to gather a large army to regain his throne. When he had mustered the force, he went to Delphi to ask the Oracle about his chances of success. The Priestess instructed him that he would reclaim his throne and that the Battiad dynasty would rule Kyrene for eight generations. However, he was also warned to show mercy and moderation on his return, or else he would bring about his own death. The Pythia's words, recorded by Herodotus in a prose paraphrase, ran as follows:

Apollo Loxias grants you power in Kyrene over a period of eight generations under four rulers named Battus and four named Arkesilaos; but he advises you to make no attempt to keep your power beyond that period. As for yourself, when you return to your country, be gentle. If you find the oven full of jars, do not bake them but send them away downwind. But if you do heat the oven, enter not the land surrounded by water, for otherwise you will die, and the best of bulls with you.<sup>463</sup>

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<sup>462</sup> Oracle no. 20: Hdt. 4.163-4; P-W 70; Fontenrose, Q119.

<sup>463</sup> Hdt. 4.163, trans. Aubrey De Sélincourt (*Herodotus: The Histories*).

Bolstered by the Oracle's affirmation of his success, Arkesilaos returned to Kyrene and duly recovered his kingship. However, once there, he soon forgot the Oracle's cautionary words and began to exact revenge on his political opponents who had driven him into exile, and was subsequently killed in Barka.

Chamoux suggests that the oracle was a *post-eventum* invention, due to the amount of later historical knowledge and events contained in it, as well as the fact that its purpose may also have been to deter the dethroned Battiads and their supporters from attempting to regain the throne.<sup>464</sup> Furthermore, How and Wells point out that Pindar makes no mention of the oracle when he sang the glory of the Battiads in 466 B.C.<sup>465</sup> Having said that, How and Wells also raise the intriguing fact that although the oracle is presented in prose, 'the tags of hexameters are obvious', suggesting that the original oracle from which the prose was written was perhaps genuine, even if it was delivered later, after the eighth and last Battiad had been deposed c. 460 B.C. The events around which the oracle story has been constructed do, on the other hand, appear to be historical fact: the burning of political opponents and the assassinations in Barka did indeed happen. After his restoration, Arkesilaos persecuted his former opponents, whereupon a number of them took refuge in a tower, where Arkesilaos ordered them to be burnt alive. Herodotus thus alleges that the first part of the oracle was fulfilled, and as a result Arkesilaos deliberately kept away from Kyrene because he thought it might be the 'land surrounded by water', and took refuge with his father-in-law, Alazir, in Barka. It was then in Barka's marketplace that he was assassinated by Kyrenean exiles, along with Alazir, who must be identified with 'the best of bulls' in the prophecy.<sup>466</sup>

Even if the oracle story is a *post-eventum* invention built around actual events, as it most certainly appears to be, it still provides a useful insight into the role and influence of the Delphic Oracle in foreign policy decision-making. Firstly, we see once again the literary tradition recording the need for kings or *polis* leaders to obtain an appraisal of their chances of success from the Oracle on military ventures before making their final decision, or, at the very least, to receive divine sanction of their course of action before embarking upon it. Secondly, if, as Parke and Wormell argue, the whole story was put together after the fall of the dynasty of

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<sup>464</sup> See Chamoux, F., *Cyrène sous la monarchie des Battiades* (Paris: E. de Boccard, 1953) 144-155. Parke and Wormell also agree: see Parke and Wormell, 1956b: 156.

<sup>465</sup> Pind. *Pyth.* 4 & 5; How and Wells, 1912: *ap.* 4.163.2.

<sup>466</sup> For further discussion on the fulfilment of this oracle, see Fontenrose, 1978: 61.

Battus, and the motive was to vindicate the Delphic Oracle, it still does not detract from the fact that the Pythia must have, therefore, originally given Arkesilaos a favourable response, which in turn encouraged him to launch the expedition to regain his throne. Parke and Wormell argue that Delphi's affirmation of the kingship for Battus and his family was part of the propaganda on his behalf at that time, but when the dynasty fell 'Delphi preferred to represent it that the Pythia had foreseen what occurred and given Arkesilaos a warning which he first forgot and then misunderstood.'<sup>467</sup> The *apologia* from Delphi here is very similar to the one just mentioned above, where Delphi was forced to reconstruct the story of Croesus to justify the support Apollo had given to him before his demise. That being said, it still shows the support and direction Delphi was giving to rulers and *poleis*, albeit sometimes erroneously, on matters of foreign policy.

## 9.6 Philip II

A very similar episode concerns Philip II of Macedon's consultation of Delphi in 336 B.C.<sup>468</sup> According to both Diodorus and Pausanias, before embarking upon an expedition against the Persians, Philip consulted the Delphic Oracle and asked whether he would conquer the king of the Persians. The Pythia's response was that 'The bull has been garlanded, the end is come, the sacrificer is at hand.'<sup>469</sup> Philip interpreted this oracle as meaning that the Persians would be slaughtered like a sacrificial bull, and, taking the prophetic utterance as affirmation of his success, made preparations to invade Persia. However, Philip was unable to lead the Panhellenic invasion because, as Pausanias points out, events soon showed that the oracle in fact alluded not to the Persians, but to Philip himself and he was assassinated in 336 B.C. by Pausanias of Orestis at a sacrifice during the marriage festivities of his daughter Cleopatra and Alexander of Epeiros, thus making Philip the 'garlanded bull' referred to in the oracle.<sup>470</sup>

The oracle contains the same kind of ambiguity as the famous oracle of Croesus already discussed above, where the recipient misinterprets the Oracle's prophecy of doom to mean his own and instead takes the god's words to be favourable to himself.<sup>471</sup> It is also important to note Diodorus' statement that Philip 'wanting to enter upon the war with the gods' approval,

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<sup>467</sup> Parke and Wormell, 1956b: 156.

<sup>468</sup> Oracle no. 57: Diod. Sic. 16.91.2; Paus. 8.7.6; P-W 266, Fontenrose, Q213.

<sup>469</sup> Diod. Sic. 16.91.2; Paus. 8.7.6.

<sup>470</sup> For an account of Philip's assassination, see Diod. Sic. 16.94; Arist. *Pol.* 5.10, 1311b; and Just. *Epit.* 9.6-7.

<sup>471</sup> Cf. Oracle no. 19, *supra*, p. 248ff.

asked the Pythia whether he would conquer the king of the Persians.<sup>472</sup> The casual manner with which Diodorus states the fact, illustrates how habitual the practice of consulting the Oracle before going to war was, and also hints at the reluctance and/or fear of *strategoï* to do so without first obtaining the blessing of the gods or, at the very least, not to offend them by ignoring custom and protocol. Moreover, the psychological effect of the seemingly positive affirmation from the Oracle is clear to be seen when Diodorus goes on to make the comment that Philip ‘thought that the gods supported him and was very happy to think that Asia would be made captive under the hands of the Macedonians.’<sup>473</sup>

Parke and Wormell consider the oracle to be genuine, arguing that it could have conveniently been connected to a ritual celebration of the summer or symbolically with the sacrificing of Persia by the hand of Philip, but that ‘a new meaning was given to it by the assassination of Philip.’<sup>474</sup> The fact that a mundane and unremarkable oracle could be given new meaning in the light of current events is yet another illustration of how the Oracles’ infallibility would be effortlessly and continually reinforced by new incidents and by the interpretations and subsequent reinterpretations by the ancient Greeks. Fontenrose, on the other hand, although he acknowledges that it is possible that a commonplace oracle could have been reinterpreted in the wake of subsequent events, is dubious of its authenticity and therefore categorises the oracle as Quasi-Historical and places it in the realm of folklore.<sup>475</sup>

## 9.7 Julian and Persia

Finally, a much later Roman example of a military commander encouraged by propitious oracular prophecies to embark upon an unwise military venture concerns Julian the Apostate and his contemplated war with Persia.<sup>476</sup> According to Theodoretos, in 362 A.D. the Emperor Julian sent envoys to Delphi, Dodona, and the other Oracles and asked the *manteis* whether he should take the field in battle against Persia.<sup>477</sup> Consequently both the Oracles of Delphi and either Dodona or Didyma responded that he should take the field and that he would be victorious. Specifically, the Pythia apparently responded by declaring that: ‘Now all the gods

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<sup>472</sup> Diod. Sic. 16.91.2.

<sup>473</sup> Diod. Sic. 16.91.4.

<sup>474</sup> Parke and Wormell, 1956b: 238.

<sup>475</sup> Fontenrose, 1978: 67. Fontenrose argues against the oracle referring to summer ritual celebrations as he does not believe that the Delphic Oracle would have spoken cult instructions in such a form.

<sup>476</sup> Oracle no. 68: Theodor. *Hist. eccl.* 3.16.21; Theodor. *Gr. aff. cur.* 10.140; Kedr. P. 538b; Fontenrose, Q262; P-W 600; Fontenrose, D56.

<sup>477</sup> Theodor. *Hist. eccl.* 3.16.21.

have set out to carry trophies to the banks of the wild-beast river. And I shall lead them, furious war-shouting Ares.’ The ‘wild-beast river’ was taken, of course, to refer the Tigris. We do not have the exact response uttered from either Dodona or Didyma.

We must presume that one of the ‘other Oracles’ surely must have been Didyma, since Julian held the office of prophet at Didyma (albeit probably an honorary title).<sup>478</sup> Fontenrose suggests plausibly that *Dôdônên* may even have been a copyist’s mistake for *Didyma* as there is no mention in the sources of Dodona being in operation after 200 B.C.<sup>479</sup> Despite some indeterminate hesitation, Fontenrose believes that the response recorded here may well be authentic due to the fact that the prophet approved Julian’s expedition and assured him of victory, even though Julian would in fact be met with defeat. Furthermore, as we have seen above, there was precedence for such advice being issued from the Oracle, as Didyma had similarly assured Alexander of victory long before Julian’s consultation.<sup>480</sup> Fontenrose also points to the fact that Julian, as a pious convert to paganism, would have in all probability asked all the Oracles for their sanction of his proposed campaign and received it.<sup>481</sup>

If we are to regard the oracular episode then as genuine, as I believe we should, it illustrates once more the prestige of Oracles in the ancient world and the important role they still played in military affairs even as late as the fourth century A.D. Furthermore, it is another example of the considerable impact an Oracle could have on psychology and also, as a consequence, on foreign policy in general. Obviously heartened by the emphatic avowals of success from the Oracles, Julian launched his grand campaign against Persia only to suffer resounding defeat at the hands of the Sassanids and, worse still, his own death at the Battle of Samarra in 363 A.D. Once again, however, the Pythia’s abstruse prophecy enabled the blame to be shifted onto the shoulders of Julian and his incorrect interpretation of the god’s meaning. Julian was told by the Pythia that the gods had already begun to carry trophies to the River Tigris, but as usual Apollo had neglected to say whose victory the trophies would celebrate, and, like Croesus, Julian had foolishly failed to seek further clarification on the issue at his own undoing. Although we do not have the exact response from Didyma, it is surely safe to assume that it too was couched in

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<sup>478</sup> See Jul. *Epist.* 451bc.

<sup>479</sup> See Fontenrose, 1988: 227-228.

<sup>480</sup> Cf. Oracle no. 61, *supra*, p. 158ff.

<sup>481</sup> See Fontenrose, 1978: 426.

enough ambiguity to ensure that the fault and misinterpretation lay at the feet of the consulter not the Oracle.

## 9.8 Non-historical examples

### 9.8.1 *The Herakleidai's invasions of the Peloponnese*

The same theme is to be found also in several of the non-historical war oracles, such as the Herakleidai launching a doomed attack on the Peloponnese earlier than had been ordained by the Delphic Oracle,<sup>482</sup> or the Boiotian leader, Xanthos, erroneously opting to fight in single combat against the Athenian commander, Melanthos, for the border country of Melainai.<sup>483</sup>

In the case of the Herakleidai's invasions of the Peloponnese there are six closely connected war oracles spanning over a fifty-year period, which involve a series of unfortunate misinterpretations on the part of the Heraklids. The first oracle in the saga concerns the Delphic command to the Herakleidai *c.* 1154 B.C. to invade the Peloponnese.<sup>484</sup> According to the fourth-century orator Isokrates, the Herakleidai consulted the Oracle of Delphi, but instead of being given any answers to their questions they were given a single oracular command, which bade them to go to their fatherland.<sup>485</sup> Upon discovering that Argos was their ancestral country, the Herakleidai invaded the Peloponnese and took it over. In Isokrates' account the command is very straightforward and it appears that the Heraklids did not have any problems with oracles. However, in the version recorded by Isokrates' contemporary, Ephorus, it appears that there were a series of oracles delivered to the Herakleidai, which, as a result of their consistent misinterpretation of them, caused them serious problems.

Pindar records the earliest reference to the oracles of the Heraklid legend, saying that the oracular god Apollo settled the descendants of Herakles and Aigimios in Lakedaimon, Argos, and Pylos. This seems to fit nicely with the command recorded by Isokrates, but it could also arguably be alluding to the whole series recorded by Ephorus and several later authors. Although there is no direct reference to Delphi being the oracular shrine involved in this particular oracle, the inference from both Pindar and Isokrates is that Delphi is the most likely

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<sup>482</sup> Oracle no. N16: Apollod. 2.8.2; Diod. Sic. 4.58.1; P-W 288; Fontenrose, L61. Q.v. *infra*, p. 258.

<sup>483</sup> Oracle no. N22: Polyæn. *Strat.* 1.19; P-W 214; Fontenrose, L48. Q.v. *infra*, p. 262.

<sup>484</sup> For the dating of this invasion, see Oracle no. N21, *supra*, p. 238 n. 412.

<sup>485</sup> Oracle no. N15: Isoc. *Or.* 6.17; Pind. *Pyth.* 5.69-72; Schol. vet. on Pind. *Pyth.* 69/92; Aristides, 13.114; P-W 287; Fontenrose, L60.

source of the prophecy. Furthermore, the subsequent oracles recorded below are frequently associated directly with Delphi, which further supports the theory that the commands were being issued by Delphic Apollo.

Subsequently, according to Ephorus and Apollodorus, the Herakleidai, not long after the death of Eurystheus, had successfully taken over the whole of the Peloponnese.<sup>486</sup> However, a year after their occupation, a plague engulfed the whole of the Peloponnese, and it was discovered from an unidentified oracle that it was the fault of the Herakleidai because they had returned to the Peloponnese earlier than had been ordained. As a result of this discovery the Herakleidai quit the Peloponnese and retired to Marathon and dwelt there.<sup>487</sup> Apollodorus then tells us that Hyllos, the son of Herakles, consulted the Delphic Oracle regarding the Heraklids' intention to return to the Peloponnese.<sup>488</sup> In response to Hyllos' question, 'How can they return?', the Pythia commanded: 'Await the third harvest; then return.' Hyllos interpreted the Oracle's ambiguous words literally, supposing that the reference to awaiting the third harvest meant in three years' time. Thus, after having waited for three years, he launched another attack on the Peloponnese. However, this would prove to be the wrong interpretation and the Herakleidai would be defeated.<sup>489</sup>

Following on from Hyllos' consultation of the Oracle, the Herakleidai, in preparation for the invasion of the Peloponnese, consulted the Delphic Oracle again to ask the god's advice on how to conquer the Peloponnese.<sup>490</sup> The Pythia prophesied that: 'The gods give you victory if

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<sup>486</sup> The invasion may have indeed been in obedience to the oracle N15 above (*supra*, p. 257 n. 485), but Apollodorus and the Scholiast on Aristeides do not mention it: see Fontenrose, 1978: 100.

<sup>487</sup> Diodorus Siculus says nothing of the Heraklids' retirement to Attica after the plague, but he records (4.58.3ff.) the fact that after their defeat and the death of Hyllos at the Isthmus, they retired to Tricorythus, which was situated at the northern end of the plain of Marathon, and stayed there for fifty years: see Apollodorus, *The Library*, translated by James G. Frazer (London, 1921) vol. 1, *ap.* Apollod. 2.8.1 n. 234; Apollod. 2.8.2 n. 236. The fifth-century B.C. Greek mythographer and logographer Pherekydes of Leros represents Demophon, son of Theseus, as the protector of the Herakleidai, as too does Euripides, who, in his play on the story, introduces Demophon as King of Athens and champion of the Heraklids: see *Ant. Lib. Met.* 33; *Eur. Heracl.* 111ff. Pausanias, on the other hand, states that it was Theseus himself, who received the Herakleidai as suppliants and refused to surrender them to Eurystheus: see *Paus.* 1.32.6.

<sup>488</sup> Oracle no. N16: Apollod. 2.8.2; *Diod. Sic.* 4.58.1; P-W 288; Fontenrose, L61. This invasion is commonly referred to as a 'return', as, although Herakles had been born at Thebes in Boiotia, he regarded the kingdom of his ancestors, Mycenae and Tiryns, as his true home. *Cf.* *Strab.* 8.3.30, 8.3.32, 8.4.1, 8.5.5, 8.6.10, 8.7.1, 8.8.5, 9.1.7, 10.2.6, 13.1.3, 14.2.6; *Paus.* 4.3.3 & 5.6.3: see Rackham, 1921: *ap.* Apollod. 2.8.2 n. 235.

<sup>489</sup> *Q.v.* Oracle no. N18, *infra*, p. 259. Diodorus does not record the three-year wait discussed above, but does detail Hyllos' death: see *Diod. Sic.* 4.58.4.

<sup>490</sup> Oracle no. N17: Aristeides, 46.215; *Schol. on Aristeides*, p. 651 *Dind.*; Apollod. 2.8.2; Oinomaos *ap.* Euseb. *Praep. Evang.* 5.20, p. 210c; *Max. Tyr.* 29.7, 35.7; *Paus.* 2.7.6; P-W 289; Fontenrose, L62. Oinomaos' account almost certainly refers to Delphic Apollo, but Eusebius does not directly refer to any specific oracular site. Aristeides' account seems to refer to the same god who spoke to Orestes and Themistokles, meaning *Apollon Pythios*: see Fontenrose, 1978: 379.



you go through the road of the narrows.’ The Herakleidai understandably took this to mean the Isthmus of Corinth; however, this would also prove to be another unfortunate misinterpretation.

When the Herakleidai’s army was met at the Isthmus by a Peloponnesian army, Hyllos challenged to single combat any one of the enemy who would face him, on the agreement that, if Hyllos should win then the Herakleidai would receive the kingdom of Eurystheus, but that, if Hyllos were defeated, then the Herakleidai would not return to Peloponnesus for a period of fifty years. Consequently, Echemos, the king of the Tegeans, came out to meet the challenge, and in the single combat which followed Hyllos was slain and the Herakleidai, true to their word, gave up their campaign and made their way back to Tricorythus. They did not attempt another invasion of Peloponnesus again for fifty years.<sup>491</sup> It would later be discovered that the god had not meant the Isthmus, but had instead meant the strait at the entrance to the Gulf of Corinth.<sup>492</sup>

After waiting the fifty years, c. 1104 B.C., the Herakleidai consulted the Oracle at Delphi once more to seek counsel on how they might conquer the Peloponnesians.<sup>493</sup> The Pythia replied once again that they should ‘Go through the road of the narrows’.<sup>494</sup> When Temenos received this response he complained that their fathers had obeyed the same instructions from the god previously yet they had met with disaster.<sup>495</sup> To this the Oracle replied: ‘You are yourselves the cause of your misfortunes because you misunderstood the oracles. I meant not the third harvest of the field, but the third harvest of generation; and I meant the narrows of the sea and not the Isthmus.’ In the version recorded by the Scholiast on Aristeides, the Oracle declared: ‘Your fathers didn’t ask what narrows I meant, whether the Isthmus or the strait at Rion and Molykria.’<sup>496</sup> Upon receiving this response from the Oracle, Temenos immediately began to build an invasion fleet and made ready the army at Naupaktos in Lokris.

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<sup>491</sup> See Diod. Sic. 4.58.3-5; Hdt. 9.26; Paus. 8.5.1. Herodotus tells us that the terms of the compact were that the Herakleidai would not attempt to return to the Peloponnesus until a hundred years had passed; however, this is the only version of the legend which records that time frame.

<sup>492</sup> Q.v. Oracle no. N18, *infra*, p. 259 n. 493.

<sup>493</sup> Oracle no. N18: Apollod. 2.8.2; Oinomaos *ap.* Euseb. *Praep. Evang.* 5.20, p. 210d; Aristeides, 46.215; Schol. on Aristeides, p. 652 Dind.; Tryphon, *de Trop.* 4.8.738 Walz.; P-W 290; Fontenrose, L63. The final return of the Herakleidai to the Peloponnesus, in conjunction with the Dorian invasion, is dated by Thucydides (1.12.3) in the eightieth year after the capture of Troy: see *supra*, p. 238 n. 412.

<sup>494</sup> The Scholiast on Aristeides attributes the oracle directly to Delphi.

<sup>495</sup> Q.v. Oracle no. N17, *supra*, p. 258.

<sup>496</sup> Cf. the oracle given to Croesus, Oracle no. 19, *supra*, p. 248ff. This is a very similar divine *apologia* to the one given to Croesus’ envoys in response to their complaint at having been misled by Apollo. In both cases the consultants were told that they should have asked for further clarification and that the fault was their own due to their own misinterpretation of the god’s words: see *supra*, p. 249 n. 452.

Apollodorus then goes on to detail how, when the Herakleidai were at Naupaktos, they brought calamity upon themselves in the form of plague, famine, and the destruction of the transport fleet, when Hippotes killed the Akarnanian seer, Karnos, who had approached them reciting oracles in a frenzy.<sup>497</sup> When the Herakleidai consulted the Delphic Oracle once again for advice on how to escape their current difficulties, the Pythia responded by telling them that their present misfortunes were as a result of Karnos' murder, and that to escape their tribulations they should worship Apollo Karneios, exile the killer for ten years, and take 'the Three-Eyed One' as a guide for their invasion.<sup>498</sup> After the Herakleidai chanced upon an Aetolian exile, Oxylos, sitting astride a one-eyed horse, they made him their guide and subsequently conquered the Peloponnese.

Finally, it appears that Oxylos must have consulted the Delphic Oracle regarding the Herakleidai's request for him to act as their guide for the invasion.<sup>499</sup> Pausanias does not record the question put to the Oracle, but the Pythia's reply was that 'he should take the Pelopid as fellow-colonist (*synokistês*)'. In accordance with the oracle, Oxylos made diligent search and discovered a man called Agorios, who was the great-grandson of Orestes. He subsequently brought Agorios himself from Helike in Akhaia, as well as a small body of Akhaians. It therefore appears that in commanding Oxylos to take with him as co-founder the descendant of Pelops, Delphic Apollo was giving him his approval to lead the Herakleidai into the Peloponnese. The last oracle related to the Herakleidai's invasion of the Peloponnese concerns the episode with Kypselos during the invasion already dealt with above.<sup>500</sup>

The six oracular episodes discussed above, which concern the Herakleidai's invasion of the Peloponnese, are particularly revealing for several reasons. It certainly appears that the original legend referred to by Pindar and recorded by Isokrates only contained the one oracular consultation and command, but that Ephorus, and the later writers who took up his account, developed and embellished the tale with several twists and misadventures before the Herakleidai's final victory. In other words, it became, once more, a tale of *avertissements incompris*.

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<sup>497</sup> Apollod. 2.8.3.

<sup>498</sup> See P-W 291, 292, 293; Fontenrose, L64 & L65; Paus. 5.3.5.; Suidas, s.v. Triophthalmos; Strab. 8.3.33.

<sup>499</sup> Oracle no. N19; Paus. 5.4.3; P-W 294; Fontenrose, L66.

<sup>500</sup> Oracle no. N20, *supra*, p. 215ff.

In many of the accounts of these oracles, Delphi is not always explicitly referred to as the source of the oracles, but as we have seen there are close enough connections between the Herakleidai and the Delphic Oracle, to assume that, by the second century B.C. anyway, it was Delphic Apollo who was believed to have been the god consulted and who was issuing the commands. Fontenrose, however, puts forward an interesting hypothesis that in a very early version of the legend, a complete version of which, according to Vitalis, may have been circulating by 750 B.C.,<sup>501</sup> it may have been Karnos who originally spoke the oracles to the Herakleidai and that he may have been the spokesman of Apollo or Zeus. Certainly, if the legend had been formed and was circulating in the early or middle eighth century B.C., then it would be highly unlikely that the oracles would have originally been considered to be Delphic. It also appears that in the earliest version of the legend the original direction to the Herakleidai to return to their fatherland came not from Apollo but from Herakles. Fontenrose argues that it is the later sources, such as Theopompus and Pausanias, that reveal these original oracle-speakers of the legend. Nevertheless, at some point the Delphic Oracle was introduced into the legend and soon became the predominant version, as recorded by Ephorus and later writers such as Apollodorus, although it never completely took over the other versions, hence the vestiges of the earlier oracular tales.<sup>502</sup>

However, regardless of the manner in which the literary tradition of the legend evolved, the saga still reveals several key insights into the function and role of Oracles in military affairs and also how that role was perceived by the ancient Greeks. First and foremost, the Heraklid legend must be seen as an attempt by the Dorians to legitimise their supremacy in the Peloponnese by identifying themselves with the descendants of Aigimios and their rulers with the Herakleidai, thus proving that they had a hereditary right to the land. However, yet again it is the Delphic Oracle which is called upon to provide divine validation for that claim.<sup>503</sup> In addition, when taking the oracles together as a whole, they reveal several of the characteristic functions oracles performed prior to and during warfare, as we have seen so often above. For example, we see the Herakleidai and their individual leaders consult the Oracle for advice before embarking upon a military campaign, and we see military leaders consulting the Oracle during a campaign for further advice, particularly when things are proving difficult. We see

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<sup>501</sup> Vitalis, G., *Die Entwicklung der Sage der Rückkehr des Herakliden* (Greifswald: Adler, 1930) 45-46. On the Heraklid oracles see also Nilsson, M. P., *Cults, Myths, Oracles, and Politics in Ancient Greece* (Lund: Gleerup, 1951) 70-72.

<sup>502</sup> See Fontenrose, 1978: 101-102.

<sup>503</sup> Fontenrose, 1978: 100. Cf. Sparta and Athens and bones transferral, *supra*, Oracle nos. 17 & 37, pp. 66ff. & 70ff.

also examples of the Oracle's advice directly impacting upon military decision-making; for instance, in the case of Hyllos, in obedience to the oracle directing him to wait for the third harvest,<sup>504</sup> he delayed launching an attack against the Peloponnese for three years. Furthermore, the Oracle's advice informed the Herakleidai's decision to attack through the narrows, even though it was later discovered to have been a misinterpretation. Even then, when it was discovered that they had in fact misunderstood the god's words, they once again accepted and assimilated the Oracle's advice and decided to attack through the narrows at the entrance to the Gulf of Corinth. Both episodes of course also illustrate the crucial element of interpretation, which consequently protects the integrity of the Oracle and reinforces its infallibility.

Once more we must assume that, although we are dealing with myth and legend here, to the contemporary Greek audience in the centuries spanning from Pindar to Pausanias, these oracular consultations and directives concerning foreign policy and military strategy would have been familiar, expected, and accepted.

### 9.8.2 *Athens' war over Melainai*

In the instance of Athens' war with Boiotia over Melainai, c. 1127 B.C.,<sup>505</sup> on the other hand, Athens (or Xanthos, the Boiotian commander, depending on how Polyaeus' account is interpreted) consulted an unnamed Oracle for advice, one can confidently assume, on how to obtain victory in the conflict. The Oracle's obscure prophecy was that 'the black devising death for the fair will take the Blacks.' Polyaeus, who is our only source for this episode, tells us that subsequently the Athenian commander, Melanthos ('Black'), fought in single combat against the Boiotian commander, Xanthos ('Fair'), for the border village of Melainai ('Blacks'), and killed him by a trick: when they were engaged in combat, Melanthos called out that it was unfair to call upon a second in single combat, and when Xanthos turned to see who Melanthos was referring to, he was run through with a spear.<sup>506</sup> The Boiotians were consequently defeated and the border tract of country subsumed by Athens.

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<sup>504</sup> Cf. Delphi's advice to Athens to wait thirty years before going to war with Aigina: Oracle no. 24, *infra*, p. 314ff.

<sup>505</sup> Oracle no. N22: Polyaeus, *Strat.* 1.19; P-W 214; Fontenrose, L48. Once more the chronology is based upon Hellanikos' *Atthis*, which states that Melanthos succeeded to the throne of Athens after Thymoites refused to accept Xanthos' offer to settle the border dispute by a *monomachia*, and announced that he would surrender his kingdom to anyone who was willing to fight the duel: see Hellanikos, *FGrH* 4 F 125; *FGrH* 4, 323a; Harding, 2008: 78-79; Jacoby, 1949: 88f., *passim*.

<sup>506</sup> Apparently, according to Polyaeus, the Athenians in commemoration of this successful stratagem instituted an annual festival called the *Apaturia*. For further discussion of the oracle and the episode, see Fontenrose, 1960:

This oracle story reveals two important aspects concerning military oracles. Firstly, it illustrates yet again a consultation during a war by either a *polis* (Athens) or a military commander (Xanthos); and secondly, the oracular prophecy contained such obscure and enigmatic language that both sides could interpret it to mean victory for themselves, which led both commanders, each bolstered by what they perceived to be affirmation of success from the god, to settle the conflict in single combat, leading to Xanthos' death. It therefore illustrates, once more, an oracle affecting the psychology of military commanders and in turn their strategical and tactical decision-making.

## 9.9 Conclusions

All of the above examples illustrate clearly the immense influence an Oracle could have, whether it be for good or for bad, in the military affairs of the ancient Greeks. The Oracle plainly had the ability to persuade or dissuade *poleis* and individuals to embark upon or desist with military ventures, or at the very least had the power to affect the psychology and morale of those seeking the advice of the gods. However, in each of the above examples it is absolutely crucial to note that when the oracular guidance proves disastrous for the city-state or individual, the blame clearly rests with the consulter not with the omniscient and ever-unerring Oracle.

In each of the cases analysed, the fault always lies with the consultant's interpretation of the oracle, whether it be the *demos* of the *polis* or an individual military commander. It is particularly clear, for instance, from the public debate taking place in Athens before the Sicilian expedition, and equally with the deliberation surrounding the 'wooden wall' oracle before the Persian invasion,<sup>507</sup> that the abstruse prophecies of the Delphic Oracle were open to a wide variety of interpretations from the *demos*, and whichever interpretation proved to be most popular would ultimately go on to influence and shape *polis* foreign policy and military strategy. The fact that sometimes those interpretations proved to be incorrect was never the fault of the Oracles.<sup>508</sup>

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234-236; Vidal-Naquet, P., *The Black Hunter: Forms of Thought and Forms of Society in the Greek World* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986) 109-110; and Buxton, R., 'The Significance (or Insignificance) of Blackness in Mythological Names', in Christopoulos, M., Karakantza, E. D., and Levaniouk, O. eds., *Light and Darkness in Ancient Greek Myth and Religion* (Lanham, Md., 2010) 7-8.

<sup>507</sup> Q.v. Oracle no. 31, *infra*, p. 275ff.

<sup>508</sup> For further discussion see Mikalson, 2003: 56-57.

The essential role of interpretation in the decision-making process of individuals and the *demos* consequently raises important questions over the true extent of the Oracles' influence over the ancient Greek world and the world of warfare. However, despite the fact that interpretation of the Oracles' pronouncements without doubt played an absolutely vital role in the decision-making of *poleis* and *strategoï*, it still does not detract from the influence plainly exerted by the Oracle on *polis* and army psychology, and the formation of military strategy. Regardless of the Oracle's intent, the prophecy that it issued clearly had the power and potential to heavily influence a city-state's decisions, even if it was their interpretation of the oracle's cryptic meaning that was conclusive and final. The fact that the Oracle's prophecies formed an essential part in the decision-making process of many *poleis*, *strategoï*, and monarchs before and during a war, and were commonly discussed and debated by the citizens in the assembly, means that it simply would have been impossible for them not to have some kind of influence, irrespective of what the Oracle had truly intended or what agenda the ancient Greeks had gone with to the god in the first place, especially if they were extremely positive or particularly pessimistic. The fact remains that, no matter how much weight we place upon the ancient Greeks' interpretation of the oracles, the debate was nevertheless channelled and limited by the actual words of the prophecy, and the Greeks had to work within its constraints.

In each of the above examples of Sparta, Croesus, Kylon, Arkesilaos, Philip, and Julian, the individual or *polis* seeks the affirmation of an Oracle for their proposed military venture and, upon receiving what they interpret to be a positive response, embark upon a disastrous military campaign. However, in each instance, working within the constraints of the prognostication they were given, it is easy to see why they gained such a positive psychological boost and were encouraged to follow their erroneous course of action. The powerful influence of oracular prophecy in the decision-making process of *poleis* is perhaps best illustrated, however, with Athens' consultation of Delphi, Dodona, and Ammon prior to the Sicilian expedition. The ostensibly favourable responses received from the three oracular shrines clearly confirmed to the pro-expedition Athenians that the mission was going to be successful, and at the same time must have helped convince any waverers or sceptics that it was the right course of action to undertake, illustrated by the fact that the Athenian *demos* voted in favour of the campaign. Of course, as with the other examples, when looking back at the events retrospectively it became clear that the Athenians had unfortunately misinterpreted the oracles' meanings and had therefore not heeded the warnings the Oracles were issuing. However, what is also of vital importance in this episode is the fact that Plutarch tells us that as well as the positive prophecies

given to the Athenians by the Oracle of Ammon, the envoys had also been given inauspicious oracles about the venture but had kept them hidden from the Athenian *demos*.<sup>509</sup> The clear inference is that had they been revealed they would have quite possibly deterred the Athenian people from embarking upon the venture: it is a particularly salient piece of evidence of the power and influence of the Oracles in the ancient Greek world.

The oracular episodes concerning misleading prophecies in warfare are therefore crucial for two reasons, in that they reveal both the influence of the Oracles in the decision-making processes of ancient Greek *poleis* and *strategoi*, and once more the psychological impact of oracular prophecy on ancient Greek warfare. In each case an individual or *polis* consults an Oracle on a proposed military venture and then, encouraged by its words, undertakes a damaging course of action. It is, of course, the very ambiguity of the Oracles' responses which allows such interpretation to take place both contemporaneously and *post eventum*, and enables the fulfilment of the Oracles' words, thus reinforcing its veracity and irreproachability. Furthermore, it is the very existence of such alternative interpretations, which provides further evidence of different people's personal psychological responses to the oracular pronouncements.

## **10. Negative prophecies: effects on *polis* and army psychology and decision-making**

Although we have looked in depth at those oracular consultations and responses that had a positive effect on both civilian and army morale, there are also, conversely, numerous examples where a *polis* asks for the Oracle's advice and guidance or tries to gauge its chances of victory, and receives such a gloomy prophecy from the Oracle that it has a detrimental effect on the *polis*' state of mind, and, indeed, in certain cases has a direct and deleterious impact upon the *polis*' military strategy and tactics, thus helping to bring about its subsequent defeat in warfare.

### **10.1 The Battle of Sepeia**

Perhaps the most remarkable illustration we have of an Oracle's negative prognostication directly affecting military strategy and tactics is that of the prophecy delivered to the Argives

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<sup>509</sup> Plut. *Nic.* 13.1.

by the Pythia before the Battle of Sepeia.<sup>510</sup> Threatened with a Spartan invasion under Kleomenes' command, the Argives consulted the Delphic Oracle, seeking advice on what course of action to take. The Priestess responded with the following prophecy, which concerned Miletos as much as it did Argos:<sup>511</sup>

But when the female subdues the male and drives him out,  
And wins thereby great glory amongst the Argives,  
Then shall she cause many Argive women to tear their cheeks;  
And thus shall they speak in the generations yet to come:  
'The fearful thrice-coiled snake was tamed by the spear and slain.'

You then, Miletos, contriver of wicked deeds,  
Shall be a feast for many, and a splendid prize;  
Your wives shall wash the feet of many a long-haired man,  
And others shall care for our shrine at Didyma.<sup>512</sup>

The oracle is so abstruse and enigmatic that both How and Wells, and Parke and Wormell, believe that it must be authentic.<sup>513</sup>

With regard to the first part of the prophecy concerning Argos, Herodotus simply states that the Priestess' pronouncement spread fear amongst the Argives before the Battle of Sepeia (ταῦτα δὴ πάντα συνελθόντα τοῖσι Ἀργείοισι φόβον παρεῖχε).<sup>514</sup> However, it is implicit that the oracle was foretelling the impending Argive defeat at Sepeia; the reference to the Argive women tearing their cheeks must surely be interpreted as the mourning for Argive losses. The later Argive tradition, as recorded by Pausanias,<sup>515</sup> correlated the oracle with a story of how an assault on the city by Kleomenes was repelled by Argive women under the leadership of a woman called Telesilla. However, Forrest quite rightly argues that the oracle in Herodotus is irreconcilable with Telesilla's success, as in the oracle it is the 'female victory' that will cause

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<sup>510</sup> Oracle no. 27: Hdt. 6.18-19, 6.77.2; *Anth. Pal.* 14.89 & 90; Paus. 2.20.9; *Suda* s.v. T260; Tzetz. *Chil.* 8.3-6; P-W 84; Fontenrose, Q134.

<sup>511</sup> Pritchett suggests that the reason for this may lie in the fact that Aristagoras of Miletos had sought aid in Greece before the fall of his city, but had been rebuffed by the Spartans; therefore, he may have turned instead to Sparta's rival, Argos. Consequently, it is possible that the Argive delegation had been sent to Delphi to seek advice on the Milesians' request for help: see Pritchett, 1979: 309; Cartledge, 2002a: 128.

<sup>512</sup> The first passage can be found at Hdt. 6.77, the latter at 6.19; trans. Aubrey De Sélincourt (*Herodotus: The Histories*).

<sup>513</sup> See How and Wells, 1912: *ap.* 6.77; Parke and Wormell, 1956b: 158-159. Cartledge, too, believes that the double oracle is genuine: see Cartledge, 2002a: 128.

<sup>514</sup> Hdt. 6.77.3.

<sup>515</sup> Paus. 2.20.9.



the Argive losses or mourning and must, therefore, precede the defeat at Sepeia, whereas Telesilla's exploits supposedly followed it.<sup>516</sup>

As for the passage referring to Miletos, Herodotus states plainly that the prophecy was fulfilled when the 'long-haired' Persians captured the city, killed most of the Milesian men, plundered and burnt the temple at Didyma, and enslaved the survivors.<sup>517</sup>

Nonetheless, what is of the utmost importance here is the psychological impact of the oracle on military command. Herodotus records how the Argive army, on the back of the inauspicious oracle, decided to adapt their tactics to mirror those of the Spartans.<sup>518</sup> As a consequence, every time the Spartan herald shouted an order the Argives ordered the same. However, Kleomenes soon observed what the Argives were doing and, issuing a false command to his troops to partake of their midday meal, tricked the Argives into copying the order and launched a decisive surprise attack against the exposed and vulnerable Argives.<sup>519</sup> This example provides us with a precious insight into the dramatic effect an Oracle's prophecy could have on the mindset of both soldiers and generals and the consequent effects on military strategy and decision-making. Herodotus states unequivocally that the Delphic oracle 'spread fear among the Argives'<sup>520</sup> and made them 'apprehensive of treachery'.<sup>521</sup> Indeed, the foreboding prophecy spread such alarm and anxiety amongst the Argive commanders that they adopted hesitant, uncharacteristic tactics. Furthermore, Kleomenes, seeing this weakness, took advantage of the indecisive and faltering Argive leadership, and he too changed his tactics to exploit the opportunity. Thus, on this occasion, it was more the Oracle's ominous and gloomy prophecy that brought about the Argive defeat rather than the particular fighting prowess of the participants.

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<sup>516</sup> See Forrest, W. G., 'Themistokles and Argos', *CQ* 10, 2 (1960) 221. See also F. Jacoby, *FGH Hist* 310 frag. 6 (*Commentary*, text and notes); Wickert, *Der Kleine Pauly* s.v. Kleomenes 3 (1969); Stadter, P. A., *Plutarch's Historical Methods* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1965) 45-53; Crahay, 1956: 172-179. For further debate on the chronology of the events and the dating of Sepeia, see Hendriks, I. H. M., 'The Battle of Sepeia', *Mnemosyne* 33, 3/4 (1980) 340-344.

<sup>517</sup> Hdt. 6.19.3.

<sup>518</sup> Hdt. 6.77.3.

<sup>519</sup> Hdt. 6.77-78. Herodotus is our oldest source for the battle. Of the later authors who paid attention to this battle (e.g. Paus. 2.20.8, 3.4.1; Plut. *Mor.* 245c-e, 223a) only Plutarch (*Mor.* 223a) mentions a trick, though it differs significantly from Herodotus' account: see Hendriks, 1980: 344-346. However, Hendriks argues convincingly that there is little to support Plutarch's version of events against the account given by Herodotus.

<sup>520</sup> Hdt. 6.77.3.

<sup>521</sup> Hdt. 6.77.1.

## 10.2 The Thessalians' siege of Keressos

Another powerful demonstration of the power of an Oracle's negative prophecy on the psychology of an army's morale and the consequent effect on military decision-making can be seen during the Thessalians' siege of Keressos c. 520 B.C.<sup>522</sup> According to Pausanias, the Thessalians, during their war with Boiotian Thespians, were engaged in a particularly difficult siege of a Thespian fortress called Keressos. When the Thessalians had exhausted all attempts at making a breakthrough, they decided to consult Delphi, presumably to obtain advice on how to successfully take the stronghold.<sup>523</sup> Unfortunately, the Thessalians were subsequently told by Pythian Apollo, in relatively straightforward terms, that Keressos could not be taken until the Lakedaimonians had been defeated at the tomb of Skedastos' daughters,<sup>524</sup> which at that time must have been interpreted to mean some distant point in the future, especially considering the fact that Sparta was by this stage in the sixth century, the most powerful city-state in the Peloponnese and was hegemon of the Peloponnesian League.<sup>525</sup> With hindsight, of course, the oracle becomes clear when the Spartans were defeated by Epaminondas and the Thebans at Leuktra in 371 B.C.,<sup>526</sup> and the Thespians, who had subsequently abandoned their city and taken refuge at Keressos, were besieged and taken by Epaminondas and the Theban army shortly after.<sup>527</sup>

We do not know for certain when the verses that Pausanias quotes were composed; he may have possibly taken them from Ephorus or some other fourth-century historian.<sup>528</sup> However, the substance of this oracle was certainly circulating around Greece soon after the Battle of Leuktra in 371 B.C. Several different oracular tales surround Leuktra, all with a fairly similar theme that the Lakedaimonians are doomed to be defeated at the tomb of the Leuktrides, ranging from dream oracles, chresmologues, and ominous portents.<sup>529</sup> Fontenrose argues that the Delphic Oracle was only casually connected with the oracular tradition of Leuktra, and that it is more likely to have been originally an oracle of Bakis that later became ascribed to

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<sup>522</sup> Oracle no. 21: Paus. 9.14.3; P-W 254; Fontenrose, Q204. It is possible that this oracle may also be the one referred to by Xenophon (Oracle no. 52, *infra*, p. 297ff.), which gave the Thebans encouragement before the Battle of Leuktra in 371 B.C.: see Xen. *Hell.* 6.4.7. Diodorus' version records similar oracles delivered by *chresmologoi*: see Diod. Sic. 15.54.1-2. Cf. also Plut. *Pelop.* 20.7, 21.1; Ps.-Plut. *Mor.* 774d.

<sup>523</sup> Paus. 9.14.2. Cf. the Akhaian siege of Phana: Oracle no. 64, *supra*, p. 189ff.

<sup>524</sup> Paus. 9.14.3.

<sup>525</sup> See Forrest, 1968: 79-83; Cartledge, 2001: 36-38; Cartledge, 2002a: 119-127; Cartledge, 2002b: 61-64

<sup>526</sup> Q.v. Oracle no. 52, *infra*, p. 297ff.

<sup>527</sup> Paus. 9.14.4.

<sup>528</sup> Fontenrose, 1978: 147.

<sup>529</sup> For the supernatural portents, see Oracle no. 53, *infra*, p. 270ff.

Delphi.<sup>530</sup> He suggests, moreover, that the final verse on Keressos may therefore be an addition to an already complete oracle, but does not extrapolate any further on why he believes this to be the case.<sup>531</sup> Presumably the fact that the Thebans under Epaminondas took Thespias and Keressos shortly after their victory at Leuktra, moves Fontenrose to believe that it was a *post-eventum* invention. However, he is decidedly hesitant about the last two lines dealing with Keressos, and admits himself that he is unsure why the Thessalians are brought into the oracle.<sup>532</sup>

In any case, what is important to note here is that the negative response to the Thessalian request for military guidance on the siege appears to have been enough to persuade the Thessalians to end the attack, or at the very least must have had a seriously detrimental effect on the morale of the Thessalian troops besieging Keressos, contributing to the failed assault on the stronghold. Considering the fact that the Pythia could offer no positive words of encouragement or advice about ending the siege, but rather declared that Keressos would only fall when the Spartans suffered what must have seemed at that time a very unlikely defeat, the Oracle's response must have seemed to the Thessalians to be tantamount to a rebuff by Delphic Apollo, confirming that the siege would be unsuccessful, or at the very least it would not be ending anytime soon. Therefore, the unfavourable prophecy, in combination with the fact that they had exhausted all other attempts at ending the siege, would surely have further damaged Thessalian spirits and contributed to their decision to give up the assault against Keressos. The fact that Keressos did not fall during the Thessalian invasion is congruous with this theory. Furthermore, the fact that Pausanias, immediately after recounting the oracular prophecy given to the Thessalians, jumps ahead to Epaminondas' siege of Keressos in 371 B.C. suggests that he believed the negative Delphic prognostication brought about a swift end to the Thessalians' siege of the citadel. Certainly, if the Thessalians did indeed, as Pausanias tells us, turn to the Delphic Oracle in desperation for advice on how to take Keressos, then they must have already been considering ending the siege.<sup>533</sup> The fact that the Oracle was unable to provide any last-ditch solution, but rather only further despondency, would have surely helped make up their mind to concede defeat.

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<sup>530</sup> Fontenrose, 1978: 148.

<sup>531</sup> See Fontenrose, 1978: 148.

<sup>532</sup> Fontenrose, 1978: 148.

<sup>533</sup> Pausanias (9.14.2) states plainly that 'the Thessalians tried to take Keressos, but success seemed hopeless. So they consulted the god at Delphi.'

### 10.3 Sparta's consultation of Dodona before Leuktra

The oracular prophecies and portentous omens surrounding the Battle of Leuktra also provide us with a particularly useful insight into the powerful psychological effects of negative prognostications on army morale. Cicero records a particularly disturbing oracular consultation received by the Spartans at Dodona just before Leuktra.<sup>534</sup> According to the account, the Spartans sought the counsel of the Oracle of Zeus at Dodona to enquire about their chances of success in the forthcoming battle against the Thebans; however, before the actual consultation could take place, an ape kept by the King of Molossia knocked over the vessel holding the lots and scattered them all over the place. The disturbing omen was so disconcerting that the Dodona priestess told the Spartans that they should not expect victory.<sup>535</sup> When we take into account this extraordinarily disquieting consultation, along with the series of other foreboding portents and omens that afflicted the Lakedaimonians in the run up to the battle,<sup>536</sup> the Priestess' extremely bleak warning to the Spartans must surely have had a seriously detrimental effect on the army's psyche before the battle, which, sure enough, they went on to lose at the hands of Epaminondas. In complete contrast to that, of course, was the boost to morale the Thebans must have obtained from the unpropitious consultation delivered to the Spartans, as well as several auspicious omens they received prior to the battle, such as the doors of the temple of Herakles at Thebes opening on their own volition despite being barred, and the cockerels crowing when divine honours were being made to Trophonios at Lebadeia.<sup>537</sup>

It is clearly the belief of Cicero that this disastrous oracular consultation and the stream of disturbing omens had a significant deleterious impact on the Lakedaimonians' frame of mind and morale before the Battle of Leuktra and that accordingly it played a major role in the Spartan defeat at the hands of the Thebans. Just prior and subsequent to his account of the Spartan consultation of Dodona, Cicero also recounts several other cases of 'conjectural divination' involving individuals, such as Dionysios and Gaius Flaminius, who were faced with alarming portents, which left Dionysios 'greatly troubled' when his horse was engulfed in a

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<sup>534</sup> Oracle no. 53: Cic. *Div.* 1.34.76 & 2.32.69; Callisth. *FGrHist* 124 F 22 (a) & (b).

<sup>535</sup> Cic. *Div.* 1.34.76. See also Amandry, P., 'Review of H.W. Parke: The Oracles of Zeus: Dodona, Olympia, Ammon', *Revue Belge de Philologie et d'Histoire* 47 (1969) 98; Eidinow, 2007: 70 & 272 n. 37; and Parke, 1967: 137.

<sup>536</sup> For instance, the head of Lysander's statue at Delphi being suddenly crowned with wild thorns, and the golden stars in the temple of Kastor and Polydeukes at Delphi disappearing all of a sudden: see Cic. *Div.* 1.34.75.

<sup>537</sup> Cic. *Div.* 1.34.74. The Boiotian augurs declared that the victory belonged to the Thebans, as it was the habit of the cockerels to keep silence when conquered and to crow when victorious.

whirlpool,<sup>538</sup> and Flaminius' soothsayers and troops worried about joining battle with Hannibal when Flaminius' horse fell in front of a statue of Jupiter Stator and the standard-bearer of the first company could not unfurl the standard; Flaminius ignored the omens and was subsequently utterly destroyed by Hannibal's forces at Lake Trasimenus in 217 B.C.<sup>539</sup>

Importantly, following their defeat at Leuktra, the Spartans consulted Dodona again, regarding their prospect of military success in the ongoing war against Thebes and her allies.<sup>540</sup> Diodorus records how the priestess of Dodona told the envoys that the war 'would be a tearless one for the Lakedaimonians'. The prophecy was fulfilled when Archidamos, returning from an expedition into Arkadia, encountered an Arkadian and Argive army, which he completely routed, slaying, according to Diodorus, 10,000 men in the process, without the loss of a single Spartan life in the battle. Xenophon records the same victory over the Arkadian and Argive force, and states once more that the Spartans did so without sustaining any fatalities, although he does not mention the oracle.<sup>541</sup> Parke argues that this is a remarkable omission from a deeply religious man with strong convictions in the authority of Oracles, and, as a result, believes that the association of this particular battle with the Dodona prophecy was a later tradition.<sup>542</sup>

Nonetheless, even if the connection of the prophecy and the battle was a later association made with the benefit of hindsight, the fact that the Spartans were still habitually consulting the same oracular shrine on military matters several years later after receiving such an ill-fated prophecy as the one before Leuktra, shows us the Greeks' unshakeable faith in Oracles and the utter confidence and belief in their infallibility. In other words, the simple fact that the Oracle had been proven right by the Spartan defeat at Leuktra, only served to make the Oracle more infallible in the Spartans' eyes, and therefore, instead of dissuading the Spartans from using it, it actually reinforced their trust and faith in it and thus further encouraged their reliance and dependence upon it.<sup>543</sup>

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<sup>538</sup> Cic. *Div.* 1.33.73.

<sup>539</sup> Cic. *Div.* 1.35.77. Cf. Liv. 21.57, 63.

<sup>540</sup> Oracle no. 54: Diod. Sic. 15.72.3.

<sup>541</sup> Xen. *Hell.* 7.1.28-32. Cf. Plut. *Ages.* 33.3ff.

<sup>542</sup> See Parke, 1967: 138.

<sup>543</sup> Cf. other *post-eventum* interpretations of oracles, which consequently reinforced the infallibility of the Oracles, such as: Athens and the Sicilian expedition, Oracle no. 43, *supra*, p. 246ff.; Sparta's invasion of Arkadia, Oracle no. 14, *supra*, p. 244ff.; Croesus' invasion of Persia, Oracle no. 19, *supra*, p. 248ff.; Kylon's attempted coup of Athens, Oracle no. 10, *supra*, p. 251ff.; and the assassination of Philip II, Oracle no. 57, *supra*, p. 254ff.

## 10.4 Messenian Wars

Another useful example which illustrates the dramatic impact a negative oracular prophecy could have on the military decision-making of *poleis* is during Sparta's siege of the Messenians on Mount Ithome in the First Messenian War.<sup>544</sup> In this instance, the besieged Messenians sought counsel from the Delphic Oracle on how to obtain victory over the Lakedaimonians and were told that if they performed a human sacrifice of a maiden from the bloodline of Aipytos they would be victorious.<sup>545</sup> However, what is astonishing from Pausanias' account is the fact that the Spartans, when they learned of this oracle, were so perturbed and discomposed at the foreordained Messenian victory that they shied away from engaging the Messenians in battle, and in fact did not feel confident enough to attack again for another five years until they themselves obtained auspicious omens from their sacrifices to do so.<sup>546</sup> Moreover, the Messenians were, on the contrary, so emboldened by the oracle they had received from Delphi that they rushed out, rather too overzealously, to meet the Spartans in combat without waiting on their allies to support them. In the consequent battle, the Messenian king, Euphaes, was killed, and the Messenians were eventually defeated after another seven years of war.<sup>547</sup>

It is a quite remarkable assertion by Pausanias that the Pythia's prognostication unnerved the Spartans to such an extent that they delayed launching an attack against Ithome for five years. It is also possible, of course, that the Spartans may not have attacked the Messenians' fortified defensive base on Mount Ithome for pragmatic reasons, possibly because they were not particularly skilled at siege warfare and the Messenian fortifications may have posed a formidable obstacle. However, even if that was the case, it is still very important that they perhaps used the pretext of the Messenian oracle as justification not to undertake a dangerous siege, possibly with the aim of saving face with her allies and/or her enemies.<sup>548</sup> It is once more

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<sup>544</sup> Oracle no. 2: Oinomaos *ap.* Euseb. *Praep. evang.* 5.27, p. 221d; Paus. 4.9.4; Diod. Sic. 8.8.2; P-W 361-362; Fontenrose, Q14.

<sup>545</sup> Diod. Sic. 8.8.2. Diodorus also says the Pythia decreed that if the selection by lot did not work then any maiden from the house of Aipytos could be offered up. Oinomaos' verse, recorded in Eusebius, does not mention the second stipulation. Pausanias' account does mention the second part of the prophecy, but his version simply states that any maiden from another family that offered her up willingly would suffice. At this point Pausanias goes on to recount the details of how certain events unfolded which enabled several Messenian fathers to avoid offering their daughters up for sacrifice, and as a result the oracular command remained unfulfilled: Paus. 4.9.4-10.

<sup>546</sup> Paus. 4.10.1: 'When the Lakedaimonians heard the oracle given to the Messenians, both they and their kings were in despair, and for the future shrank from offering battle.'

<sup>547</sup> For the rest of the years of the First Messenian War, see the other entries above and below: Oracle no. 3, *supra*, p. 184ff.; Oracle no. 4, *infra*, p. 285ff.; Oracle no. 5, *infra*, p. 294.

<sup>548</sup> Cf. Kleomenes' use of an oracle to justify his strategic decision not to attack the city of Argos: Oracle no. 28, *supra*, p. 205ff.

interesting to note that the Spartans seem to have been immediately knowledgeable of the oracle given to the Messenians, which once more may intimate at oracles being widely disseminated in the public domain and used as tools in psychological warfare between *poleis*.<sup>549</sup> It is also important to note that the Messenians' failure to properly fulfil the oracular command will eventually lead to her ultimate defeat in the conflict.<sup>550</sup>

Furthermore, the oracular episode is also telling in that it reveals the disconcertion and alarm being stirred up by the seers in the Messenian camp prior to the Delphic consultation. The *manteis* clearly must have been upsetting the populace with prophecies of doom and woe, for, as Diodorus tells us, an elder has to rebuke the Messenian citizens for listening to such prophecies, and urges them instead to send a messenger to Delphi to seek proper guidance.<sup>551</sup> It is once again demonstrative of the psychological impact of divination and prophecy on *polis* and army morale in times of war.

## 10.5 Licinius and Didyma

Another equally gloomy prognostication from the Roman period, which must have had a seriously detrimental impact upon morale, was that of the one delivered by Didymaeon Apollo to Licinius during his war with Constantine I.<sup>552</sup> The fifth-century A.D. historian of the Christian Church, Sozomen, records how the Emperor Licinius consulted the Oracle of Didyma in 323 A.D. and that in response to Licinius' question on the war the deity spoke these Homeric verses from the *Iliad*: 'Old man, surely young warriors will exhaust you; your strength has failed, and hard old age is upon you.'<sup>553</sup> Although we do not have the precise question put to the Oracle by Licinius, taking into account the nature of the response it must surely have been to seek counsel on how to obtain victory in the forthcoming conflict or to assess his chances of success against Constantine. Indeed, it seems more likely to have been the latter as Sozomen also states prior to this passage that 'on the eve of another battle with Constantine, Licinius, as was wont to be done, made a forecast of the expected war, by sacrifices and oracles, and, deceived by promises of conquest, he returned to the religion of the Greeks.'<sup>554</sup>

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<sup>549</sup> Cf. *supra*, p. 195.

<sup>550</sup> Cf. other examples of ruin being brought on upon individuals and *poleis* who disregarded the commands of the Oracles: *supra*, p. 37ff.

<sup>551</sup> Diod. Sic. 8.8.2.

<sup>552</sup> Oracle no. 67: Sozom. *Hist. eccl.* 1.7.73; Fontenrose, D55.

<sup>553</sup> The response quotes Hom. *Il.* 8.102-103; trans. Fontenrose, 1988: 227. There are several more examples of Homeric references in other Didymaeon verse responses: see Fontenrose, 1988: 102.

<sup>554</sup> Sozom. *Hist. eccl.* 1.7.35ff.

This is a rare example of a very important individual consulting the Oracle at Didyma for guidance on military matters. Indeed, of the thirty-three Historical responses of Didyma, and of the ten fragmentary responses in Fontenrose's 'Supplement A',<sup>555</sup> about three-quarters of the thirty-five known consultants were either the Milesian government or the citizens of Miletos, and of the twenty-three Quasi-Historical responses over three-quarters of the recipients were Milesians or their colonists. Consequently, it is clear that, in the main, the Oracle at Didyma served the Milesian state, its citizens, and her colonies. However, it is also clear that it had considerable prestige, too, far beyond Miletos, particularly in Ionia, Aiolia, Hellenic and Roman Asia, and the Aegean islands. For instance, we have evidence of the cities of Ionian Teos, Pergamon, Kalymnos, and Doric Rhodes sending envoys to Didyma, as well as individuals from other cities, such as Lochos of Kos, making personal consultations. However, it is interesting to note that of the individuals who consulted Didyma, there were several eminent monarchs, such as the Seleucid kings, a Bithynian king, and three Roman emperors, Diocletian, Julian and Licinius (providing Sozomen's account can be trusted). Moreover, the close connection with Roman emperors is further bolstered by the fact that Julius Caesar and Trajan were both benefactors of Didyma.<sup>556</sup>

Fontenrose, however, does not believe the oracle to be genuine, though he does not give any explanation to support his supposition. Indeed, on the contrary, I believe that there is no real reason to doubt the story. The fact that Homeric verse is quoted is not unusual, nor is the consultation of Apollo Didymeus by a Roman emperor. Also, although the verse allegedly spoken by the priestess can be argued plausibly to be a *post-eventum* invention considering Licinius' subsequent defeat by Constantine, the fact that at the time of the consultation in 323 A.D. Licinius was already on the back foot in the conflict and was probably about sixty years old, suggests that the words uttered by the Oracle would have been a fairly safe prognostication to make.<sup>557</sup>

If the oracular story is indeed true, then such a cheerless and saturnine prophecy, combined with the fact that Constantine was already beginning to gain the upper hand in conflict, must have struck a serious blow to Licinius' morale. Indeed, it may have played a significant part,

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<sup>555</sup> Fontenrose, 1988: 232-237.

<sup>556</sup> For more discussion on the clients of the Oracle, see Fontenrose, 1988: 104-105.

<sup>557</sup> Licinius was born c. 265 A.D. and died in 325 A.D.



psychologically, in Licinius' subsequent defeats to Constantine at Adrianople, the Hellespont, and Chrysopolis in 324 A.D. It is clearly the belief of Sozomen that the oracles had a powerful effect upon Licinius' psyche and decision-making when he states that they 'deceived' him with promises of conquest.<sup>558</sup> Sozomen, unsurprisingly, also attributes Licinius' defeats on land and sea at Adrianople and the Hellespont to divine assistance from God to Constantine.<sup>559</sup>

## 10.6 Athens and the 'wooden wall' oracle

Perhaps the most famous oracular consultation by a Greek state on a matter of war is that of the 'wooden wall' oracle dispensed by Delphic Apollo to the Athenians on the eve of the Persian invasion.<sup>560</sup> However, aside from its renown it is crucially important for the purposes of this study as it encapsulates so much of what we have been discussing thus far, and as such, deserves to be dealt with in considerably more depth.

Herodotus records how, in the autumn of 481 B.C., after hearing news of Xerxes' preparations for the invasion of Greece, Athens sought counsel from the Delphic Oracle on what steps to take next; the response was not what they had hoped for.<sup>561</sup> The Athenian envoys (*theopropoi*) received such a negative and gloomy oracle from the Pythia that they decided to approach the Oracle for a second time in the hope of receiving a more favourable prophecy. At the second time of asking they received a less menacing response and were advised that a 'wooden wall' would be their saving grace, they should withdraw from the enemy, and that 'divine Salamis' would 'bring death to women's sons'.<sup>562</sup> This oracle generated several interpretations amongst

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<sup>558</sup> Sozom. *Hist. eccl.* 1.7.35ff.

<sup>559</sup> Sozom. *Hist. eccl.* 1.7.75ff.

<sup>560</sup> Oracle no. 31: Hdt. 7.140-144, 8.41, 8.51.2, 8.53.1; Anth. Pal. 14.92-3; Dion. Hal. *Ars Rhet.* 6.2; Liban. *Decl.* 9.16, 10.27, 10.29, 20.19; Nep. 2.6; Just. *Epit.* 2.12.13; Plut. *Them.* 10; Paus. 1.18.2; P-W 94 & 95; Fontenrose, Q146 & Q147.

<sup>561</sup> Hdt. 7.140.1-3. For discussion on the exact date of the oracular consultation or consultations, i.e. whether it was in 481 or 480 B.C., see Hammond, 1982: 75-82; Bowden, 2005: 102; and Robertson, 1987: 2-3. Hammond argues convincingly for the Delphic Oracle to have been consulted by the Athenians before October 481 B.C., most likely in late August or early September of 481, and that it would have taken place after Sparta and Argos' consultations in August 481 B.C.: see Hammond, 1982: 79-80. Hignett, Lazenby, and Hands also argue for an early date, and assert that it most likely occurred when Xerxes was still in Sardis, and before the Greeks first met in conference: see Hignett, C., *Xerxes' Invasion of Greece* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963) 449-451; Lazenby, J. F., 'The Strategy of the Greeks in the Opening Campaign of the Persian War', *Hermes* 92, 3 (1964) 265-6; Hands, A. R., 'On Strategy and Oracles, 480/79', *JHS* 85 (1965) 59-61. For proponents of the oracular consultation taking place later at various different junctures in 480 B.C., see: Evans, J. A. S., 'The Oracle of the 'Wooden Wall'', *The Classical Journal* 78, 1 (1982) 28-29; Labarbe, J., *La loi navale de Thémistocle* (Paris: La Société d'Édition "Les Belles Lettres", 1957) 119-21; Berve, H., *Zur Themistokles-Inschrift von Troizen*, vol. 3 (Munich: Bayerische Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1961) 27-28; Burn, 1962: 355-358; Zeilhofer, G., *Sparta, Delphoi und die Amphiktyonen im 5. Jahrhundert vor Christus* (Nuremberg: Erlangen, 1959) 28-30; Crahay, 1956: 301-2; Amandry, P., *Thémistocle: Un décret et un portrait* (Strasbourg: 1961) 424.

<sup>562</sup> See A.R. Burn's comment on the last line of the second oracle: Burn, 1962: 357-358.

the Athenian citizens, with some believing that the 'wooden wall' referred to the thorn-hedge fence that had encircled the Athenian citadel in earlier times and that they should make their stand against the barbarians behind the walls of the Akropolis. It was Themistokles' interpretation, however, that the 'wooden wall' referred to the Athenian navy and that the Persians would be defeated at Salamis.<sup>563</sup> Themistokles' interpretation of the oracle ultimately won over the Athenian people, and the decision to plough their resources into preparing a fleet and concentrating their efforts at sea proved to be a crucial and decisive factor in the outcome of the war.<sup>564</sup>

Crahay, who consistently tries to downplay the influence of the Delphic Oracle to very small proportions, argues that these two oracles were in fact fabricated by Themistokles to persuade the Athenians to evacuate Athens and prepare for a battle at sea.<sup>565</sup> Indeed, Crahay argues that in almost every case the Herodotean oracles were fabricated for propagandist purposes of a particular city or political group. Pearson, on the contrary, argues vehemently against this and rightly criticises Crahay's arguments by pointing out that if this was the case, then it is extremely strange that among all the charges made against Themistokles in later years we never hear of the accusation that he deceived his countrymen by faked oracles. Furthermore, he argues that if Themistokles did perform such a ruse then he would have needed to have pretended that he sent emissaries to Delphi secretly; a fact which the sources do not record and is omitted by Crahay too.<sup>566</sup> Bowden, too, is very sceptical about the two oracles, mainly due to the fact that he believes that the Pythia simply could not have prophesied spontaneously, and that it is even less conceivable that she could have spoken twelve lines of hexameter on the first occasion, followed by a further set of twelve more lines at the Athenians' second time of asking.<sup>567</sup> Bowden argues that for the Pythia to pronounce such oracles as Herodotus records them, it would have required a considerable amount of pre-planning on Delphi's part, which would have been most abnormal to the way the Oracle normally functioned. However, in the extraordinary circumstances such atypical behaviour by the Delphic Oracle need not seem so unusual. With such a momentous threat of invasion looming large, and which was well-known

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<sup>563</sup> Hdt. 7.143.1-2.

<sup>564</sup> On the importance of the Athenian navy in the outcome of the war, see Hdt. 7.139; on the importance of Themistokles' role, see Hdt. 7.143, 8.123-25; Thuc. 1.73. For discussion on the importance of the oracle on the formation of Athenian strategy, see Hands, 1965: 56-61, and J.M. Marincola in Sélincourt, 2003: 674 n. 14.

<sup>565</sup> See Crahay, 1956: 295-304.

<sup>566</sup> See Pearson, L., 'Review of Roland Crahay: La littérature oraculaire chez Herodote', *The American Journal of Philology* 79, 3 (1958) 310.

<sup>567</sup> Bowden, 2005: 100-107.

of in advance, the Delphic Oracle would have had plenty of foreknowledge and time to plan and prepare for an inevitable consultation by the Athenians. Seen in this light, two well-rehearsed oracles of carefully prepared hexameter, commanding the Athenians to flee from the oncoming invasion force, seems more than plausible. Indeed, Robertson and Nilsson argue that the Delphic Oracle would have been primed and ready for most of the official enquiries recorded in Herodotus.<sup>568</sup>

How and Wells, moreover, argue prudently that the authenticity of the first oracle is proven by the fact that no-one would have later invented a cheerless prognostication that was falsified by the event. Its existence is further corroborated by an adaptation of it in Aeschylus' *The Persians*, written in 472 B.C., only eight years after the historical events.<sup>569</sup> Indeed, the oracle had become so firmly embedded in Athenian minds and legend by the time of Aristophanes, that he was able to parody the 'wooden wall' oracle in *Frogs* (1460-1465). The couplet, 'Treat enemy soil as yours, your own let go / Your ships are wealth, all other wealth is woe', is clearly a reference by Aristophanes to the Oracle's advice to the Athenians in 480 B.C. to trust to their 'wooden wall'. Consequently, the audience must have been expected to understand the reference and its implied suggestion that the Athenian navy and its rowers would once more stand Athens in good stead in 405 B.C. when they were faring badly against the Spartans in the Peloponnesian War. Parke and Wormell wholeheartedly agree with this view of the oracles' legitimacy and emphatically state that there can be no doubt that they are the original utterances of Delphi before the event, as no forger would have perpetuated such a mistake, which showed that Apollo changed his mind about one of the most decisive events of Greek history.<sup>570</sup> This is certainly the belief, too, of Robertson, who does not doubt the veracity of the oracles recorded in Herodotus' account and rejects outright the possibility of 'a fictitious document prevailing over any authentic memory of events and forming the agreed tradition thereafter.'<sup>571</sup>

Bowden attempts, rather tenuously, to argue away this obstacle, which impedes the sceptics' viewpoint considerably, by suggesting that the Athenians would simply have preferred Herodotus' dramatic and glorious version of events in his *Histories*, which stressed the Athenians' role in bringing about the allied Greek victory, instead of the more mundane reality.

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<sup>568</sup> Robertson, 1987: 6; Nilsson, 1958: 244.

<sup>569</sup> Aesch. *Pers.* 83ff. See How and Wells, 1912: *ap.* 7.140.1.

<sup>570</sup> Parke and Wormell, 1956b: 170.

<sup>571</sup> Robertson, 1987: 1.

To support this argument, Bowden draws parallels with ‘the myth of the Blitz’ during the Second World War, where most British people have accepted as true certain versions of events that do not always match up to the documentary record.<sup>572</sup> However, this analogy with wartime Britain is not altogether convincing, for although it is true that Britain was not as united, defiant and indefatigable as painted by propaganda, or unceasingly good-humoured in the face of adversity as the post-war myth would have us believe, the perpetuated untruth is much more general in scope, whereas the specific words of the Oracle would be much more difficult to fabricate so soon after the event, especially when they would have been publicly debated in the Ekklesia at Athens.

Furthermore, Bowden also attempts to rationalise why the Delphians would have invented such pessimistic verses which appear to advertise Apollo prophesying incorrectly and then to change his mind. Although Bowden believes strongly that the twenty-four-line oracle quoted by Herodotus is a *post-eventum* creation ‘published’ by the Delphic sanctuary itself, he suggests that it may have in fact been a single-verse oracle of twenty-four lines, which Herodotus divided into two halves to increase the drama of events at Delphi.<sup>573</sup> He contends that when the two halves are put together it reads perfectly satisfactorily as a single unit. This argument, of course, depends on reinterpreting several of the Pythia’s negative commands and terrifying premonitions in the first oracle to dovetail neatly with the less gloomy prognostications in the second oracle, such as in the opening lines to ‘Fly to the World’s end’ to mean ‘the edges of Athenian territory’ rather than the ends of the Greek World itself. Bowden points to Harrison’s discussion of the oracles to support his own theory, but although Harrison sees consistency between the two parts of the oracle and acknowledges the possible interpretation of the ‘World’s end’ in the first oracle to only mean ‘Attica’, he does not dispute the idea that there were in fact two separate oracles; on the contrary, he argues merely that Herodotus and the Athenians would not have necessarily seen the two oracles as conflicting with each other or as evidence of self-contradiction on Apollo’s part.<sup>574</sup> Bowden’s argument is unconvincing and does not explain, if the oracle was originally a single-verse oracle, why Herodotus chose to tell

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<sup>572</sup> Bowden, 2005: 107. For ‘the myth of the Blitz’, see Calder, A., *The Myth of the Blitz* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1991). Cf. Holladay’s argument of how a *communis opinio*, contrary to the actual chronology of events, that the evacuation of Attica only took place after the fall of Thermopylae and the return of the Athenian fleet from Artemisium, was formed and perpetuated as a result of patriotic myth-making by the Greeks: see Holladay, A. J., ‘The Forethought of Themistocles’, *JHS* 107 (1987) 186.

<sup>573</sup> Bowden, 2005: 106.

<sup>574</sup> See Harrison, 2000: 151-152.

the story so differently, and, moreover, if he misrepresented the events so blatantly would some of his audience not have noticed and objected?

That being said, although Bowden doubts the exact oracles as quoted by Herodotus, he does not doubt that the Athenians' consultation of the Delphic Oracle before the Persian invasion took place. Indeed, he argues that, as the Athenians were well aware that the purpose of Xerxes' invasion was to punish them for their involvement in the Ionian Revolt and for their subsequent humiliation of the Persians at the Battle of Marathon nine years later, it would have been abundantly clear to them that Athens would be attacked, therefore it would have been extremely likely that they would have drawn up an evacuation plan as soon as they knew Xerxes could not be stopped from entering Greece.<sup>575</sup> However, any evacuation plan would have required abandoning the temples of the gods, and for this reason, above all others, it would have been absolutely necessary to seek the permission of those gods and Delphi to do so.<sup>576</sup> Bowden suggests instead, therefore, that the question put to the Pythia by the Athenian *theopropoi* would rather have been along the lines of: 'would it be better and more profitable for us to abandon our city and the temples of the gods, and take to the ships, or to await the coming of the Persians.'<sup>577</sup>

There is also the theory, put forward by several historians, such as Parke and Wormell, that Themistokles, knowing beforehand that his plan would encounter opposition from many Athenians, may have got the Athenian ambassadors to put forward his proposed scheme privately at the second consultation. A similar line of reasoning is advocated by Georges and Holladay.<sup>578</sup> However, as already discussed above with Crahay's more extreme accusation that the oracles were fabricated *ex nihilo* by Themistokles as a political and military stratagem,<sup>579</sup> in the end it is purely speculation on these historians' parts and there is no evidence whatsoever for this taking place.

Ultimately, although the precise role of Delphic Oracle in the formation of Athenian military strategy, and the veracity of the oracles as recorded by Herodotus, has divided many scholars,

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<sup>575</sup> Bowden, 2005: 103.

<sup>576</sup> A comparable example can be seen with the Delphians' consultation of Apollo during the Gallic invasion of Greece in 279 B.C.: *q.v.* Oracle no. 63, *supra*, p. 143ff.

<sup>577</sup> Bowden, 2005: 103.

<sup>578</sup> See Holladay, 1987: 182-187; Georges, P. B., 'Saving Herodotus' Phenomena: The Oracles and the Events of 480 B.C.', *Classical Antiquity* 5, 1 (1986) 14-59.

<sup>579</sup> *Supra*, p. 276.

the general consensus amongst the majority of historians and commentators is that the oracles are most likely true pronouncements.<sup>580</sup> Bearing all this in mind, the oracular episode is yet another profound example of *polis* psychology and military strategy being directly and significantly influenced by oracular prophecy; although, the influence of key individuals in the interpretation and/or manipulation of the oracles is once more of vital importance.

In this instance, the first oracle delivered by the Pythia to the Athenian *theopropoi* was so cheerless and bleak that, out of fear of what would happen to them if they returned to Athens bearing such desolate news, they made the extraordinary decision to ask the Priestess for a second prophecy in the hope of obtaining slightly less foreboding counsel. The first prophecy issued by the Pythia, which basically asked the Athenians why they had not already fled from the oncoming barbarian forces, and told them that they and Greece were completely doomed and faced absolute destruction,<sup>581</sup> was so utterly devoid of comfort that it must surely have terrified the Athenian envoys. Indeed, Herodotus comments that the Athenian envoys were ‘very greatly dismayed and were about to abandon themselves to despair at the dreadful fate which was prophesied’ (ταῦτα ἀκούσαντες οἱ τῶν Ἀθηναίων θεοπρόποι συμφορῇ τῇ μεγίστῃ ἐχρέωντο προβάλλουσι δὲ σφέας αὐτοὺς ὑπὸ τοῦ κακοῦ τοῦ κεχρησμένου) until the Delphian, Timon, interjected and suggested they approach the Oracle a second time as suppliants.<sup>582</sup>

The second ‘wooden wall’ prophecy issued by the Priestess was, of course, slightly more auspicious and considerably less ominous than the first in that it held out a sliver of hope that the wooden wall would save Athens from annihilation, although it still advised that they retreat from Xerxes’ forces.<sup>583</sup> Such disconsolate counsel from the Delphic Oracle clearly had a major psychological impact on the Athenian *demos*, and naturally, as Herodotus tells us, it sparked

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<sup>580</sup> See How and Wells, 1912: *ap.* 2.181-182; Hauvette-Besnault, A., *Hérodote: historien des guerres médiques* (Paris: Hachette, 1894) 322-328; Hammond, N. G. L., *A History of Greece to 322 B.C.* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1959) 223 & Hammond, 1982: 75-93; Hignett, 1963: 441-445; Robertson, 1987: 1-20. Mikalson discusses the ‘wooden wall’ episode but does not form a definitive conclusion either way: see Mikalson, 2003: 52-59. For sceptics of the authenticity of the oracles, see: Crahay, 1956: 295-304; Bowden, 2005: 100-107; and Fontenrose, 1978: 124-128.

<sup>581</sup> Hdt. 7.140.2-3.

<sup>582</sup> Hdt. 7.141.1. How and Wells state that the word προβάλλουσι should be interpreted to mean ‘in utter despair’. The idea comes from the action of throwing themselves on the ground in despair; *cf.* Cic. *Tusc.* 2.54: ‘Qui doloris speciem ferre non possunt abiciunt se atque ita adflicti et exanimati iacent’: see How and Wells *ap.* 7.141.1. *Cf.* Herodotus’ earlier laudatory comment (Hdt. 7.139.6) concerning the Athenians’ courage in the face of the distressing oracles from Delphi: ‘The alarming oracles that came from Delphi and threw them into a terror did not persuade them to desert Greece, but, standing their ground, they had the courage to receive the invader of their country’ (οὐδὲ σφέας χρηστήρια φοβερὰ ἐλθόντα ἐκ Δελφῶν καὶ ἐς δεῖμα βαλόντα ἔπεισε ἐκλιπεῖν τὴν Ἑλλάδα, ἀλλὰ καταμείναντες ἀνέσχοντο τὸν ἐπιόντα ἐπὶ τὴν χώραν δέξασθαι).

<sup>583</sup> Hdt. 7.141.3.

off furious debate in the city, attempting to decipher the true meaning of the oracle's words.<sup>584</sup> The end result was two mutually exclusive interpretations: one, that the 'wooden wall' referred to the Athenian navy and they should concentrate their defence and efforts at sea; the other that the 'wooden wall' referred to the ancient thorn-hedge that used to surround the Akropolis. It was this latter interpretation, formed out of a combination of fear, panic, and hope, given breath by the Pythia's prophecies, which resulted in the extirpation of the Athenians who fatally decided to stand their ground against the Persians and take refuge behind a new wooden barricade on the Akropolis.<sup>585</sup> On the other hand, the interpretation of the 'wooden wall' to mean instead the Athenian navy, propounded by the likes of Themistokles, resulted in the majority of the Athenians deciding to significantly expand their existing navy and meet the Persian invader at sea with all the force they possessed, as well as the bulk of the Athenian people abandoning Attica and relocating to the safety of 'Divine Salamis'. Thus, this alternate interpretation of the oracle issued by Delphi clearly had a major impact upon the formation of Athenian military strategy, which would, indeed, prove instrumental in the survival of the greater part of the Athenian populace when Athens was sacked by the Persians and, moreover, absolutely crucial in the defeat of Xerxes' navy at Salamis in 479 B.C., which irrevocably damaged the Persian invasion and helped bring about ultimate allied Greek victory.

Even if one accepts the more sceptical arguments of those such as Bowden,<sup>586</sup> that the plans had likely been made already by many Athenians to abandon Attica and relocate elsewhere before they consulted Delphi, we still see at the very least the Oracle's permission being sought by the Athenians to evacuate the city and abandon its temples, and to obtain guidance on whether or not to flee the oncoming Persians or to stand their ground against them and make their defence in the Akropolis. The Oracle's desolate response to this request clearly had demonstrable effects on Athenian psychology and subsequent strategic decision-making.

### **10.7 Impact upon civilian morale: the occupation of the Pelargikon**

The impact that a foreboding oracular prophecy could have, too, upon civilian morale during a war can be clearly seen with an oracle delivered to the Athenians before the Peloponnesian War.<sup>587</sup> Thucydides records how, when King Archidamos of Sparta led the Peloponnesians on

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<sup>584</sup> Hdt. 7.142.3-143.2.

<sup>585</sup> Hdt. 8.51.2.

<sup>586</sup> Bowden, 2005: 103.

<sup>587</sup> Oracle no. 42: Thuc. 2.17.1; P-W 122; Fontenrose, Q181.

their first invasion of Attica in 431 B.C., the Athenians followed Perikles' advice not to engage the Spartans in open battle on land but instead to abandon their land and estates in the Attic countryside and retreat into the safety of Athens' walls.<sup>588</sup> For those Athenians who could not find shelter with friends or relations, however, many had to 'settle down in those parts of the city that had not been built over and in the temples and in the shrines of the heroes – except in the Akropolis, in the temple of Eleusinian Demeter, and in some other places that were strictly forbidden.'<sup>589</sup> According to Thucydides, one such area of land that was considered cursed, and should therefore not have been inhabited, was a district known as 'the Pelasgian ground' on the west side of the Akropolis.<sup>590</sup> This strip of land had been forbidden to be built upon by a Pythian oracle which stated: 'Better for Athens to leave the Pelargikon unused.'<sup>591</sup> However, out of the necessity which wartime circumstances dictated, the quarter was built over. Although Thucydides does not record a specific date when the oracle was received, it is quite possible that it was delivered in response to an Athenian enquiry before the outbreak of the Peloponnesian War regarding the impending conflict.<sup>592</sup>

The inference from Thucydides is, of course, that many Athenians were extremely disturbed by this turn of events and consequently believed and feared that all their subsequent difficulties they endured in the coming months against the Spartans, including the devastating plague of 430 B.C., were as a direct consequence of the contravention of Apollo's command. Although Thucydides believes that they interpreted the oracle incorrectly, and argues instead that the oracle simply forewarned that Athenians would be in extremely difficult times when they would be forced to occupy the Pelasgian ground,<sup>593</sup> what is of more importance is what the

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<sup>588</sup> For Perikleian policy, see Thuc. 1.143, 2.13.

<sup>589</sup> Thuc. 2.17.

<sup>590</sup> For discussion on the whereabouts of this piece of land, see Hornblower, 1991: *ap.* 2.17.1; Gomme, 1956: *ap.* 2.17; Meiggs, R. and Lewis, D. M., *A Selection of Greek Historical Inscriptions to the End of the Fifth Century B.C.*, revised ed. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1988) 221; Travlos, J., *Pictorial Dictionary of Ancient Athens* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1971) 52; and Rhodes, 1981: *ap.* 19.5.

<sup>591</sup> Thuc. 2.17.1. For discussion on this prohibition, see Hornblower, 1991: *ap.* 2.17.1; Parker, R., *Miasma: Pollution and Purification in Early Greek Religion* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983) 164 & n. 115; Fornara, C. W., *Translated Documents of Greece and Rome, i. Archaic Times to the End of the Peloponnesian War*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983) 140; and Aleshire, S. B., *The Athenian Asklepieion: The People, their Dedications, and the Inventories* (Amsterdam: J.C. Gieben, 1989), Aleshire, 1989: 9 n. 1; and Dover, K. J., 'Thucydides on Oracles', in Dover, K. J. ed., *The Greeks and their Legacy: Collected Papers, Vol. II* (Oxford, 1988) 67-69.

<sup>592</sup> Despite the fact that Thucydides is our source for this oracle, Fontenrose is sceptical that it came from a genuine oracular response. He argues that Thucydides puts it in the indefinite past, and that it is possible that he knew nothing else about the supposed *manteion*. Rather, he proposes that it may have been a superstition in the form of a proverbial phrase that was at some point attributed as an oracle from Delphi. Furthermore, he suggests that if it was in fact a genuine oracle, it was probably delivered before 490 B.C., though he does not provide any substantiation for that theory: see Fontenrose, 1978: 327.

<sup>593</sup> Thuc. 2.17.2.



majority of Athenians believed at the time. It would no doubt have helped spread anxiety and uncertainty, and surely would have added to the growing pressure we see from the mob in 431 B.C., during Archidamos' invasion, to abandon Perikles' strategy and move out from within the city walls to engage Sparta in open warfare. Indeed, Thucydides tells us that when the Lakedaimonians were seen at Acharnai, the city was in a thoroughly excited state and that in the heated debate that followed between both factions, *chresmologoi* came forward with prophecies of all kinds, which were eagerly listened to by the various parties.<sup>594</sup> No doubt such prophecies played a key role again in the debate and decision to abandon Perikles' strategy after his death in 429 B.C. and in the machinations of the demagogues, such as Kleon, who filled the political vacuum.<sup>595</sup>

Nevertheless, it is important to note here an example of how an oracular prophecy could sometimes be disobeyed out of necessity. That being said, the anxiety and trepidation which the Athenians displayed in knowingly contravening the Oracle's command illustrates the gravity that oracular prognostications carried in the ancient Greek world, simply, as in this case, out of the fear of the serious repercussions that would follow by incurring the wrath of the god.<sup>596</sup>

What is also interesting about Thucydides' account of the occupation of the Pelasgian quarter is that, aside from the fact that the action caused a considerable amount of consternation among the Athenians obliged to settle there, even the normally sceptical and rational Thucydides acknowledges the Oracle's ability to predict the future. He states:

It appears to me that the oracle came true in a way that was opposite to what people expected. It was not because of the unlawful settlement in this place that misfortune came to Athens, but it was because of the war that the settlement had to be made. The war was not mentioned by the oracle, though it was foreseen that if this place was settled, it would be at a time when Athens was in difficulties.<sup>597</sup>

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<sup>594</sup> Thuc. 2.21.3.

<sup>595</sup> Thuc. 2.65. A comparable psychological effect on the demos can be seen with the oracles received by Athens before the Sicilian Expedition, although on that occasion it was, conversely, the seemingly positive oracular prophecies which incited the masses into becoming overconfident and overambitious, and helped sway them into making the disastrous decision to conquer Sicily: *q.v.* Oracle no. 43, *supra*, p. 246ff.

<sup>596</sup> For other examples of disaster befalling those who ignored or went against an Oracle's words, see *supra*, p. 37ff.

<sup>597</sup> Thuc. 2.17.2, trans. Rex Warner (*History of the Peloponnesian War*).

Thus, as Gomme comments: ‘Thucydides rejects the common superstition that the oracle was foretelling this war (conveniently without naming it); but he seems to have accepted the view that the oracle could, to some degree, know the future.’<sup>598</sup>

A similar illustration of Thucydides’ stance on the subject of oracles can also be seen in his account of the plague in Athens in 430 B.C.<sup>599</sup> Thucydides states that in their time of distress, the Athenians naturally began to recall old oracles and relate them to their current difficulties. One of the oracles that was recalled was the Pythian oracle given to the Spartans on the eve of the war as discussed above.<sup>600</sup> Thucydides once more logically surmises that for the most part these claims were simply ‘a case of people adapting their memories to suit their sufferings.’<sup>601</sup> However, with regard to the Spartan oracle, he does go on to acknowledge the remarkable fact that the Peloponnesians were unaffected by the plague, and seems to suggest that this may have been the work of Apollo himself as promised by his own oracle. He states: ‘What was actually happening seemed to fit well with the words of this oracle; certainly the plague broke out directly after the Peloponnesian invasion, and never affected the Peloponnesians at all, or not

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<sup>598</sup> Gomme, 1956: 65-66. For debate about Thucydides’ attitude towards oracles resulting from this passage, see Hornblower, 1991: ap. 2.17.2. Veyne, using only this passage as substantiation, emphatically declares that, ‘Thucydides believed in oracles’: see Veyne, P., *Les Grecs ont-ils à leurs mythes?* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1983) 84. Veyne’s enthusiasm is tempered somewhat by Marinatos: see Marinatos, 1981a: 138-140, and Marinatos, N., *Thucydides and Religion* (Königstein: Hain, 1981b) 50ff.

<sup>599</sup> Thuc. 2.54.

<sup>600</sup> Oracle no. 41, *supra*, p. 59ff.

<sup>601</sup> That is not to say that Thucydides is questioning the validity of oracles here, but rather he is criticising the people for misinterpreting the prophecy: see Marinatos, 1981a: 139-40; and Gribble, D., ‘Narrator Interventions in Thucydides’, *JHS* 118 (1998) 64. Furthermore, Marinatos argues persuasively that the one passage in Thucydides (5.26.3), which seems, on the surface at least, to be a clear refutation of the power of Oracles has also been misinterpreted by modern historians, such as: Classen, J. and Steup, J., *Thukydides*, 5 ed., vol. 1 (Berlin: Weimannsche Buchhandlung, 1919) 61-62; Schmid, W. and Stählin, O., *Geschichte der griechischen Literatur*, vol. 1 (München: Biederstein, 1920) 115; Croiset, A. and Croiset, M., *Histoire de la littérature grecque*, 2e. éd., revue & augmentée ed., vol. 4 (Paris: Thorin, 1900) 110-111; Meuss, H., ‘Thukydides und die religiöse Aufklärung’, *Neue Jb. f. kl. Phil* 145 (1892) 226-227; von Fritz, K., *Die griechische Geschichtsschreibung*, vol. 1 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1967) 542; Bury, J. B., *The Ancient Greek Historians: Harvard Lectures* (London: Macmillan, 1909) 129; Gomperz, T., *Greek Thinkers: A History of Ancient Philosophy*, trans. Magnus, L., Authorized ed., 4 vols. (London: John Murray, 1901) 510; Latte, K., ‘Orakel’, *RE* 18, 1 (1939) 852; Notopoulos, J., ‘Thucydides’ *Prognosis* and the Oracles’, *Classical World* 39 (1945) 29-30; Parke and Wormell, 1956b: 180; and Finley, M. I., ‘Thucydides the Moralist’, in Finley, M. I. ed., *Aspects of Antiquity: Discoveries and Controversies* (London, 1968) 49. Marinatos argues that in fact Thucydides is once more laying the burden of blame squarely on the shoulders of the people obstinately making claims based upon the oracles and is therefore not questioning the veracity of the oracles themselves. Gribble argues further that Thucydides is in fact using the oracular prophecy as divine sanction for his dating of the Peloponnesian War: see Gribble, 1998: 64 n. 116. K.J. Dover also agrees with Marinatos’ arguments to a large extent, whilst making some minor adjustments and refinement of her interpretations of the passages: see Dover, 1988: 65-73. Dover does, however, agree with Oost in that he believes that Thucydides’ standpoint towards Oracles underwent a change at some stage, and suggests that old age may have brought with it a more cynical point of view: see Dover, 1988: 72; and Oost, S. I., ‘Thucydides and the Irrational: Sundry Passages’, *Classical Philology* 70, 3 (1975) 194. Hornblower, too, accepts Marinatos’ argument to a certain degree, but also acknowledges that a touch of irony in Thucydides’ tone cannot be discounted: see Hornblower, 1991: ap. 2.54.3.

seriously; its full force was felt at Athens, and, after Athens, in the most densely populated other towns.<sup>602</sup> Therefore, through the occasional, momentary lapses in Thucydides' normally sceptical and rational view of the gods and the supernatural, we can see fleeting glimpses that even he believed in an Oracle's ability to predict the future.

### 10.8 Fulfilment of a prophecy causing panic

We have already seen above the psychological impact of oracular consultations upon armies in the battlefield and on campaign through the accidental, or sometimes deliberate, fulfilment of an oracle, which subsequently forces the *strategos* in command to change his military plans, or even to cease the campaign entirely.<sup>603</sup> Likewise, we have also seen the consternation caused in Athens among the citizen body during the Peloponnesian War by the reluctant but necessitous fulfilment of the Pythian oracle not to occupy the Pelargikon.<sup>604</sup> However, there are several other explicit examples where the sudden fulfilment of an existent oracular prophecy, particularly those foretelling a *polis*' defeat when certain conditions are realised, causes severe panic in both the army and citizenry during a conflict. Two striking examples concern the Messenian Wars.

Pausanias, for instance, tells us that during the First Messenian War Aristodemos consulted the Delphic Oracle concerning Sparta's attempts to weaken the Messenian alliance.<sup>605</sup> In response to his enquiry, the Pythia issued a cryptic conditioned prediction that the Messenian stronghold on Mt. Ithome would fall when an unknown 'two' would finally emerge from their hiding place and that this would only take place when Fate would change that which had already been changed.<sup>606</sup> The Pythia's words were so obscure that Aristodemos could not decipher the oracle's meaning, until many years later, when the Messenian *mantis*, Ophioneus, who had been born blind and then recovered his sight, suddenly became blind again.<sup>607</sup> What is crucial about this oracular episode, however, is the psychological effect the fulfilment of the oracle has upon both Aristodemos and the Messenian people: the realisation that the oracle had been fulfilled (coupled with the guilt of murdering his own daughter to no purpose previously)

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<sup>602</sup> Thuc. 2.54.

<sup>603</sup> Q.v. *supra*, p. 205ff.

<sup>604</sup> Oracle no. 42, *supra*, p. 281.

<sup>605</sup> Oracle no. 4: Paus. 4.12.4; 4.13.3; P-W 364; Fontenrose, Q16.

<sup>606</sup> Paus. 4.12.4. Parke believes that this oracle, which is recorded only by Pausanias, was invented later than all the others, illustrated by the fact that it is obscurer and clumsier. Levi agrees that it is different; however, he feels rather that its difference lies in the fact that it is more powerful and sinister: see Parke, H. W., 'Notes on Some Delphic Oracles', *Hermathena* 27 (1938) 66ff.; Levi, 1979b: 131 n. 48.

<sup>607</sup> Paus. 4.13.3.

apparently prompted Aristodemos' suicide, and the Messenians in a state of despair and panic called for ambassadors to go to Sparta to sue for peace.<sup>608</sup>

Another similar and very revealing episode can be seen in Pausanias' account of the Second Messenian War. Pausanias relates how, during the eleventh year of the siege on Mount Eira, a Delphic oracle, that had previously been given to the Messenian envoys after their defeat at the Great Trench, was fulfilled, which caused great anxiety amongst the Messenian leadership.<sup>609</sup> According to Pausanias, when King Aristomenes and the Messenian *mantis*, Theoklos, had asked the Delphic Oracle if they could be saved after their disastrous defeat by the Spartans, the Pythia issued yet another sphinx-like conditional prophecy, which stated that Messenia's destruction would occur when a he-goat (*tragos*) would drink of Neda's swirling water.<sup>610</sup>

The Oracle's enigmatic prognostication was only fully understood when Theoklos discovered a wild fig-tree growing beside the River Neda, whose curved trunk bent over the stream and whose topmost leaves dipped in the waters; the prophecy evidently containing a paronomasia of the word *tragos*, which could mean either a billy-goat or a wild fig-tree.<sup>611</sup> Consequently, Theoklos went to Aristomenes and told him that they were doomed, and Aristomenes, upon seeing the tree for himself, concurred and started to make provision for their imminent defeat. The fulfilment of the oracle, therefore, had a major psychological impact upon Aristomenes, inducing his resignation to defeat and causing him to change his strategy accordingly in light of this realisation.<sup>612</sup>

However, what is of vital importance here for our purposes is the fact that Aristomenes and Theoklos made the conscious decision not to share this revelation with the rest of the Messenians.<sup>613</sup> One must surely extrapolate that the only reason the Messenian general and his seer would keep such intelligence to themselves would have been to protect the morale of the soldiers, for to reveal to their men that the Delphic oracle prophesying their final defeat at the hands of the Spartans had just been fulfilled would have had a seriously adverse effect on the troops' spirits and confidence. The clear inference from this, of course, is that an Oracle's

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<sup>608</sup> Paus. 4.13.4-5. Fontenrose argues that the failure of the Messenian *manteis* to interpret the oracle correctly serves the same purpose as the elder's admonition against seers in Diodorus' earlier account (*q.v.* Oracle no. 2, *supra*, p. 272ff.), in securing Delphi's place in the legend, as Apollo clearly possesses superior foresight and knowledge that the *manteis* do not possess or are incapable of comprehending: Fontenrose, 1978: 105.

<sup>609</sup> Oracle no. 8: Paus. 4.20.1; 4.21.3; 4.21.10; Suda T898; P-W 366; Fontenrose, Q20.

<sup>610</sup> Paus. 4.20.1.

<sup>611</sup> Paus. 4.20.2-3.

<sup>612</sup> Paus. 4.20.3.

<sup>613</sup> Paus. 4.20.3; 4.21.3.

prognostications must have wielded great psychological power and influence if the Messenian commanders intentionally hid this information from the rest of the officers and the rank and file.

Although we must of course be careful when using Pausanias' problematic narrative of the Messenian saga as historical evidence,<sup>614</sup> the above two examples recorded by Pausanias in his *Periegesis* are remarkable demonstrations of the powerful effect of oracular prophecy on the psychology of civilians and soldiers in times of war, which the ancient Greek audience must have found unexceptionable and been able to identify with and relate to.

## 10.9 Conclusions

Thus far we have spent a considerable amount of time looking at the psychological effects of positive oracular consultations on the mindset and military decision-making processes of the ancient Greeks in wartime, and on the eager and deliberate fulfilment of the Oracles' pronouncements in order to acquiesce with divine mandate and to reap the inherent psychological benefits of fulfilling apodictic prophecies that promised victory when certain conditions were satisfied. However, the above examples in this section demonstrate clearly the inverse psychological effects that negative oracular prophecies could have on a *polis*' citizenry and army. The two most striking examples concern the Battle of Sepeia and the 'wooden wall' oracle delivered to the Athenians.

In the case of the oracle delivered to the Argives before Sepeia, the Oracle's prophecy was so bleak and disconcerting that the distressed Argives aberrantly changed their tactics to mirror those of the Spartans, with disastrous results. Kleomenes, on the other hand, prior to the battle also consulted the Delphic Oracle but he instead received a morale-boosting prophecy that he would be victorious and take Argos.<sup>615</sup> Such contrasting prophecies must have greatly affected the psychology of both sides prior to and during the battle, and as a result had a significant effect on the outcome.

Likewise, in the instance of the 'wooden wall' oracle, the power of an Oracle's pessimistic prophecy is demonstrably shown by the reaction of the Athenian *theopropoi* to the first disheartening oracle, causing them to resort to the extraordinary measure of asking the god for

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<sup>614</sup> For further discussion of Pausanias' problematical account of Messenian history, see *supra*, p. 19ff.

<sup>615</sup> *Q.v.* Oracle no. 28, *supra*, p. 205ff.

a second prophecy, and the heightened emotion and feverish debate among the *demos* upon receipt of the Pythia's words. Indeed, it was the Athenian ambassadors' fear of what might happen to them if they returned to their *polis* with such bleak news as was given at the first consultation (even more so than the negative prophecy itself) that impelled them to consult Delphic Apollo a second time. Moreover, the debate which followed the consultation led to the formation of two separate military strategies: that of a number of Athenians fortifying and defending the Akropolis; and the other to rely upon the Athenian navy and remove themselves to Salamis.<sup>616</sup>

Furthermore, the examples of the menacing war oracles concerning the occupation of the Pelargikon below the Athenian Akropolis and the unpropitious oracles recalled by the *demos* during the plague of 430 B.C, give us an insight into the powerful effects foreboding oracular prophecies had on *poleis'* citizens during times of war. Thucydides' accounts of the latter two episodes paint a picture of a hard-pressed people in a state of distress, fear, and a certain degree of hysteria; of old, gloomy prophecies being recalled and interpreted as being fulfilled; and all fanned, of course, by *chresmologoi*, *manteis*, and harbingers of doom of all sorts, spouting oracles both old and new, propounding their revelations, and interpreting omens at every turn. Thus, the reality that emerges is one where the *demos'* state of mind and morale are patently affected by oracular prophecy, particularly in times of danger and war, which consequently puts considerable pressure on the *polis'* leaders and their subsequent military decision-making. This truth is apodictically demonstrated by Thucydides' admonition of the *demos* for recalling previous oracles and applying them to their current predicaments, and perhaps even more so for listening to the *chresmologoi* who were reciting such prophecies.<sup>617</sup> It is a fact illustrated further by Thucydides' remark that after the failure of the Sicilian expedition the Athenian *demos'* anger turned towards those same *manteis* and *chresmologoi* who had encouraged the Athenians through their interpretations and prophecies to embark upon the ill-fated campaign in the first place.<sup>618</sup>

Moreover, in a similar vein to the anxiety caused by the necessitous occupation of the Pelasgian ground, we also see from the examples of the incidental fulfilment of negative prophecies in

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<sup>616</sup> Cf. the *demos'* debate over whether to undertake the Sicilian expedition: Oracle no. 43, *supra*, p. 246ff.

<sup>617</sup> Thuc. 2.17.2, 2.21.3.

<sup>618</sup> Thuc. 8.1.1. Cf. also the Messenian elder's rebuke to the people not to listen to the reckless prophecies of the seers during their present difficulties in their war with Sparta: Oracle no. 2, *supra*, p. 272.

the Messenian Wars that foreordained defeat and destruction when certain conditions were met, such as that of Ophioneus' blindness returning and the 'he-goat' drinking from the Neda, the significant alarm and panic caused to the citizenry and army, which affects both morale and military decision-making to a remarkable degree, and which subsequently brings about the prophesied doom.

The same powerful psychological effects of a negative prognostication can also be inferred from the Delphic Oracle's pronouncement to the Thessalians during their siege of Keressos, which had the effect of persuading them to concede defeat and raise the siege, while the Spartans' dreadful consultation of Dodona before Leuktra clearly had, certainly in the eyes of Cicero at least, the effect of unsettling the Spartans so much that it played a major part in their subsequent defeat to the Thebans.<sup>619</sup> Moreover, the later example of Licinius demonstrates the belief in and the effect of negative oracular prophecies carrying on well into the Roman era.

In addition, the Delphic oracle delivered to the Messenians during the First Messenian War, which promised them victory if they performed a sacrifice of a maiden of Aipytos' lineage, illustrates how a positive oracle for one side in a war could have a very damaging effect on the opposing side when they learned of it. In this instance, when the Lakedaimonians gained intelligence of the prophecy, it unnerved them to such an extent that it caused them to shy away from combat for several years. On the other hand, it emboldened the Messenians so much that it encouraged them to become a bit too cavalier for their own good. In this regard, oracular prophecies were very much a double-edged sword for both parties involved in a conflict, in that a positive prophecy for one side invariably psychologically damaged the other, whilst a negative prophecy for one side automatically boosted their enemies.

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<sup>619</sup> Cic. *Div.* 1.34.76, 2.32.69; Callisth. *FGrHist* 124 F 22 (a) & (b); Oracle no. 53, *supra*, p. 270.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### PSYCHOLOGICAL WARFARE

#### 1. Introduction

Taking into account thus far the fact that belief in the divine and the supernatural so patently and profoundly permeated the world of warfare, and the powerful impact that oracular consultations and utterances had on both civilian and troop psychology and military strategy, it is necessary now to explicitly examine the potential exploitation and deliberate manipulation of those beliefs and practices by armies and *strategoï* to aid them in their wars against their enemies. This chapter will therefore look more closely at those examples where religion and oracular prognostications were overtly used as stratagems in inter-*polis* warfare.

The potent power of oracular prophecies would not have been lost upon ancient Greek military commanders, particularly those of a more sceptical disposition, who appear to have utilised and exploited oracular prognostications as a psychological weapon in warfare, with the aim of denting enemy morale, whilst at the same time boosting the morale and belief of their own troops. Of course, there must have been some generals, such as Xenophon, who, being true believers and ardent devotees would have attempted to obey and fulfil oracular prophecies simply out of sincere reverence; however, even in the hands of a religious zealot, the opportunity to tap into the superstitious temperament of both their own soldiers and the soldiers of the enemy must surely have been prudently seized upon whenever possible. As a result, we frequently see *strategoï* attempting to fulfil prophecies both before and during a campaign, in an attempt to irrevocably weaken enemy morale and inspire and encourage their own soldiers. Indeed, this strategy appears to have been used particularly during a prolonged siege or military campaign, where perhaps the troops may have been becoming weary, disheartened, and disillusioned and were therefore in need of a timely injection of energy and renewed hope. In the case of Sparta and Orestes' bones, and Athens and Theseus' bones already visited above, for instance, the fulfilment of the oracles would have had the added benefit of giving both Sparta and Athens a boost to their morale and renewed vigour to their efforts, knowing that if they obtained the bones they were guaranteed victory by the god, whilst at the same time



dealing a serious blow to the morale of the Tegeans and the Skyreans, who would have been painfully aware that once the oracle was fulfilled they would surely be doomed.<sup>1</sup>

However, before we look further at the use of psychological warfare in the ancient Greek world, we first need to define what is meant by the term ‘psychological warfare’ and explore the principles behind it. To do so, I shall examine the use of modern psychological warfare in the current Arab-Israeli conflict. Schleifer, an expert in this field of study, when discussing the principles of psychological warfare, argues that psychological warfare (or ‘psywar’) ‘is based on the idea that enemy troops do not have to be killed or wounded; instead they can be influenced not to pull (or to hesitate in pulling) the trigger, even convinced to abandon the battlefield, or their leaders can be persuaded not to send them into the combat zone in the first place.’<sup>2</sup> He asserts that psywar is a strategic weapon, and the side that applies it wisely gains a distinct advantage over the enemy.

Moreover, Schleifer also argues that psychological warfare has been used as a non-violent weapon used to achieve military goals since biblical times.<sup>3</sup> To support this claim he points to the Israelite prophet, Gideon, employing noise and deception during the war against the Midianites to demoralise the enemy’s superior forces encamped in the Jezreel Valley,<sup>4</sup> as well as the speech delivered by the Assyrian commander, the Rabshakeh, to the besieged inhabitants of Jerusalem in 709 B.C., urging them to surrender and aiming to weaken their resolve.<sup>5</sup> The use of noise stratagems was certainly not uncommon in the Graeco-Roman world either, or in other ancient cultures, such as China. For instance, Polyaeus begins his work by recounting how Pan, whilst serving as a general for Dionysos, employed such tactics when they found themselves in a wooded hollow surrounded by a much superior enemy force encamped above them.<sup>6</sup> Pan, however, shrewdly ordered the whole army, in the silence of the night and on a given signal, to give out a loud shout, which reverberated greatly in the surrounding rocks and re-echoed in the hollows of the forest. The amplified sound caused the enemy army to fear that Dionysos’ forces were far more numerous than they actually were, and, seized by anxiety, they

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<sup>1</sup> *Q.v.* Oracle no. 17, *supra*, p. 66ff.; Oracle no. 37, *supra*, p. 70ff.

<sup>2</sup> Schleifer, 2014: 1.

<sup>3</sup> See also Freedman, who traces the origins of strategy back to the Bible: Freedman, L., *Strategy: A History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013) 10-21.

<sup>4</sup> See *Judges*, 7.17-22; Schleifer, 2014: 187 n. 1.

<sup>5</sup> *2 Kings* 18.17-37; *Isaiah*, 36.

<sup>6</sup> Polyaeus. *Strat.* 1.2.

abandoned their camp and fled.<sup>7</sup> Polyaeus also explains that it is since this episode that all pointless and imaginary fears are called ‘panics’. Thus, the art of deception in war and psychological warfare were enshrined in Greek legend and earliest Greek memory.<sup>8</sup> Indeed, by beginning his work with a series of stratagems employed in war by deities such as Dionysos, Herakles, and Pan, Polyaeus implies that the archetype of deception in warfare lies with the Olympians themselves. Polyaeus records a similar historical stratagem employed by King Agis, during Sparta’s war with the Peloponnesians.<sup>9</sup> According to Polyaeus, when the Lakedaimonians were suffering from a great scarcity of provisions, Agis gave the order that the oxen should be muzzled and kept from feeding for the whole day, but when night fell they were to be loosed. The hungry oxen, when they were set free, leaped about and bellowed, raising a terrible noise, which resounded in the surrounding hills. The raucous clamour, coupled with scattered fires being kindled all over the camp, fooled the Peloponnesians into thinking that the Lakedaimonians had been strongly reinforced, and they immediately struck camp and fled away.<sup>10</sup> Examples of such psychological tactics being employed raises the tantalising possibility that the accounts of enemy troops being terrified by the sound of supernatural phenomena, like that of the Persians or the Gauls at Delphi,<sup>11</sup> may possibly have been *strategoi* using noise stratagems to exploit the belief of the supernatural in war, such as divine intervention or the professed ability of *magoi* to raise phantom armies of dead soldiers.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Polyaeus. *Strat.* 1.2.

<sup>8</sup> Freedman also points to Homer’s Odysseus as the model of deception and trickery in warfare: see Freedman, 2013: 22-41.

<sup>9</sup> Polyaeus. *Strat.* 1.46.

<sup>10</sup> Polyaeus. *Strat.* 1.46. Cf. other examples of noise stratagems: Polyaeus. *Strat.* 4.2.20, 4.3.29, 4.7.8, 4.9.2, 5.16.3, 7.11.4, 8.23.2; Front. *Strat.* 1.8.9., 2.4.1, 2.4.3, 2.4.7, 2.4.8, 2.9.1, 3.9.5, 3.9.6, 3.9.10. The *Thirty-Six Strategies* of ancient China contains similar concepts; for instance, ‘Clamour in the east, attack in the west’. Although the origin of the *Thirty-Six Strategies* is unknown, the first historical mention of its existence dates back to the Southern Chi Dynasty (A.D. 489-537) and refers to the ‘36 stratagems of Master Tán. This may refer to the general, Tán Daoji, of the Liu Song Dynasty (d. A.D. 436): see Verstappen, S. H., *The Thirty-Six Strategies of Ancient China* (San Francisco: China Books & Periodicals, Inc., 1999) vi, 27.

<sup>11</sup> *Q.v.* Oracle no. 63, *supra*, p. 143ff.

<sup>12</sup> There is considerable evidence to suggest that in the Graeco-Roman world *magoi* were believed to have the power to raise an army of the dead. In the *Pharsalia*, for instance, Lucan describes how the sorceress Erichtho is able to raise a soldier from the dead through her magical arts. However, the suggestion is that, should she have so wished, she would have been capable of raising entire ranks of dead soldiers and commanding them to fight: Luc. 6.747-753. Cf. Eur. *El.* 680, where Orestes invokes Agamemnon to rise up and bring with him a whole army of the dead to fight. These must have been allusions that would have been readily comprehended by an audience. See also Johnston, 1999: 144. For more on summoning and reanimation of the dead on battlefields, see Ogden, 2001: 12-16. For other examples of spectral armies, see: Luc. 1.569-83; Plin. *HN.* 2.58; Plut. *Mar.* 3.133; and Tac. *Hist.* 5.13. Cf. also the phantom armies at Marathon: Paus. 1.32.4; Johnston, 1999: 154 n. 100.

## 2. The home audience

Schleifer states that psychological warfare is directed at three main audiences, which are, in order of importance: the home audience, the enemy audience, and the neutral audience. Schleifer argues that the home audience is of prime importance because, as already discussed above,<sup>13</sup> the state has to mobilise its resources in times of war and persuade its citizens to sacrifice their lives for their country, and that, consequently, a state at war is doomed to lose if it fails to convince its citizenry and soldiers of the righteousness of the war's aims.<sup>14</sup> As we have already seen, it is a precept which applies to all civilisations throughout the world and across the ages. In the case of ancient Greece, once the divine endorsement for a foreign policy or strategic military decision was obtained through an oracular consultation by a *polis* or *strategos*, the extant evidence clearly suggests that it was frequently used as a powerful psychological tool by political leaders and military commanders to unite the *polis*, raise the morale of the citizenry and the army, and maintain courage and *esprit de corps* in the face of adversity on the battlefield. As Goodman and Holladay rightly aver: 'The desire to have the gods on your side in warfare was doubtless always in some sense a military tactic. Victory was more likely if the favour of a particular deity could be ensured either as a result of past connexions, cult and history or through sacrifices and prayers, the avoidance of hubristic activities and the observance of taboos.'<sup>15</sup> It is precisely for this reason that we see *stratego*i, such as Epaminondas, Xenophon, and Alexander, using oracular prophecies to remind the soldiers under their command that their cause is just and the gods are on their side, and thereby not on their enemies'.<sup>16</sup> However, as the home audience has already been dealt with in sufficient detail above when discussing the psychological reasons for the ancient Greeks consulting the Oracles in times of war, there is no need to tread the same ground again here.

## 3. The enemy audience: fulfilment of oracles to damage enemy morale

The enemy audience, on the other hand, is made up of the army and the citizenry. Schleifer states that 'Psywar operators seek to undermine the enemy troops' psychological base by convincing them of the futility of the struggle, and that the sooner the war is over the sooner

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<sup>13</sup> *Supra*, p. 53ff.

<sup>14</sup> Schleifer, 2014: 13.

<sup>15</sup> Goodman and Holladay, 1986: 152. For a fuller discussion of piety being rewarded with victory by the gods, see Oracle no. 50, *supra*, p. 41; Eidinow, 2007: 13.

<sup>16</sup> For discussion of the general's battle pre-battle exhortation, see *supra*, p. 102ff.

conditions for them and their country will improve.’<sup>17</sup> Therefore, the goal is to force the enemy to consider the dangers and wastefulness involved in pursuing a lost cause. The employment of psychological warfare to undermine enemy morale and force their capitulation as quickly as possible was a principle that was well-acknowledged and applied in ancient warfare. Vegetius, for example, in his military treatise, *De Re Militari*, advises that ‘It is much better to overcome the enemy by famine, surprise or terror than by general actions, for in the latter instance fortune has often a greater share than valour.’<sup>18</sup> Furthermore, he also states that ‘Good officers decline general engagements where the danger is common, and prefer the employment of stratagem and finesse to destroy the enemy as much as possible in detail and intimidate them without exposing their own forces.’<sup>19</sup> It is for this very reason that we see ancient Greek *poleis* attempting to bring to fruition those oracles which foretell victory for their side or doom for their opponents once a certain condition is met. Hence, that is why we see the race between the Spartans and the Messenians during the First Messenian War to be the first to fulfil the Delphic prophecy which proclaimed that victory would be awarded to whichever side dedicated one hundred tripods to Ithomaian Zeus.<sup>20</sup>

According to Pausanias, after twenty years of war with Sparta, the Messenians consulted the Delphic Oracle for advice on how to end the conflict and obtain victory. The Pythian priestess responded to the Messenian envoys with the following oracle:

They who shall stand twice five times ten tripods  
To Ithomaian Zeus at his altar,  
the god gives them the land of Messene  
and the glory of war; Zeus decrees this.  
Treachery advances you, and vengeance follows you;  
you would deceive gods; act your destiny.  
The curse falls on some men before others.<sup>21</sup>

Upon hearing this oracle, the Messenians believed that the prophecy was on their side and was granting them victory in the war, since the sanctuary of Zeus of Ithome was inside their fortress, which naturally would make it virtually impossible for the Lakedaimonians to be able to

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<sup>17</sup> Schleifer, 2014: 13.

<sup>18</sup> Veg. *Mil.* 3.26, trans. John Clarke: see Vegetius, *The Military Institutions of the Romans*, translated by John Clarke; edited by Thomas R. Philips (Mansfield Centre, CT, 2011).

<sup>19</sup> Veg. *Mil.* 3.9.

<sup>20</sup> Oracle no. 5: Paus. 4.12.7; 4.26.4; P-W 365; Fontenrose, Q17. This war oracle is closely tied in with an earlier oracle given to Aristodemos: *q.v.* Oracle no. 4, *supra*, p. 285.

<sup>21</sup> Paus. 4.12.7, trans. Peter Levi (*Guide to Greece*).

dedicate there first.<sup>22</sup> Considering they had no money for bronze, the Messenians consequently planned to make a hundred wooden tripods instead, in order to fulfil the prophecy and ensure victory. However, someone from Delphi reported the oracle to the Spartans, who then discussed the worrying prophecy in the Assembly but no public solution could be found. However, Oibalos, a man of little repute, but evidently of shrewd intellect, made a hundred terracotta tripods and brought them hidden in a game-bag, along with some nets like a professional huntsman, to Ithome.<sup>23</sup> As Oibalos was little known in Lakonia it was easier for him to escape detection by the Messenians. Thus, after mingling with some countrymen, he was able to enter Ithome, and as soon as night fell, dedicated the tripods of clay to the god, and returned to Sparta to tell the Lakedaimonians the news.

Upon discovering the tripods dedicated at Zeus's shrine, Pausanias tells us that the Messenians were 'profoundly disturbed' (ἐτάραξε μὲν μεγάλως).<sup>24</sup> Aristodemos consequently tried to assuage their fears as best he could with a speech and by standing the now-finished wooden tripods around the altar. However, it appeared that the damage had already been done by the fulfilment of the oracle and Aristodemos and the Messenian people were subsequently beset by a series of omens foretelling their doom and the fall of Messenia.<sup>25</sup> Soon after Aristodemos' suicide, the Messenian army was decisively defeated in open battle against the Spartans and were at last forced to abandon Mt. Ithome, marking the end of the First Messenian War.<sup>26</sup>

Although the oracle comes only from Pausanias, the oracular episode is illuminating in several ways. Firstly, as a result of their interpretation of the oracle, the Messenians received a boost to their morale and believed that the prophecy had preordained their victory over the Spartans. However, conversely, it had the exact opposite effect when, through their sluggishness in building the wooden tripods and the guile of Oibalos, the Spartans were able to fulfil the prophecy first, throwing the Messenians into a state of severe trepidation. Thus, it is a powerful demonstration of oracles being used as psychological weapons in warfare, as the 'religious intelligence', for want of a better phrase, passed to the Spartans from Delphi was actively

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<sup>22</sup> Paus. 4.12.8.

<sup>23</sup> Paus. 4.12.9. Levi believes that the tripods must have been small dedicatory terracottas. Although there is no record of such items except from relief representations, Levi has no difficulty in admitting their real existence: see Levi, 1979b: 132 n. 50.

<sup>24</sup> Paus. 4.12.10.

<sup>25</sup> Paus. 4.12.10-4.13.3. It was at this point that the seer Ophioneus lost his sight again and the earlier oracle given to Aristodemos was fulfilled, and it also became suddenly clear what Spartan trickery the Pythia had been referring to when she had forewarned the Messenian king previously: see Oracle no. 4, *supra*, p. 285.

<sup>26</sup> Paus. 4.13.5-6.

utilised by them to gain an edge in the military conflict. Indeed, it is clear from the story that Oibalos' stratagem was enough to seriously damage the morale of the Messenians and was instrumental in significantly altering the course of the war through the perturbation it caused among the Messenian people and by contributing to Aristodemos' death.<sup>27</sup>

A similar example can be found in the Amphictyons' prolonged siege of Kirrha c. 590 B.C., when the Delphic Oracle informed the Amphictyonic League envoys that Kirrha would remain invincible until the sea reached the edge of the Delphic sanctuary, and the Kirrhaeans, as a result, took comfort that they would be safe.<sup>28</sup> However, Kleisthenes, under the advice of Solon, immediately consecrated the land between Delphi and the Corinthian Gulf to Apollo, thus fulfilling the prophecy, no doubt destroying Kirrhaean morale in the process, and finally taking the city.<sup>29</sup> Likewise, in Kroton's war with Epizephyrian Lokris, the Krotoniates were told by the Pythia that the enemy would have to be conquered by vows before they could be vanquished by arms.<sup>30</sup> Consequently, the Krotoniates immediately dedicated a tenth of the spoils to Apollo. However, when the Lokrians found out about the oracle, they furtively dedicated a ninth of the spoils, and when the two sides met the Lokrians defeated a vastly larger Krotoniate force, no doubt aided by the fact that the Lokrians knew that they had fulfilled the oracle and would therefore be granted victory.

Several similar examples of psychological warfare surround the Battle of Leuktra. One of the most powerful illustrations can be seen from Epaminondas' fulfilment of the prophecy delivered to the Thebans by the Oracle of Trophonios at Lebadeia.<sup>31</sup> In this instance, when the Thebans received an extremely auspicious oracle, declaring, in essence, that they would be victorious against the Spartans in the forthcoming battle, providing they took with them the

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<sup>27</sup> It is also worthwhile to note here that there was still a further twist to this oracular story. The meaning of the reference in the oracle to the Messenians acting out their destiny and the curse falling on some men before others became clear several hundred years later in 371 B.C. when the Spartans were decisively beaten by the Thebans at the Battle of Leuktra and Epaminondas founded, or refounded, the Messenian state. It became apparent with hindsight, therefore, that the god at the time had meant that Aristodemos and the Messenians would have to suffer defeat and misfortune for the present, but that in later times the curse would befall the Lakedaimonians and that they would ultimately be destroyed. Furthermore, the fact that the oracle was interpreted around 350 years later by the Greeks to have come true after the Battle of Leuktra, provides another example of how the highly cryptic nature of the Oracle's responses helped reinforce its own infallibility.

<sup>28</sup> Oracle no. 12, *supra*, p. 175ff.

<sup>29</sup> It is worthwhile noting that the confusion among the sources as to whether it was the Kirrhaeans or the Amphictyons who received the oracle, hints once again at the openly communicable nature of oracular prophecies in the ancient Greek world, where oracular utterances quickly became public knowledge.

<sup>30</sup> Oracle no. 15, *supra*, p. 183ff.

<sup>31</sup> Oracle no. 51, *supra*, p. 181ff.

shield of Aristomenes and set up a trophy before combat commenced, Epaminondas immediately sent one of the Boiotian commanders, Xenokrates, post-haste to collect the shield, and then ordered that the relic be ostentatiously displayed on the battlefield in plain sight of the Lakedaimonian army. Keeping in mind the fact that the oracle did not specify where the trophy had to be set up, the clear inference is that Epaminondas erected the trophy in full view of the Spartans as a psychological weapon. Pausanias comments that all the Greeks who had seen the shield at Lebadeia in peacetime would have undoubtedly recognised it, and that those who had not would still have known it by repute.<sup>32</sup> Furthermore, bringing the shield of Aristomenes to the battle would also have brought with it the suggestion and belief that the hero himself would be fighting on the Theban side. Thus, displaying the shield and fulfilling the oracle would no doubt have strengthened the spirit of the Boiotian forces, whilst at the same time duly unnerved the Lakedaimonians. The Thebans, of course, went on to win a famous victory.

In addition, Xenophon tells us that the Thebans also took considerable encouragement from a certain oracular response, which stated that ‘the Spartans must suffer a defeat at the place where stands the monument to the virgins who are supposed to have killed themselves because they had been raped by some Spartans.’<sup>33</sup> From several of our sources, it appears that there was a tomb (or tombs) of the Leuktrides on or near the battlefield of Leuktra, which became the site of a hero-cult.<sup>34</sup>

As a result of this prophecy, the Thebans apparently put garlands on this monument before the battle, and the Lakedaimonians were consequently defeated when they faced the Boiotian army on the plain of Leuktra beside the tomb of the Leuktrides. Although the specific source of the oracle is not given, it is likely that it was the oracle given to the Thessalians by Delphic Apollo

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<sup>32</sup> Paus. 4.32.6.

<sup>33</sup> Oracle no. 52: Xen. *Hell.* 6.4.7.

<sup>34</sup> Although there are some variances, the story generally follows along the lines that the Leuktrides were the daughters of Skedastos (or, according to Diodorus, of Leuktros and Skedastos), a resident of Leuktra. According to Pausanias, sometime before the Thessalian war on Thespiiai (Plutarch simply states that it was long before the Battle of Leuktra), two Lakedaimonian ambassadors, Phourarchidas and Parthenios, stayed overnight at Skedastos’ house and raped his daughters, variously named Hippo and Molpia (or Miletia), or Theano and Euxippe, who then, unable to bear the shame, hanged themselves. Skedastos, upon discovering what had happened, demanded retribution from Sparta, but when he received none he subsequently pronounced a curse upon the Spartans and committed suicide over his daughters’ graves. For the various accounts of the legend, see Xen. *Hell.* 6.4.7; Diod. Sic. 15.54; Plut. *Pelop.* 20.3-4; Ps.-Plut. *Mor.* 773b-774d; Paus. 9.13.5; Nonnos Abbas 10, p. 992 Migne = Apost. 15.53.

during their siege of Keressos c. 520 B.C.,<sup>35</sup> or perhaps one of the other Oracles consulted before Leuktra.<sup>36</sup>

Again, this is another example, on presumption that the Oracles' prophecies were public knowledge, of oracles being used as a tool of psychological warfare. By openly adorning the monument in recognition of the Oracles' words, the Theban military leadership must have hoped to achieve two main objectives. Firstly, it was a public gesture of acknowledgement and show of religious reverence to the gods in the hope of making the words of the prophecy come true at that particular location in the forthcoming battle. Secondly, and more importantly, the act of overtly decorating the monument must surely be seen as a psychological stratagem aimed at bolstering their own troops' belief whilst attempting to sow seeds of doubt and fear into the minds of the Lakedaimonians.<sup>37</sup> It is interesting to note that Xenophon immediately goes on to detail several other omens reported in Thebes at the time that seemed to be auspiciously pointing towards victory for the Theban army, but that he also acknowledges the allegations by some people that 'all these reports were fabricated by the Theban leaders.'<sup>38</sup> The fact that Xenophon acknowledges this reservation shows us that military commanders were certainly not beyond reproach in such matters, and perhaps suggests that they were even well-known for engaging in these types of psychological tactics.

Furthermore, it is also important to note in Pausanias' account of Leuktra, that on the eve of the battle the Boiotian commanders were divided over what to do; Epaminondas, along with Malgis and Xenokrates, wanted a battle with Sparta quickly, whereas Damokleidas, Damophilos, and Simangelos were against joining battle with the Lakedaimonians, and instead wanted to smuggle the women and children into Attica and to prepare for a siege.<sup>39</sup> Therefore, with this in mind, Epaminondas' act of sacrificing and praying to Skedastos and the Leuktrides to help him and the Thebans to avenge them, may have also been an attempt to persuade the vacillating generals that the omens and the gods would be on their side if they made their stand against the Spartans at Leuktra. It appears that it may have had the desired effect and swung the balance in favour of Epaminondas' proposed strategy, when the seventh Boeotarch,

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<sup>35</sup> *Q.v.* Oracle no. 21, *supra*, p. 268.

<sup>36</sup> *Q.v.* Oracle no. 51, *supra*, p. 181.

<sup>37</sup> *Cf.* other instances of the manipulation of oracles and omens by generals, *infra*, p. 304ff.

<sup>38</sup> *Xen. Hell.* 6.4.8.

<sup>39</sup> *Paus.* 9.13.6.



Brachyllides, returned from Kithairon, and his decisive vote went to Epaminondas' party.<sup>40</sup> If this was Epaminondas' ploy, then once more it illustrates oracles being used and manipulated by military leaders for political reasons, to persuade and cajole others into supporting their military strategies and tactics.<sup>41</sup>

Epaminondas was certainly no stranger to psychological tactics. Indeed, Polyaeus records an instance of him unashamedly fabricating an oracle and manipulating the superstitious beliefs of his soldiers in order to raise their morale in the face of superior enemy numbers.<sup>42</sup> Supposedly, before the Battle of Leuktra, Epaminondas contrived for his army to be met by a stranger, who said that he had been sent by Trophonios to inform them that victory would belong to those who began the attack. Epaminondas then told the Thebans, who were clearly moved by this pronouncement of the Oracle, to pay their vows at the temple of Herakles, where he had previously arranged for the rusty weapons that were kept there to be polished and laid before the statue of the god. When the soldiers and their officers consequently discovered the gleaming weapons, the soldiers immediately shouted in acclamation, and advanced out to battle, full of confidence that they were fighting under the protection of Herakles.<sup>43</sup>

So too can Leonidas' fulfilment of the Delphic oracle, prophesying that a Spartan king from the lineage of Herakles would need to fall in order to save all of Lakedaimon and Greece from Persia, by sacrificing himself at Thermopylae, be seen to be an attempt to buoy up Greek morale in the face of seemingly insurmountable odds.<sup>44</sup> Even if the oracle was a contemporaneous or *post eventum* fabrication, it is still a very illuminating example of how oracles could be used in psychological warfare. Indeed, if we presuppose that the oracle was created *ex tempore* then it must surely have been designed to turn the disheartening Greek defeat at the hands of the Persians on their first meeting in combat into an omen of victory for the rest of Hellas, whilst

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<sup>40</sup> Paus. 9.13.7.

<sup>41</sup> Cf. Oracle nos. 35, 36, 40, 41, N5, N6.

<sup>42</sup> Polyaeus. *Strat.* 3.3.8.

<sup>43</sup> Diod. Sic. 15.53.4; Polyaeus. *Strat.* 2.3.8. Cf. also Epaminondas' use of a *salubre mendacium* before the Battle of Leuktra to motivate and incite his troops. Frontinus (*Strat.* 1.11.6) states: 'Epaminondas, general of the Thebans, on one occasion, when about to engage in battle with the Spartans, acted as follows. In order that his soldiers might not only exercise their strength, but also be stirred by their feelings, he announced in an assembly of his men that the Spartans had resolved, in case of victory, to massacre all males, to lead the wives and children of those executed into bondage, and to raze Thebes to the ground. By this announcement the Thebans were so roused that they overwhelmed the Spartans at the first onset.'

<sup>44</sup> Oracle no. 29, *supra*, p. 178ff.

at the same time hopefully sow seeds of doubt and fear among the Medes once they caught wind of the prognostication having been fulfilled.

Similarly, Aristeides' deliberate fulfilment of the Delphic Oracle's prophecy given before the Battle of Plataea, which stated that the allied Greeks would be victorious if they supplicated and sacrificed to certain gods and heroes, and made their stand on the plain of Demeter Eleusinia and Kore, is another case in point.<sup>45</sup> Although Aristeides may have manipulated the oracle to suit his own ends, it is still clear, nevertheless, that he went to great lengths to conspicuously fulfil the stipulations of the oracle for the benefit of the assembled Greek forces, even going so far as to persuade the Plataeans to remove their boundary stones next to Athenian territory in order to make the battlefield part of Attica as decreed by the Pythia. It provides yet another example of oracular prognostications being used for the psychological benefits to one's own troops and the accompanying injurious effects on the enemy's psyche. There are dozens of similar examples.

The same practice is chronicled in several of the legendary war oracles. For instance, King Erechtheus of Athens, when faced by an imminent Thracian invasion, is reported to have fulfilled the Delphic oracle which promised him victory if he were to sacrifice his daughter before the two sides met in combat.<sup>46</sup> By fulfilling the grave command of Delphic Apollo, we can assume that it would have played a powerful psychological role in Erechtheus' victory, affecting both sides conversely. Likewise, Kypselos, the King of Arkadia, was able to exploit the Delphic oracle which forbade the Herakleidai to make war on those with whom they ate to his advantage against the invading army when it entered the Peloponnese.<sup>47</sup> By tricking the Herakleidai into eating Arkadian corn left on the highway, Kypselos was able to fulfil the oracle and force the Herakleidai into becoming allies, thus sparing his people from bloodshed. In a similar vein, Lykourgos records how, when the Athenians were invaded by the Peloponnesian Dorians in the eleventh century B.C., King Kodros deliberately fulfilled a Delphic oracle that had been delivered to the Spartans, which stated that the Lakedaimonians would capture Athens so long as they did not kill the Athenian king.<sup>48</sup> By tricking an invading soldier into killing him, Kodros therefore fulfilled the prophecy, and the Spartans, upon discovering this,

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<sup>45</sup> Oracle no. 36, *supra*, p. 169ff.

<sup>46</sup> Oracle no. N2, *supra*, p. 188ff.

<sup>47</sup> Oracle no. N20, *supra*, p. 215ff.

<sup>48</sup> Oracle no. N23, *supra*, p. 212ff.

immediately ceased the attack and returned home. Such legendary war oracles show, not only the psychological effects and utilisation of oracles in warfare, but also the fact that the oracular prognostications were clearly common knowledge and must have been widely disseminated within the ancient Greek world.

It should not come as any surprise to discover that the practice of using prophecies as psychological weapons in war carried on into medieval and modern warfare. A particularly pertinent illustration concerns John de Courcy and his conquest of Ulster in 1177 A.D., where he used the prophecies of Columba and Merlin to persuade his fellow Anglo-Norman followers of the righteousness and foreordained success of the military venture, and at the same time convince the native inhabitants that he was the man destined to conquer the kingdom of Ulaid. According to Gerald of Wales' account in his *Conquest of Ireland*, a famous prophecy of Columba the Irishman existed, which foretold that a bloody battle would take place on the banks of the River Quoile (near Downpatrick, Co. Down) and that a poor man, a fugitive from foreign lands, would arrive at Down with a small force and take over the area. The prophecy fitted John perfectly, for, although he was an aristocrat he was undoubtedly poor, he was a 'fugitive' from his own lands in Somerset in terms of having to leave his home for economic reasons, and he only had a small army of 22 knights and 300 foot soldiers with him. Furthermore, John also neatly fitted the prophecy of Merlin Celidonius, which stated that a white knight, astride a white horse, bearing a device of birds on his shield, would overrun Ulaid with hostile intent. De Courcy consciously and deliberately made sure that his coat-of-arms (three red eagles on a white background) and horse overtly matched Merlin's description in order to fulfil the prophecy; Gerald even stresses in his work that John's hair was so fair that it tended towards white. It is no coincidence that Gerald included these prophecies in his chronicles of de Courcy: the clear inference is that de Courcy, as Lord of Ulster, drew much attention to these prophecies, and, in fact, perhaps even prompted Gerald to include them in his history of John.<sup>49</sup>

Similarly, in the fifteenth century A.D., in the years preceding and during the time of Joan of Arc's exploits, a number of prophecies were circulating around Europe concerning a young maid who would save France; the prophecies being attributed to several personages, including St. Bede the Venerable, Euglide of Hungary, Marie d'Avignon, and Merlin Celidonius. One

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<sup>49</sup> For more discussion of John de Courcy's invasion of Ulster and the prophecies surrounding him, see Flanders, S., *De Courcy: Anglo-Normans in Ireland, England, and France in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2008) 141-148.

such prophecy stated that the maid would come forth from an oak wood and would work miracles, another that an armed woman would save the kingdom, whilst another foretold that France would be ruined through a woman and afterwards restored by a virgin. Moreover, as one of the prophecies stated that the maid would come from the borders of Lorraine, and Joan's village of Domremy was near the border between France and the Duchy of Lorraine in the Holy Roman Empire, many in France believed that she was indeed the maiden referred to in the prophecies.<sup>50</sup> As the prophecies were widely known in France at that time it is not difficult to see why the dauphin and his supporters deliberately and overtly identified Joan as the prophesied saviour of France, and used her as a focal point to rally the dauphin's forces and turn the tide of the Hundred Years' War. Indeed, they began to spread new or elaborated prophecies that specifically fitted Joan, in order to inspire the French troops and raise their spirits, and at the same time make the English believe that she was a fearsome mythological figure made flesh.<sup>51</sup> Whether or not the dauphin and his commanders truly believed in her divine calling, they clearly exploited and utilised the prophecies surrounding her, and the powerful psychological effects on the dauphin's forces and their English enemies are clear to be seen. The identification of Joan as the Maid of Lorraine from the prophecies contributed massively to her popularity and following within France, and instilled belief and fanatical devotion from the soldiers under her command, particularly after she led the French forces to an astounding victory over the English at the Battle of Orléans in May 1429.<sup>52</sup> Whereas, conversely, the fear of troops under Joan's leadership became so formidable that when she approached Lord Talbot's army at Patay in June 1429, most of the English troops and their commander, Sir John Fastolf, fled the battlefield in panic.<sup>53</sup>

From the perspective of continuity, these medieval and early modern examples provide further evidence of the use of oracular prophecies and religion as a psychological weapon in warfare,

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<sup>50</sup> See Warner, M., *Joan of Arc: The Image of Female Heroism*, New ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013) 14-16; Taylor, L. J., *The Virgin Warrior: The Life and Death of Joan of Arc* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010) 19-20; Fraioli, D. A., 'The Literary Image of Joan of Arc: Prior Influences', *Speculum* 56, 4 (1981) 811-812; Novack, B. E., *A Double-Edged Sword: Jehanne d'Arc and Claims to Divine Sanction in Acts of War* (Eugene, Oregon: Pickwick Publications, 2014) 8-12.

<sup>51</sup> See Taylor, 2010: 47-50; Fraioli, D. A., *Joan of Arc: The Early Debate* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2000) 65-66.

<sup>52</sup> See Taylor, 2010: 66-73.

<sup>53</sup> Jean Wavrin de Forestel, a Picard fighting under Fastolf's command during the Loire campaign, states that the renown of Joan of Arc greatly undermined English courage: 'They seemed to see fortune turning its wheel against them...principally by the enterprises of the Maid.' Fastolf was later stripped of his Order of the Garter by John, Duke of Bedford, for his act of cowardice: see Taylor, 2010: 83; Ayroles, J. B. J., *La Vraie Jeanne d'Arc*, 6 vols. (Paris: Gaume et Cie, 1890; reprint, Éditions Saint-Remi, 2005) vol. III, 411, 499.

especially when we keep in mind the fact that even as late as the seventeenth century, military commanders looked back to ancient Greek and Roman warfare and the military writers of antiquity for strategic and tactical instruction and inspiration. As Freeman states:

‘ancient Greece was the land “where grew the arts of war.” Books on martial skills had begun there: Aeneas Tacticus, Polybius, Asclepiodotus, Onasander, and Aelian codified military information that appeared less systematically in writers like Xenophon, Polyaeus, and Arrian. Roman theory was summed up by Frontinus, Modestus, Vegetius, and Leo, who used examples from authors like Caesar, Livy, Sallust, and Tacitus. Surviving into the Renaissance, all these discussions were combed, annotated, translated, and imitated.’<sup>54</sup>

Heuser argues similarly that the works of ancient historians, such as Thucydides, Xenophon, and Polybius, and the classical military treatises of Aeneas the Tactician, Flavius Arrianus, and Aelianus Tacticus, were used time and again by subsequent generations, and, moreover, that ‘the Middle Ages produced little beyond translations or at best updates of Vegetius.’<sup>55</sup>

Indeed, we must not overlook the fact that not much has really changed over the course of several millennia. The use of religion and belief in the supernatural as a psychological weapon in war is something which is still, in fact, used regularly in modern conflicts; a fairly recent example of which can be found during the Troubles in Northern Ireland in the 1970s. It has recently come to light, for instance, that the British Army, in an attempt to undermine the support for both Republican and Loyalist terrorists from within their local communities, used ‘black propaganda’, which aimed to harness and exploit the population’s strong Christian beliefs. Jenkins reveals how British military intelligence agents in Northern Ireland used fears about demonic possessions, black masses, and witchcraft as part of a psychological war against the Republican and Loyalist paramilitary groups. A British army psyops unit, ‘Information Policy’, for instance, deliberately stoked up a ‘satanic panic’ from 1972 to 1974, placing black candles, occult drawings, and upside-down crucifixes in derelict buildings in some of Belfast’s war zones and crime scenes, and leaked stories to newspapers about satanic rituals taking place in Republican and Loyalist areas of the city. The idea was that Ireland in general was very

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<sup>54</sup> Freeman, 1980: 26. For further discussion on the proliferation and knowledge of ancient war treatises in the seventeenth century, see Freeman, 1980: 25-27.

<sup>55</sup> Heuser, B., *The Evolution of Strategy: Thinking War from Antiquity to the Present* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010) 32. Heuser argues further that warfare and mindsets changed very little from antiquity to the Middle Ages, and indeed that Western warfare showed no steady development until well into the nineteenth century: Heuser, 2010: 39. See also Freedman’s authoritative work on the evolution of strategy, which he traces from the Bible and the ancient Greeks through to Sun Tzu, Machiavelli, Milton, and beyond to present day: Freedman, 2013: esp. 3-68.

religious and superstitious, therefore whipping up devil-worshipping paranoia and associating paramilitary organisations with Satanism and black magic was a way to discredit those groups and to make the terrorist activities abhorrent to both the Roman Catholic and Protestant Churches, which held a considerable degree of influence, even for the paramilitaries.<sup>56</sup>

Similar comparisons can be drawn with the British Army's use of psychological warfare during the Mau Mau Uprising in Kenya between 1952 and 1960. In this instance the British Army used black propaganda, based on the highly questionable one-man ethnopsychiatric analysis of Dr. John Colin Carothers, which had been commissioned by the British government, to paint the Mau Mau as a savage, violent, evil, and depraved tribal cult in a divide-and-rule strategy, in order to erode the Mau Mau's support and isolate them from the Kikuyu tribe and the rest of the outside world.<sup>57</sup>

### 3.1 Religious psychological stratagems

The indispensable role that oracles and divination played in the psychological warfare between *poleis* in the ancient Greek world and their impact on ancient warfare is made even more apparent when we consider the profusion of examples we possess of military commanders either deliberately fabricating or manipulating oracles, omens, and sacrifices to suit their own agendas and plans. We have already seen, for instance, Epaminondas mendaciously inventing an oracle of Trophonios and constructing an auspicious tableau in the temple of Herakles prior to the Battle of Leuktra in order to generate the appropriate reaction from his troops.<sup>58</sup> Frontinus also tells us that on the eve of Leuktra, Epaminondas, thinking that the confidence and courage of his troops needed strengthening by an appeal to religious sentiment, under the cover of night removed all the weapons that were decorating the temples, and in the morning convinced his men that the gods themselves were attending their march in order to lend their aid to the Thebans in the battle itself.<sup>59</sup> Similarly, Polyaeus records how Epaminondas, in order to instil hope and bravery in his troops in the face of superior enemy numbers at Leuktra,

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<sup>56</sup> See Jenkins, R., *Black Magic and Bogeymen: Fear, Rumour and Popular Belief in the North of Ireland, 1972-74* (Cork: University of Cork, 2014) 69-93; Jenkins, R., 'Spooks and Spooks: Black Magic and Bogeymen in Northern Ireland, 1973-74', in De Blécourt, W. and Davies, O. eds., *Witchcraft Continued: Popular Magic in Modern Europe* (Manchester, 2004) 191-212.

<sup>57</sup> See McCulloch, J., *Colonial Psychiatry and 'the African Mind'* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006) 64-76; Carothers, J. C., *The African Mind in Health and Disease: A Study in Ethnopsychiatry* (Geneva: World Health Organization, 1953).

<sup>58</sup> Diod. Sic. 15.53.4; Polyaeus. *Strat.* 2.3.8; Oracle no. 51, *supra*, p. 181ff.; *supra*, p. 299; Petridou, 2015: 144.

<sup>59</sup> Front. *Strat.* 1.11.16.

arranged for an artist to sneak into the nearby temple of Athene at Thebes during the night and alter the statue so that the goddess was holding the handle of the shield in her left hand instead of it resting at her knees. In the morning, before the troops marched out, Epaminondas ordered the temples to be opened up, and the astonishing sight greatly boosted the soldiers' morale, believing that they were assured of Athene's direct protection in the combat.<sup>60</sup>

One is reminded of the episode recorded by Herodotus concerning Miltiades and the Parian priestess, Timo, during the Athenian siege of Paros in 490 B.C.<sup>61</sup> According to Herodotus, in order to punish the Parians for sending a trireme with the Persian fleet to Marathon, Miltiades had put the island under siege and demanded compensation of 100 talents. However, the Parians put up unexpected, stubborn resistance and Miltiades was making little progress. It was while he was puzzling over his next move that Miltiades was approached by Timo, who revealed to him how he should go about conquering Paros. Although we are not told what it was Timo revealed to Miltiades, Herodotus tells us that in accordance with her advice, he made his way to the hill in front of the city, where the shrine of Demeter the Lawgiver stood, and, unable to open the door in the fence which surrounded the precinct, he jumped over and made straight for the shrine. However, it is Herodotus' next statement, which is of real significance: 'Precisely what he intended to do there, I really don't know – perhaps to meddle with some of the things which it is sacrilege to touch.'<sup>62</sup> The suggestion is that, as some type of stratagem, Miltiades intended to move or arrange sacred items in the temple in some way that would have had forced the Parians to surrender. The obvious inference is that the Parians, upon seeing some sort of divine omen from the disarrayed (or carefully arranged?) sacred objects, would have been so perturbed that it would have caused their capitulation. It is surely a patent case of religious psychological warfare in action, and evidence that *stratego*i regularly employed these types of stratagems as legitimate tactics with anticipated real and effective results. Unfortunately for Miltiades and the Athenians in this case, of course, it went awry when Miltiades was overcome with fear as he approached the doors of the shrine, and fled back to the Athenian camp, damaging his leg in the process as he cleared the fence, which then went gangrenous and forced the expedition to end fruitless after twenty-six days.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> Polyæn. *Strat.* 2.3.12.

<sup>61</sup> Hdt. 6.134.

<sup>62</sup> Hdt. 6.134.2.

<sup>63</sup> For further discussion of the episode, particularly with regards to its implications for the ancient Greeks' views on fate (*moira*) and free will, see Adkins, A. W. H., *Merit and Responsibility* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1960) 123; Eidinow, 2011: 102-104; Harrison, 2000: 228-229.

Elsewhere, Frontinus records how the Spartan king, Archidamos, during his campaign against the Arkadians in 467 B.C., set up weapons in the Lakedaimonian camp and ordered horses to be led around them secretly at night. In the morning, Archidamos pointed out the horse tracks to the assembled men and claimed that Kastor and Polydeukes had ridden through the camp, and consequently convinced his troops that the same gods would be aiding them in the forthcoming battle.<sup>64</sup> In a similar vein, Frontinus records a striking example of psychological warfare employed by the Athenian *strategos*, Perikles. According to Frontinus, Perikles, just before he was about to engage in battle with an enemy army noticed that there was a dense grove of trees nearby, clearly visible to both armies, which was unoccupied and consecrated to Hades. Consequently, Perikles arranged for a man of enormous stature, made even more imposing by high buskins, purple robes, and flowing hair, and mounted on a chariot drawn by magnificent white horses, to be secreted in the copse. Perikles then instructed that upon the signal for battle the man was to drive forth from the trees, calling Perikles by name, and to encourage him by declaring that the gods were lending their aid to the Athenians. The ruse apparently worked brilliantly, as the enemy turned and fled from the battlefield almost before a dart was hurled.<sup>65</sup> Alexander the Great, on the other hand, when making a military sacrifice prior to a battle, purportedly used a preparation to inscribe certain letters on the hand of the priest who was carrying out the ritual, which indicated that victory was vouchsafed to Alexander. Consequently, when the steaming liver had received the impress of the characters and was presented by Alexander to his troops, the soldiers' spirits were raised tremendously, since they thought that the god had given them an assurance of victory.<sup>66</sup> Attalus I, the king of Pergamon, employed the exact same artifice prior to his engagement with a numerically superior force of Galatians at the river Caicus in 241 B.C.<sup>67</sup>

Frontinus also records several examples of the same sort of religious stratagems being used in Roman warfare. For instance, he recounts how the Roman general Quintus Sertorius used to feign dreams and create fictitious omens in order to keep up the morale of his troops. One such

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<sup>64</sup> Front. *Strat.* 1.11.9; Polyæn. *Strat.* 1.41.1. Cf. also Aristomenes' staging of a Dioskouroi epiphany to infiltrate the Lakedaimonian camp and massacre most of the Spartan participants of the subsequent mass sacrifice in honour of the gods: Polyæn. *Strat.* 2.31.4; Petridou, 2015: 143-144.

<sup>65</sup> Front. *Strat.* 1.11.10; Latimer, 2003: 72. For further discussion on stratagematic epiphanies, see Petridou, 2015: 142-156.

<sup>66</sup> Front. *Strat.* 1.11.14. Cf. Polyæn. *Strat.* 4.3.14. Plut. *Apophth. Lacon. Ages. Magni.* 77 attributes this stratagem to Agesilaos.

<sup>67</sup> Front. *Strat.* 1.11.15; Polyæn. *Strat.* 4.20.



wile involved the use of a white doe which he claimed had been given to him by the gods, and that inspired by the divine power of Diana, it talked with him and revealed to him what was expedient to do in war.<sup>68</sup> Indeed, Aulus Gellius tells us that if Sertorius had to give his soldiers a particularly difficult command, he declared that he had been advised by the hind, and that the soldiers all willingly rendered obedience, as if to a god. Lucius Sulla, also, in order to make his soldiers readier for combat, pretended that the future was foretold to him by the gods, and that his last act, before engaging in battle, was to pray in plain view of his army to a small image of Apollo, which he had taken from Delphi, entreating it to speed the promised victory.<sup>69</sup> Meanwhile, Gaius Marius was always accompanied on campaign by a Syrian priestess, Martha, from whom he pretended to learn in advance the outcome of battles.<sup>70</sup>

The idea that sacrifices and omens could be manipulated and used for political and military gain is further illustrated by Aeneas Tacticus' fourth-century B.C. military treatise on siege warfare, which states that 'a *mantis* shall not make sacrifice on his own account without the presence of a magistrate.'<sup>71</sup> The implication here is clearly that unauthorised or subversive prophecies could have damaging effects on the psychology of the besieged citizens and the city's defenders. Furthermore, the manipulation of divination by individuals can be seen also in Roman times with the misuse of augury for political reasons.<sup>72</sup> Thus, to the ancient Greek *strategos* and the Roman *imperator*, oracles and the various other forms of divination were absolutely vital weapons in the armoury of psychological warfare.

One must even wonder if some of the divine epiphanies described above,<sup>73</sup> were not in fact the shrewd devices of quick-witted *strategoi* at key moments in the heat of battle. Keeping in mind the numerous accounts we have of ancient generals, for psychological purposes, inventing *salubria mendacia* in battle, in order to buoy up morale or inflame their troops, such as stating that the enemy's king/commander had fallen, or their left/right wing had broken through enemy lines, one can easily imagine an incisive general, sensing a dangerous or crucial moment in the engagement, creating an extempore *dolus bonus* claiming that a god or hero had been seen along the line joining their side in the combat, or that a goddess had been seen descending and

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<sup>68</sup> Front. *Strat.* 1.11.13. Cf. Aul. Gell. *NA*, 15.22; Val. Max. 1.2.5.

<sup>69</sup> Front. *Strat.* 1.11.11. Cf. Val. Max. 1.2.3; Plut. *Sull.* 29.

<sup>70</sup> Front. *Strat.* 1.11.12. Cf. Val. Max. 1.2.4; Plut. *Mar.* 17.

<sup>71</sup> Aen. *Tact.* 10.4.

<sup>72</sup> See Luck, 1985: 251.

<sup>73</sup> Q.v. *supra*, p. 113ff.

wreaking havoc among the enemy; even better still if that phenomenon would fulfil an earlier oracular prophecy which had promised such aid.<sup>74</sup> Indeed, Onasander states that such ‘deceit is necessary when a great battle has arisen.’<sup>75</sup> He goes on to advise that when a general delivers a stratagem of this sort, such as declaring that the enemy general has been slain, he should do so within earshot of the enemy troops, for by doing so his own soldiers are encouraged and doubly eager to fight, while the enemy, learning of the misfortunes of their side, often lose heart and take flight. There are many other instances of such *salubria mendacia* in warfare in the ancient Graeco-Roman world.<sup>76</sup>

It is not hard to envisage how easily a rumour of an epiphany of a god or hero might spread so quickly during combat and be believed so voraciously afterwards, when one considers the chaos and confusion of battle: all manner of things may be imagined during the emotion of battle or conjured up in the recollection of events at a later time. Carl von Clausewitz famously refers to this ‘fog of war’ when he states: ‘War is the realm of uncertainty; three quarters of the factors on which action in war is based are wrapped in a fog of greater or lesser uncertainty. A sensitive and discriminating judgment is called for; a skilled intelligence to scent out the truth.’<sup>77</sup> Whilst the Duke of Wellington once stated:

The history of a battle is not unlike the history of a ball. Some individuals may recall all the little events of which the great result is the battle won or lost; but no individual can recall the order in which, or the exact moment at which they occurred, which makes all the difference to their value or importance.<sup>78</sup>

The existence of the fact that Greek and Roman generals would go to so much effort to fabricate oracles and omens prior to and during warfare speaks volumes about the importance of religion in ancient warfare. Doubtless some generals would have been interpreting and applying the words and messages of the gods to their strategy and tactics during warfare out of true faith and religious devotion; however, in the clear instances of army commanders scheming and using deceit with regards to oracles and omens, the only possible rationale is that it must have been for psychological reasons to raise the morale and verve of their own

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<sup>74</sup> For instance, Oracle no. 63, *supra*, p. 143ff.

<sup>75</sup> Onas. *Strat.* 23.1

<sup>76</sup> See Hdt. 3.72; Front. *Strat.* 1.11.6, 2.4.9, 2.4.10, 2.7.1, 2.7.2, 2.7.3, 2.7.4, 2.7.7, 2.7.13. For examples of generals telling one wing that the other wing had been victorious, see Livy, 2.64.6-7; Front. *Strat.* 2.4.11, 2.7.10, 2.7.11; Polyaeus. *Strat.* 1.35.

<sup>77</sup> Carl von Clausewitz; *Vom Kriege*, 1.3. See Howard and Paret, 2008: 46.

<sup>78</sup> Quoted in Keegan, J., *The Mask of Command* (London: Cape, 1987) 158.

troops, and to spread fear and doubt among the enemy and to sap their will to fight. The clear inference is that the rank and file of the army must have been very religious and superstitious, so much so that any astute general would have had to make sure that he paid due respect and consideration to those values and beliefs, and, moreover, tap into those convictions to his advantage. Indeed, Frontinus dedicates an entire section in his military treatise on how to dispel the fears inspired in soldiers by adverse omens.<sup>79</sup> It is in this light that we can begin to understand the absolute necessity for Greek *poleis* and *strategoï* to follow protocol faithfully and consult the Oracles before, during, and after war in order to keep both gods and men happy.

The effectiveness of this ancient psychological warfare would have, of course, depended a great deal upon the freedom with which the oracular prognostications delivered to both sides in a conflict were known and disseminated. A shrewd general, such as Epaminondas or Perikles, would obviously have made sure any oracular prophecy that was of benefit to his army and potentially harmful to his enemy would quickly become public knowledge. However, the rumour mill of ancient Greece must have played a key role in fanning the spread of such oracles too. Certainly, the Oracles themselves, as hubs of social activity and centres for intelligence gathering, would have also played a vital role in helping propagate rumours of oracular prophecies all over the ancient Mediterranean basin; no doubt also aided by the resident and wandering assortment of *manteis*, *chresmologoi*, and *magoi* of the ancient world.<sup>80</sup>

Indeed, from the corpus of war oracles examined in this study, it appears that the *strategos* would have been only too aware of any oracular prophecies circulating about his enemy and their mutual conflict, and would no doubt have been more than capable of making sure his opposite number and the opposition troops were fully apprised of any prophecies he wished them to be aware of. Schleifer attests to this fact when he states: ‘In wartime, information receives wider dissemination than in peacetime because of the large numbers of rumour rampant on the front and even greater number circulating in the rear. Rumours are a key means of spreading information because they satisfy the insatiable hunger for news.’<sup>81</sup> Thus, it is clear that in times of war, as Virgil says, ‘*Fama volat*’.<sup>82</sup> Acknowledging that this oracular grapevine was well established in the ancient Greek world, it brings oracular episodes, such as the

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<sup>79</sup> Front. *Strat.* 1.12.

<sup>80</sup> For discussion of Delphi being an information centre for news and gossip of current events in the ancient Greek world, see Robertson, 1987: 6; Nilsson, 1958: 244; Russell, 1999: 88-91; Starr, 1974: 27-28; *supra*, p. 195ff.

<sup>81</sup> Schleifer, 2014: 13.

<sup>82</sup> Verg. *Aen.* 8.554.

Thebans' utilisation of the widely-known prophecy concerning the tomb of the Leuktrides before the Battle of Leuktra, into sharp focus.<sup>83</sup> The Theban military leadership's consequent decision to ostentatiously garland the monument of the Leuktrides in full view of the Lakedaimonians must be seen as an attempt to boost Theban spirits and belief before the combat, whilst simultaneously aiming to enervate Spartan morale and spread doubt amongst their ranks.

### 3.2 Heroes, oracles, and mythological warfare

Perhaps the most potent illustrations we possess of the ancient Greeks' use of religious psychological warfare concerns the oracular prophecies dealing with the translation of heroes' bones and the oracles commanding *poleis* to propitiate certain heroes in order to obtain victory. Aside from the political and strategic role the cults of heroes played in the foreign policies of ancient Greek *poleis*, in terms of making powerful symbolic gestures to other city-states about their territorial claims and ambitions, and asserting divine justification for those same actions,<sup>84</sup> the possession of the remains of a hero and the establishment of a hero cult was also fervently believed to secure the protection and aid of the hero in warfare, which of course had clear attendant psychological benefits.<sup>85</sup> It is consequently because of this belief that we see heroes so heavily involved in ancient Greek warfare, not only in impromptu manifestations on the battlefield,<sup>86</sup> but also being directly invoked by ancient Greek armies to aid them in battle, and used explicitly in their battlefield strategies and tactics.<sup>87</sup>

Indeed, the use of heroes' bones, and the appropriation of them from an enemy state, became a kind of 'mythological warfare' between *poleis*.<sup>88</sup> The act of capturing and transferring relics from an enemy's territory, or at least attempting to subvert the protection afforded to that state by their heroes (usually through prayer and petition), was a common strategy used by *poleis* to steal the supernatural aid of a hero from their enemies and assimilate it into their own army, while at the same time striking a powerful psychological blow against their foes and simultaneously emboldening their own troops. This was certainly the case with Sparta and

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<sup>83</sup> Oracle no. 52, *supra*, p. 297ff.

<sup>84</sup> Q.v. *supra*, p. 66ff.

<sup>85</sup> Q.v. *supra*, p. 84ff.

<sup>86</sup> Q.v. *supra*, p. 85ff.

<sup>87</sup> Q.v. *supra*, p. 123ff.

<sup>88</sup> The phrase 'mythological war' is used by both Blomart and Pariente: see Blomart, 2004: 93; Pariente, A., 'Le monument argien des "Sept contre Thèbes"', in Piérart, M. ed., *Polydipsion Argos* (Paris, 1992) 219.

Orestes' bones during their war with Tegea,<sup>89</sup> and Athens and Theseus' bones during their annexation of Skyros.<sup>90</sup> In both instances both city-states were embroiled in particularly difficult and prolonged struggles with the peoples they were trying to subdue, and consequently sought the counsel of the Delphic Oracle on how to improve their fortunes in the wars. The Pythia responded by commanding them to seek and repatriate the bones of specific heroes in the lands they were attempting to conquer in order to bring about victory. Apart from the political and propagandistic motives of Sparta and Athens for transferring the heroes' remains from their enemies' territory home to their respective cities, the act was also clearly intended to overtly rob their enemies of their heroes' protective power, thereby inflicting considerable psychological damage to enemy morale. It is clear from Pausanias' account of Kimon's transfer of Theseus' bones that he believed that the acquisition of the relics was vital to the capitulation of Skyros, for the island was protected by their sacred power and only fell after they had been taken away.<sup>91</sup> Likewise, Herodotus states emphatically that it was the Spartans' appropriation of Orestes' bones which gave them an upper hand in their war with Tegea,<sup>92</sup> and that ever since the day they came into possession of the hero's relics they had the better of the Tegeans whenever they met each other in battle.<sup>93</sup>

The Spartans were also instructed by the Delphic Oracle on another occasion, c. 550-500 B.C., to bring the bones of Orestes' son, Tisamenos, from Akhaian Helike to Sparta.<sup>94</sup> Although Pausanias does not record the exact circumstances of the Spartans' consultation, it is most likely that Tisamenos, being an Akhaian hero, was a protector of Helike, and that the transfer of his relics played a similar role in a past war between the Lakedaimonians and the Akhaians as Orestes' bones did in the war with the Tegeans.<sup>95</sup>

However, it appears that the appropriation of the power of an enemy's hero could, in fact, be achieved with or without the actual transfer of relics.<sup>96</sup> This was certainly the case of Solon and

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<sup>89</sup> *Q.v.* Oracle no. 17, *supra*, p. 66ff.

<sup>90</sup> *Q.v.* Oracle no. 37, *supra*, p. 70ff.

<sup>91</sup> Paus. 3.3.7.

<sup>92</sup> Hdt. 1.67.

<sup>93</sup> Hdt. 1.68.

<sup>94</sup> Paus. 7.1.3. P-W 34; Fontenrose, Q91.

<sup>95</sup> See Fontenrose, 1978: 75; Leahy, 1955: 26-38.

<sup>96</sup> *Cf.* Athens' attempts to steal Orestes and the Dioskouroi from Sparta discussed above: *supra*, p. 69 n. 146. See also Kron, 1999: 72-73.

the heroes of Salamis, Periphemos and Kykhreus, during Athens' war with Megara,<sup>97</sup> and the Athenians and Aiakos during their war with Aigina.<sup>98</sup>

### 3.2.1 *Solon and Salamis*

With regards to the first episode, the Athenians had originally attempted to take the island of Salamis between 636-632 B.C., but had failed in their efforts and subsequently passed a law forbidding any future attempts on the island.<sup>99</sup> However, approximately thirty years later c. 600 B.C. they renewed their interest in seizing Salamis from the Megarians and launched a new campaign under the command of Solon to conquer the island.<sup>100</sup> According to Plutarch, Solon consulted the Pythia on the expedition and received the following response:

The tutelary heroes of the land where once they lived, with sacred rites  
Propitiate, whom the Asopian plain now hides in its bosom;  
There they lie buried with their faces toward the setting sun.<sup>101</sup>

Upon receiving this prophecy, Solon sailed at night to the island and made secret sacrifices to the heroes Periphemos and Kykhreus who protected the island, and in doing so apparently assured success for his military expedition which followed shortly after.<sup>102</sup> Plutarch also tells us that despite the Athenians wresting the island from Megara's hands, the Megarians continued in their resistance and that finally the Lakedaimonians had to step in to arbitrate over the conflict.<sup>103</sup> In order to further refute Megarian claims to the island, Solon utilised the oracle again to make the point that the dead on the island of Salamis were not buried after the Megarian fashion, with their dead facing east, but were in fact buried in the Athenian manner with the dead facing west.<sup>104</sup> Plutarch also goes on to tell us how Solon further bolstered his

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<sup>97</sup> Oracle no. 16: Plut. *Sol.* 9; P-W 326; Fontenrose, Q69.

<sup>98</sup> Oracle no. 24: Hdt. 5.89.2; P-W 82; Fontenrose, Q131.

<sup>99</sup> Plut. *Sol.* 8.

<sup>100</sup> For the chronology of the conquest of Salamis, see Piccirilli, L., 'Solone e la guerra per Salamina', *Annali della Scuola Normale Superiore di Pisa* 8, 1 (1978) 11; Kearns, 1989: 46-47; Owens, R., *Solon of Athens: Poet, Philosopher, Soldier, Statesman* (Brighton: Sussex Academic Press, 2010) 177-178.

<sup>101</sup> Plut. *Sol.* 9.1, trans. Bernadotte Perrin (*Plutarch's Lives*).

<sup>102</sup> For discussion of the Salaminian heroes, Periphemos and Kykhreus, see: Manfredini, M. and Piccirilli, L., *La vita di Solone*, 1a ed., *Scrittori greci e latini* (Milan: Mondadori, 1977) 134.

<sup>103</sup> Plut. *Sol.* 10.1.

<sup>104</sup> Plut. *Sol.* 10.3. The fourth-century Megarian historian, Hereas, however, denied this and stated that the Megarians also buried their dead facing west. Hereas also argued that the Athenians buried their dead in single depositions in their tombs, whereas the Megarians, like the early inhabitants of Salamis, made three or four. However, Hereas must have had no real knowledge of the graves on Salamis, which are in fact single interments and therefore support Solon's claims. For the archaeological evidence on this issue, see Lorimer, H. L., 'Pulvis et Umbra', *JHS* 53 (1933) 172 n. 70.

case with other sundry oracles that referred to Salamis as being ‘Ionian’, thus further weakening the claims of ‘Dorian’ Megara.<sup>105</sup>

Unfortunately, Plutarch is our only authority for this episode, which, in the absence of further corroborative sources, raises considerable reservations over its authenticity. The fact that the oracle verse itself does not make any direct or indirect reference to Solon, the Athenians, or anyone else for that matter, actually taking the island makes Parke and Wormell dismiss the oracle as being legitimate and in fact believe it to be a much later invention, consequently categorising it among ‘Fictitious Oracles of the Sixth Period (373-300 B.C.)’.<sup>106</sup> However, one need not be so dismissive of the oracle. The poetic and enigmatic verse appears to be archetypal Delphic Oracle, and, apart from the obvious silence of other sources, there is no concrete evidence anywhere else to prove otherwise that the oracle was not in fact received by Solon. Alternatively, it may even have been the case that this was an oracle circulating at the time, which Solon was aware of and decided to exploit, which could help explain the reason why the capture of the island was not explicitly referred to. It also seems entirely plausible that the oracle was indeed a genuine Delphic verse-oracle that could have been received after Solon’s lifetime, but was then later incorporated into a pseudo-historical narrative of Athens’ acquisition of Salamis.<sup>107</sup>

If we are, however, to accept Plutarch’s account that this oracle was indeed received in response to Solon’s consultation, then it provides several important insights. Firstly, there are obvious psychological benefits from receiving such an oracle. Solon’s deliberate fulfilment of the prophecy may have been simply out of reverence to the Oracle’s advice, but in doing so he would have surely gained confidence that he would be successful in taking the island from the Megarians. If we take a more cynical attitude, it may have been for the psychological benefit of the 500 men he took with him on the expedition in order to make them believe they had the island’s heroes on their side. Indeed, it may even have been an attempt to assuage the fears of a nervy, war-weary Athenian Assembly, who according to Plutarch had earlier forbidden any more attempts to take the island of Salamis.<sup>108</sup> Secondly, the main strategy employed by Solon to ensure the capture of Salamis was to win the favour of the supernatural guardians who watched over the island. If we are to believe that Solon was simply making use of an oracle in

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<sup>105</sup> Plut. *Sol.* 10.4.

<sup>106</sup> P-W 326.

<sup>107</sup> See Fontenrose, 1978: 193.

<sup>108</sup> Plut. *Sol.* 8.1

circulation already received by the Athenians, then his interpretation and manipulation of the oracle for strategic purposes is hugely significant.

Alternatively, if we accept that the oracle appeared much later than Solon, regardless of whether it was a genuine oracle, conveniently applied in hindsight to the capture of Salamis, or simply a later invention, it still provides important insights. Either way, the Athenians clearly wanted to use the Delphic Oracle as justification for Solon's actions and to strengthen Athenian claims for ownership of the island. Thus, on one hand, it shows us yet again how oracular prophecies could be wielded by *poleis* to obtain divine sanction for their foreign policy actions, and illustrates that the Delphic Oracle's endorsement, if proven, must have carried considerable political weight, otherwise there would be no reason in city-states going to such efforts to persuade others of its existence. In this example, Athens' case for ownership of the island was decidedly strengthened by arguing that the Oracle had given divine guidance and sanction to Solon to capture the island and also that the oracle provided proof that the island belonged to the 'Ionian' Athenians on account of the way they buried their dead. On the other hand, the story also shows us once more that for the ancient Greek audience it must have been widely accepted that generals would consult Oracles before and during war on such matters. In fact, with regards to Solon, it looks like he regularly consulted, and was supported by, the Delphic Oracle not only in matters of war but also in his political reforms, a fact illustrated by the place Delphi held in his laws.<sup>109</sup>

### 3.2.2 *Athens and Aigina*

The second episode concerns Athens' war with Aigina c. 505 B.C. Herodotus tells us that the Athenians, in response to a series of raids by Aigina on the Attic coast, consulted the Delphic Oracle for advice before they embarked upon countermeasures against the Aiginetans.<sup>110</sup> The Athenians were consequently advised by the Pythia to delay the war for thirty years, and then,

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<sup>109</sup> For instance, under the Solonian constitution the archons had to take an oath that if they transgressed the laws they would have to dedicate a life-size golden statue at Delphi, which illustrates a special reverence for the sanctuary, as too does the appointment of the three *Exegetai Pythochrestoi*: see Parke and Wormell, 1956b: 111. There is even evidence from a couple of oracular fragments that Solon may have consulted the Pythia before introducing his constitutional reforms and indeed may have received explicit encouragement from Apollo to proceed to that end; a fact which would further help to explain Solon's special connection with Delphi. For a fuller discussion, see Parke and Wormell, 1956b: 111-112. Furthermore, Plutarch's reference (*Sol.* 10.4) to Solon using 'sundry oracles' to support Athenian claims on Salamis is particularly telling and further supports the theory that Solon regularly consulted and used the Oracle in his own affairs.

<sup>110</sup> Oracle no. 24: Hdt. 5.89.2; P-W 82; Fontenrose, Q131.



in the thirty-first year after the Aiginetans had started the trouble, they should consecrate a *temenos* to Aiakos and declare war. The Priestess declared that if they followed this advice they would be victorious; however, if they chose not to wait, they would still eventually subdue Aigina, but at huge cost and losses to themselves. The Athenians did go so far as to consecrate a holy precinct to Aiakos in their marketplace, but as they felt so aggrieved by the Aiginetan attacks they could not bear to wait thirty years for their revenge.<sup>111</sup> It is clear, however, from the Oracle's advice to dedicate a shrine to Aiakos, and the Athenians' subsequent construction of a sanctuary to the Aiginetan hero in the Athenian agora, that it was a calculated stratagem to rob Aigina of Aiakos' protection, or at the very least, through their overt show of deference and reverence to him, persuade him not to intervene on Aigina's behalf in the conflict.<sup>112</sup> In both cases, of course, the foundation of the hero cult to Aiakos in Athens would have had significant psychological effects on both sides involved: the Athenians gaining confidence and hope that Aiakos would stay neutral or better still leave Aigina and join them, while doubt and anxiety would have been spread among the Aiginetans, fearing that they might lose the protection of their formidable hero.

We can see, therefore, from the two episodes concerning Solon and Salamis, and Athens and Aigina, an attempt by Athens on two separate occasions to deprive an enemy *polis* of the protective power of its hero by placating the hero with sacrifice rather than attempting to capture his actual remains and transfer them home. However, the existence and strength of this belief in ancient Greek warfare is further illustrated by the fact that the Athenians themselves feared that they too could have the protection of their own guardian heroes stolen from them by their enemies if they came and sacrificed to them. In Euripides' *Erechtheus*, for instance, after Erechtheus' death and the sacrifice of one of Praxithea's daughters, Athena outlines the future sacrificial rituals the Athenians are to perform, which includes a set of sacrifices to be performed to the Hyakinthids in times of war, such as offering a sacrifice preliminary to battle.<sup>113</sup> However, Athena also declares that the sanctuary of the Hyakinthids was to be an *abaton*, and that enemies must be prevented from secretly sacrificing (*thyein*) there, in order to

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<sup>111</sup> Fontenrose once more classifies the oracle as Quasi-Historical but does not give any further explanation as to why he does so: see Fontenrose, 1978: 311. See also, Crahay, 1956: 274-276. For further discussion of this oracle with regards to the importance of interpretation, see *infra*, p. 335ff.

<sup>112</sup> See Larson, J., *Ancient Greek Cult: A Guide* (New York; London: Routledge, 2007) 201-202.

<sup>113</sup> On the heroes Erechtheus and Praxithea, see Mikalson, J. D., *Honor Thy Gods: Popular Religion in Greek Tragedy* (Chapel Hill; London: University of North Carolina Press, 1991) 32-34.

bring victory to themselves and destruction to the Athenians.<sup>114</sup> As Sissa and Detienne state: ‘qu’un ennemi en découvre le chemin et y sacrifie le premier, et aussitôt la puissance des protecteurs se voit menacée de détournement.’ (‘If an enemy discovers the way to a city and is the first to sacrifice there, there is an immediate threat that the power of its protectors will be appropriated by the enemy.’)<sup>115</sup> It should be noted, also, that the two episodes illustrating attempts to steal away the protection of an enemy’s hero without the physical possession of his bones, both come from the late seventh/early sixth centuries B.C. Blomart makes the very plausible suggestion that the Athenians may not have transferred the physical relics in these examples from the archaic period, as that method only became common practice later on.<sup>116</sup> The reference, therefore, to Athens’ fear of the practice being used against them in Euripides’ *Erechtheus* suggests that it still may have been a viable strategy in the fifth century, but that by that stage the more common approach was to uncover and seize the actual remains, hence why reports of such actions become much more prevalent in the sources during the Classical period.

### 3.2.3 *Athens and the bones of Rhesos*

Another way in which heroes’ bones could be used as a supernatural and psychological tactic in warfare was through transporting the actual bones of heroes to the field of battle. We have already seen above, for example, in the instance of the Akhaians bringing the bones of Pelops to Troy, the practice of *poleis* physically bringing the bones of a hero to the land they are attempting to conquer, which subsequently brings about swiftly the desired victory.<sup>117</sup> In this mythological episode, it appears that either the relics were believed to exude some kind of supernatural power or, more likely, that the act ensured that the hero would physically come with them to fight.<sup>118</sup> A very similar example can be seen with the Athenians and the bones of Rhesos during their attempts to subjugate Thrace.<sup>119</sup>

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<sup>114</sup> Eur. *Erechth.* frag. 65A, l. 87-89 Pinaudi. See Blomart, 2004: 93; Sissa, G. and Detienne, M., *La vie quotidienne des dieux grecs* (Paris: Hachette, 1989) 285-286; Kearns, 1989: 48; Ekroth, G., 'Offerings of Blood in Greek Hero-Cults', in Pirenne-Delforge, V. and Suárez de la Torre, E. eds., *Héros et héroïnes dans les mythes et les cultes grecs: actes du colloque organisé à l'Université de Valladolid du 26 au 29 mai 1999* (Liège, 2000) 270; Parker, R., 'Myths of Early Athens', in Bremmer, J. N. ed., *Interpretations of Greek Mythology* (London, 1987b) 202.

<sup>115</sup> Sissa and Detienne, 1989: 216, quoted in Blomart, 2004: 93.

<sup>116</sup> Blomart, 2004: 87.

<sup>117</sup> Q.v. *supra*, p. 86.

<sup>118</sup> For more detailed discussion, see *supra*, p. 83ff.

<sup>119</sup> Oracle no. 39: Polyaen. *Strat.* 6.53; P-W 133; Fontenrose, Q188.

After several failed attempts by Athens to colonise Thrace at the beginning of the fifth century B.C.,<sup>120</sup> the Athenians consulted the Oracle at Delphi regarding a proposed expedition to establish a colony at Ennea Hodoi (Nine Ways) on the River Strymon. According to Polyaeus, the Pythia issued the following response:

Why, Athenians, do you again want to colonise the many-footed place? It is difficult for you without the gods. For it is not fated until you find and bring from Troy the stubble of Rhesos and bury him in his fatherland. Then you can win glory.<sup>121</sup>

Upon receiving this prophecy from the Oracle, the Athenian general, Hagnon, consequently dispatched some men under cover of darkness to Troy to locate the grave of the mythical Thracian king and steal the bones.<sup>122</sup> The men were able to accomplish their mission, and when Rhesos' bones were buried at the banks of the Strymon, Hagnon was able to successfully establish the colony of Amphipolis.<sup>123</sup> Afterwards, Hagnon subsequently built a monument to Rhesos as well as a temple to his mother, the muse Kleio.<sup>124</sup>

Although Delphi is not explicitly mentioned as the Oracle involved, it is more than likely that it was the oracular site concerned, particularly keeping in mind its usual role in such matters and the fact that Polyaeus preserves a prophecy in hexameter and in a style very reminiscent of Delphi.<sup>125</sup> Fontenrose classifies the oracular episode as Quasi-Historical and, indeed, lists it as an example displaying the folkloric theme of 'The Hero Helper'.<sup>126</sup> Parke and Wormell, on the other hand, although they acknowledge that other literary references to a tomb of Rhesos are lacking, suggest that the actions detailed by Polyaeus are remarkably in keeping with the practice of earlier periods, and that it is very likely that some attempt would have been made by Athens to counteract the previous ill-fated attempts to found a colony at that site with a new and powerful piece of magic. Thus, the appropriation of the remains of the Thracian king, Rhesos, and the consequent establishment of a hero-cult, would have, in the minds of the Athenians, protected Amphipolis from Thracian attacks, in the same way that Oedipus' bones

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<sup>120</sup> Lorber, C. C., Schwabacher, W., and McGovern, W. E., *Amphipolis: The Civic Coinage in Silver and Gold* (Los Angeles: Numismatic Fine Arts International, 1990) 1.14; Blomart, 2004: 89.

<sup>121</sup> Polyaeus. *Strat.* 6.53, trans. Joseph Fontenrose (*The Delphic Oracle*).

<sup>122</sup> For Rhesos' participation in the Trojan War as an ally of Troy, and his death there: see Hom. *Il* 10.465-502; Eur. *Rhes.* 279-280, 665-680.

<sup>123</sup> Thuc. 4.102; Diod. Sic. 12.68.2; Polyaeus. *Strat.* 6.53.

<sup>124</sup> Schol. on Aeschines, 34 Dindorf; Eur. *Rhes.* 279-280; Schol. on Eur. *Rhes.* 347; Blomart, 2004: 89. See also Malkin, 1987: 81-84; Hansen, M. H. and Nielsen, T. H., eds., *An Inventory of Archaic and Classical Poleis* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004) 820.

<sup>125</sup> See Parke and Wormell, 1956b: 187.

<sup>126</sup> Fontenrose, 1978: 75.

protected Athens from Theban attack.<sup>127</sup> Consequently, Parke and Wormell conclude that Polyaeus' record seems to preserve a genuine piece of tradition from the fifth century B.C.<sup>128</sup> In both cases of Agamemnon and Pelops' bones, and Hagnon and Rhesos' remains, aside from a bona fide belief on the part of the ancient Greeks that the relics possessed some kind of supernatural power that would help them to overcome their foes, the combination of the fulfilment of an oracular prophecy, which stated that they would be victorious once they had obtained the relics of the specific hero, and the arrival itself of a supernatural ally would have been a tremendous psychological boost to the awaiting soldiers. Of course, the converse would also apply to the opposing army, once they caught wind of the fulfilled prophecy and of their enemy's divine reinforcements.

### 3.2.4 *Aigina, Epidauros, and Athens*

Although the examples looked at so far have concentrated mainly on Athens and Sparta, they were by no means the only city-states involved in mythological warfare. Aigina, for instance, during the same war discussed above with Athens, sent the Aiakidai to the Thebans as allies,<sup>129</sup> while the Spartans allowed the Lokrians to borrow the Dioskouroi to help them against Kroton.<sup>130</sup> We also see Aigina engaged in mythological warfare with Epidauros and then, subsequently, once more with Athens. According to Herodotus the Aiginetans, when they were rebelling from Epidauros c. 625 B.C., stole two sacred Attic olive-wood statues of the goddesses Damia and Auxesia, which the Epidaurians had been previously told to erect by a Delphic oracle in order to end a plague, and then set up a cult at a place called Oie.<sup>131</sup> As the olive wood had been given to the Epidaurians by the Athenians in return for annual tribute to Erechtheus and Athene Polias,<sup>132</sup> the Athenians then attempted to recover the images from Aigina, first by diplomacy and then by force.<sup>133</sup> Although the ensuing events were reported differently by the Aiginetans and the Athenians, both sides agreed on the earthquake and thunderclap, which happened at the time of the assault, and the ancient authors seem to agree that the reasons why

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<sup>127</sup> Q.v. *supra*, p. 87.

<sup>128</sup> Parke and Wormell, 1956b: 188.

<sup>129</sup> Q.v. *supra*, p. 90.

<sup>130</sup> Q.v. *supra*, p. 89.

<sup>131</sup> Hdt. 5.82.1-2; Paus. 2.30.1, 2.32.2; P-W 10-11; Fontenrose, Q63.

<sup>132</sup> Hdt. 5.82-83.

<sup>133</sup> Hdt. 5.84.

the Athenians failed in their attempt to recapture the statues was due to, or at least partly due to, the divine protection of Damia and Auxesia.<sup>134</sup>

### 3.2.5 *Kleisthenes of Sikyon and Argos*

Another intriguing episode of mythological warfare concerns Kleisthenes of Sikyon and the cult of Adrastos during Sikyon's war with Argos c. 580 B.C.<sup>135</sup> According to Herodotus, the Argive hero, Adrastos, the son of Talaos, had once been King of Sikyon, and was therefore worshipped there and had a temple in the marketplace.<sup>136</sup> However, when Kleisthenes went to war with Argos, he attempted to expel the cult of Adrastos from the city because of his Argive lineage. In order to do this, he sought the permission of the Delphic Oracle, but the Pythia in no uncertain terms rebuked him for the suggestion.<sup>137</sup> Undeterred, but nevertheless wary of incurring the wrath of the god for ignoring his warning, Kleisthenes came up with an alternate method of getting rid of the cult of Adrastos from Sikyon. Instead, he decided to send to Thebes to invite the hero Melanippos, the mythical enemy of Argos who was one of the opponents of the Seven against Thebes, to Sikyon, to which the Thebans assented. Kleisthenes subsequently consecrated a very secure sanctuary for Melanippos inside the government house, and then transferred to him the religious honours of sacrifice and festival that had previously been paid to Adrastos.<sup>138</sup> What is more, Blomart suggests that this action probably occurred around the same time that the Argives built a *heroon* to the chiefs of war against Thebes in their agora as a symbol of the military power of Argos.<sup>139</sup>

Although one might argue that Kleisthenes was simply ending the cult of Adrastos out of spite because Sikyon was at war with Argos, and that he was making a political statement, the

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<sup>134</sup> Hdt. 5.85-88. For more detailed discussion and analysis on the episodes, see Figueira, 1985: 49-74; Figueira, T. J., *Athens and Aigina in the Age of Imperial Colonization* (Baltimore; London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991) 117-118; Larson, J., *Greek Heroine Cults, Wisconsin Studies in Classics* (Madison, Wis.: University of Wisconsin Press, 1995) 139-140.

<sup>135</sup> The dating of the war between Sikyon and Argos is far from secure. Kelly and Andrewes suggest that the oracle delivered by Delphi to Kleisthenes concerning Adrastos might have occurred before the First Sacred War, which is generally dated to the 590s: see Kelly, T., *A History of Argos to 500 B.C.* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1976) 123-125; Andrewes, A., *The Greek Tyrants, Classical History and Literature* (London: Hutchinson University Library, 1956) 59. McGregor, on the other hand, believes that Kleisthenes' war with Argos and his anti-Argive policy took place only toward the end of his reign: see McGregor, M. F., 'Cleisthenes of Sikyon and the Panhellenic Festivals', *TAPA* 72 (1941) 266-287.

<sup>136</sup> Hdt. 5.67.

<sup>137</sup> Hdt. 5.67.2; Dio Chrys. *Or.* 3.41; P-W 24; Fontenrose, Q74.

<sup>138</sup> Hdt. 5.67.3-4.

<sup>139</sup> Blomart, 2004: 94; Pariente, 1992: 219-221.

inference is, keeping in mind the other examples we have looked at, that there was also a real fear on Kleisthenes' part that the Argian hero, who had become resident in Sikyon's agora, might be used against him in the war between the two states, and that the subsequent import of Melanippos was brought in to counter that threat and to strengthen the Sikyonian hand against the Argives. The fact that, as Herodotus tells us, Melanippos' cult was established in the greatest possible security inside the government house implies a real fear that it could be used by Sikyon's enemies.<sup>140</sup> In any case, whether it be for propagandistic reasons or for supernatural aid, the action could only have had a positive impact on the morale of the Sikyonian citizens and troops.

### 3.2.6 *Alexander and Tyrian Apollo*

As well as the ancient Greek tactic of translating or subverting the cults of heroes of enemy cities, there is also evidence of *stratego*i attempting to take over the cults of the gods of their foes during war, although admittedly it is very rare and constrained to Alexander the Great, who often worshipped the gods of enemy cities during his conquests. Nevertheless, an intriguing episode concerning Alexander's siege of Tyre illustrates this practice in action.

After defeating Darius III at the Battle of Issus in November 333 B.C., Alexander marched his army into Phoenicia, where Byblos and Sidon quickly submitted to him. When Alexander approached Tyre, the pattern seemed about to continue when the Tyrian envoys met Alexander on the march and promised to do whatever Alexander might command; however, when Alexander declared that he wished to visit the island in order to sacrifice to Melqart, whom he identified with his ancestor Herakles, and, moreover, that an oracle had commanded him to do so,<sup>141</sup> the Tyrians refused to let him as they believed it was a ploy to occupy the city, and instead suggested that he was welcome to sacrifice to Herakles on the mainland in Old Tyre. It seems that Alexander's arrival coincided with Melqart's great annual festival in February 332 B.C.,<sup>142</sup> therefore if Alexander had sacrificed to the god in Tyre at that time it would have been tantamount to acknowledging his sovereignty, hence why the Tyrians declined the request. Alexander, nevertheless, was furious and consequently prepared to lay siege to the island city.

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<sup>140</sup> Hdt. 5.67.3.

<sup>141</sup> Diod. Sic. 17.40.2; Curt. 4.2.2-3; Arr. *Anab.* 2.15.7. Curtius (4.7) tells us that Alexander affirmed he had been ordered by an oracle to sacrifice to the Tyrian Herakles.

<sup>142</sup> Curt. 4.2.10.

There seems, however, to have been considerable apprehension from the Macedonian soldiery about undertaking such a daunting siege of Tyre, which held a formidable defensive position and had once withstood a thirteen-year siege by King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon in the early sixth century B.C.<sup>143</sup> Consequently, Alexander was forced into announcing to his men that he had received a dream-vision in which Herakles had appeared, stretching out his hand to him from the walls of Tyre and beckoning him to enter,<sup>144</sup> whilst foreboding omens, such as blood dripping from the bread of the Macedonians, had to be interpreted in a positive light by the seer Aristander.<sup>145</sup> Indeed, the clear suggestion from Curtius is that this vision was a clever stratagem used by Alexander to raise the morale of his troops in the face of what would be a protracted and laborious siege. For instance, he states: ‘But Alexander, who was by no means inexperienced in working upon the minds of soldiers, announced that an apparition of Herakles had appeared to him in his sleep, offering him his right hand; with that god leading him and opening the way he dreamed that he entered the city.’<sup>146</sup>

Furthermore, during the siege, many of the Tyrians claimed that Apollo had appeared to them and declared that he was going away to side with Alexander because he was displeased at what had been done in the city. To prevent this, the inhabitants attached gold chains to Apollo’s statue and fastened them to the pedestal so that he could not desert them, reviling him as an ‘Alexandrist’.<sup>147</sup> After Tyre eventually fell, Alexander made his long overdue sacrifice to Melqart, and, upon discovering the chained statue of Apollo, removed him from his bonds and declared that from that moment on he should be known as ‘Apollo Philalexandros’.<sup>148</sup> Alexander then paid great tribute to both Herakles and Apollo with sacrifices, lavish processions, athletic and naval competitions, votive offerings, and finally a torchlight review.<sup>149</sup> Indeed, Diodorus tells us that the victorious Greeks sacrificed to Apollo as if it had been through his power and favour that they had captured Tyre.<sup>150</sup> The result of all this was

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<sup>143</sup> See Lane Fox, 2004: 181-182.

<sup>144</sup> Plut. *Alex.* 24.3; Curt. 4.2.17; Arr. *Anab.* 2.18.1.

<sup>145</sup> Diod. Sic. 17.41.7-8; Curt. 4.2.14. For Alexander’s dream-vision of an elusive satyr, see Plut. *Alex.* 24.5.

<sup>146</sup> Curt. 4.2.17.

<sup>147</sup> Plut. *Alex.* 24.7; Curt. 4.3.21-22 (Curtius states that it was only one inhabitant who claimed the vision of Apollo).

<sup>148</sup> Diod. Sic. 17.46.6.

<sup>149</sup> Arr. *Anab.* 2.24.6; Diod. Sic. 17.46.6.

<sup>150</sup> Diod. Sic. 13.108.4-5. For more discussion on the events surrounding the siege of Tyre, see Bosworth, 1988: 64-67; Green, 1991: 247-263; Lane Fox, 2004: 178-193; Cartledge, 2004: 147-150; Fredricksmeier, 2003: 263-266.

that the desolate Tyrians believed that the gods had abandoned them and had been taken over by Alexander and the Macedonians.<sup>151</sup> However, although all of this is extremely revealing about the ancient Greeks' belief in the role of the divine in warfare, it must be remembered that Alexander was really an exception to the rule, and that in general it was the heroes rather than the gods that the ancient Greeks attempted to take over, unlike the Romans.<sup>152</sup>

#### 4. The neutral audience

Psychological warfare is also directed, as Schleifer explains, against neutral audiences outside of the conflict: 'The reason for courting a neutral target audience not directly involved in the conflict is to win its support or at least prevent it from supporting the enemy.'<sup>153</sup> This is another crucial reason why *poleis* in the ancient Greek world felt the need to consult Oracles before going to war, in order to obtain divine endorsement and establish the righteousness of their cause, which could then be used to persuade other city-states to join with them in their just war, or to convince potential adversaries to stay out of the conflict altogether.

We see, for example, several instances where a city-state or general uses an oracular prophecy in an attempt to persuade another *polis* to join with them in an alliance during a war, such as Mardonius using the oracles delivered by Delphi and Ptoion Apollo in an attempt to persuade the Athenians to ally with Persia,<sup>154</sup> Epidamnos appealing to Corinth to join with them in their war against the Illyrians,<sup>155</sup> and Thebes petitioning Aigina to aid them in their war against Athens.<sup>156</sup> In the case of Mardonius' overtures to Athens during the winter of 480/79 B.C., it is apparent that he was intentionally using the oracular prophecies to persuade the Athenians to ally, or at the very least to use the oracles as a makeweight in the negotiations in order to help sway their resolve and their minds. Moreover, the threat of the prophecy being fulfilled and the doom that such a prophesied alliance held for Sparta certainly spurred the Spartans into action and persuaded them to take to the field alongside the Athenians against the Persians in Boiotia. Indeed, the Athenians clearly played on this fear and held the presaged fatal alliance over the Spartans' heads in order to ensure they would immediately join the Athenians on the battlefield

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<sup>151</sup> See Blomart, 2004: 95.

<sup>152</sup> See Blomart, 2004: 94-95.

<sup>153</sup> Schleifer, 2014: 14.

<sup>154</sup> Oracle no. 35, *supra*, p. 233ff.

<sup>155</sup> Oracle no. 40, *supra*, p. 218ff.

<sup>156</sup> Oracle no. 23, *supra*, p. 229ff.



against Mardonius.<sup>157</sup> Perhaps the most striking example we have of this strategy in action, however, is Corinth's patent use of the Delphic Oracle's prognostication given to the Spartans on the eve of the Peloponnesian War, which stated that the Lakedaimonians would win the forthcoming war and Apollo would fight on their side, in an effort to persuade the assembled Peloponnesian League members to vote for war against Athens.<sup>158</sup>

Furthermore, in ancient Greece, the Oracles themselves, and in particular Delphi, often played this role of the neutral target audience of psychological warfare. There are numerous examples where we see both sides of a conflict attempting to influence and persuade the Delphic Oracle of the righteousness of their crusade and thereby hopefully inducing the Pythia to deliver a prognostication to help their cause and undermine their enemies' ambitions. This can be argued to be one of the motivations of Agesipolis' consultation of Olympia and Delphi before his invasion of Argos in 338 B.C.<sup>159</sup> Aside from the apparent, and quite possibly heartfelt, apprehension on Agesipolis' part of breaking a holy truce proffered by the Argives, it is also quite possible that Agesipolis was making such an overt show of consulting not one, but two Oracles on the issue, in order to persuade the Oracles to take Sparta's side against the insincere and impious Argives, and obtain unequivocal divine sanction and a clear moral high ground for his invasion of Argos. The fact that the question posed by Agesipolis to Delphic Apollo, 'Is your opinion as to the truce the same as that of your father?', was actually a leading question, suggests strongly that he was, indeed, trying to cajole the Pythia into giving Sparta a positive prophecy against the Argives. These attempts by *poleis* to curry favour with the Oracles may also help explain, to a certain extent, the series of tit-for-tat consultations of the Delphic Oracle by both Messenia and Sparta during the Messenian Wars, with each side attempting to sway the Pythia over to their side and gain an advantage over the other.<sup>160</sup>

We can even see these tactics being employed among the allied Greek *poleis* prior to the Persian invasion, with several city-states vying for divine influence and pressure to support their own particular battle plans; for instance, in the Delphic Oracle's prophecies delivered to the Athenians on the eve of the Persian Wars, which seemed to support the Peloponnesians' plans to defend the Isthmus of Corinth and to dissuade the Athenians from making their stand at

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<sup>157</sup> Hdt. 8.144.4-5.

<sup>158</sup> Oracle no. 41, *supra*, p. 59ff. For fuller discussion of the Oracle's role in military alliances, see *supra*, p. 217ff.

<sup>159</sup> Oracle no. 48, *supra*, p. 161ff.

<sup>160</sup> Oracle no. 2, *supra*, p. 272ff.; Oracle no. 3, *supra*, p. 184ff.; Oracle no. 4, *supra*, p. 285; Oracle no. 5, *supra*, p. 294ff.; Oracle no. 6, *supra*, p. 231ff.; Oracle no. 7, *supra*, p. 182; and Oracle no. 8, *supra*, p. 286ff.

sea.<sup>161</sup> Similarly, as Parke and Wormell suggest, Aristeides may have later, in 479 B.C., attempted to orchestrate an appropriate response from the Delphic Oracle to supersede the ‘wooden wall’ oracle of the previous year, in order to persuade the Lakedaimonians to abandon their defensive position behind the Isthmus wall and join the Athenians in open combat against Mardonius at Plataea.<sup>162</sup> Indeed, the votive offerings and trophies that were dedicated to Delphic Apollo and the other oracular shrines can be seen to be an integral part of the psychological warfare between city-states to sway the neutral Oracles over to their side. This can be seen in Athens’ complaint to Zeus Ammon at Siwa that he seemed to be favouring the Spartans over the Athenians in their war despite the fact that they were much more generous in their offerings to the gods.<sup>163</sup> The Oracle’s response, of course, was to declare that the sincere and pious reverence shown to the gods by the Lakedaimonians meant much more than the dissembling entreaties and ostentatious dedications of *poleis* seeking to win the god’s favour.

## 5. Conclusions

Baynes avows plainly that ‘The maintenance of morale is recognized in military circles as the most important single factor in war.’<sup>164</sup> It is a precept that has been echoed throughout the history of warfare by great commanders and military writers alike.<sup>165</sup>

It was this fundamental need to ensure that an army’s mindset and morale were in the optimum state for the rigours and trials of battle, which drove *poleis* and *strategoï* to consult the Oracles for divine sanction and authority for prosecuting their wars in the first instance, and to utilise oracular prophecies as psychological weapons during warfare. Consequently, we find that Oracles were an inextricable part of, and omnipresent force in, ancient Greek warfare. The need to establish a strong *ius ad bellum* to ensure that the *polis* and army went to war in the right frame of mind, composed and assured in the belief that the gods were on their side, meant that the Oracles had a massive psychological role to play in warfare right from the very beginning of a conflict. Furthermore, oracular prophecies were used from the start of conflicts to persuade or dissuade other *poleis* to join or refrain from entering the fray.

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<sup>161</sup> Oracle no. 31, *supra*, p. 275; Evans, 1982: 27; Grundy, 1901: 237; Robertson, 1987: 1-20; Hammond, 1982: 92.

<sup>162</sup> Oracle no. 36, *supra*, 169; Parke and Wormell, 1956b: 175.

<sup>163</sup> Oracle no. 50, *supra*, p. 41.

<sup>164</sup> Baynes, 1967: 92.

<sup>165</sup> See *supra*, p. 31.

During the war itself, Oracles were regularly consulted and their prophecies used to embolden one's own troops and detrimentally affect the enemy's morale. Indeed, we have seen numerous examples of discerning commanders in the Graeco-Roman world of warfare, blatantly and unashamedly using religion and the superstitious nature of the rank-and-file soldier for psychological purposes on the battlefield. Moreover, Frontinus, when discussing Sertorius' manipulation of the Lusitanian troops under his command, makes it perfectly clear that it was not just the superstitious barbarian auxiliaries or the simple-minded who believed in such ruses involving omens, prophecies and divination, but the entire army when it was believed that they genuinely came from the gods.<sup>166</sup>

Although a pious and devout *strategos* such as Xenophon may have followed the directives of the Oracles out of religious deference, other celebrated generals, such as Kleomenes, Perikles, Epaminondas and Alexander, without doubt impenitently exploited, manipulated, and falsified oracles when and where it suited them for psychological purposes. That being said, even for a truly reverent commander, the opportunity to use an oracle to gain a psychological advantage over his enemies would have been impossible to neglect. Besides the examples already discussed above, aimed by *poleis* and *strategoï* at the home and enemy audiences, oracles could also be used by generals as part of their rhetoric before combat in their pre-battle exhortations, in an attempt, once again to provoke the necessary reaction from their troops before the clash. One can imagine a shrewd general, out of necessity, inventing a spur-of-the-moment *salubre mendacium* before battle, in the shape of a convenient and expedient oracle, unveiled at the perfect time to raise morale and fire the blood before engaging the enemy.<sup>167</sup> We have already seen an example of this in action on the eve of the Battle of Plataea, when Mardonius conveniently revealed to the assembled commanders that he was aware of an oracle which stated that the Persians would invade Greece, sack Delphi, and subsequently be destroyed.<sup>168</sup> He then declared that as the Persians would deliberately stay away from the sanctuary at Delphi, the prophecy would not be fulfilled and therefore the commanders should rejoice and be sure that they would achieve victory against the Greek Confederacy the next day. Although we cannot be certain whether Mardonius invented the oracle, his timing to divulge this knowledge was particularly apt, considering the fact that the Persian army had not received favourable

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<sup>166</sup> Front. *Strat.* 1.11.13.

<sup>167</sup> For more on the use of rhetoric by generals in battle, see Bliese, 1994: 105-130; and Anson, 2010: 304-318; *supra*, 102ff., 103 n. 305 .

<sup>168</sup> Oracle no. 33, *supra*, p. 185ff.

omens from their sacrifices to go on the offensive for the past ten days and he was about to issue orders to defy those portents and launch an attack against the allied Greeks. Using the Medised Greeks' own revered Delphic Oracle to overcome their apprehension at contravening the omens would have been a shrewd, calculated move and a clever piece of sophistic rhetoric on Mardonius' part, which would undoubtedly have helped mollify their fears and boosted their spirits on the eve of a major battle. Another potent example can be seen in Alexander's use of the oracle of Ammon to incite and rouse his troops in his battlefield address at Gaugamela in 331 B.C.<sup>169</sup>

Thucydides, through the voice of Alkibiades, states in his history of the Peloponnesian War: 'Without fail, a man harms his foes thus: those things that they dread most he discovers, carefully investigates, then inflicts upon them.'<sup>170</sup> The same perspective is shown in Polybius in the Hellenistic period when he states:

'There is no more precious asset for a general than a knowledge of his opponent's guiding principles and character, and anyone who thinks the opposite is at once blind and foolish...In the same way the commander must train his eye upon the weak spots in his opponent's defence, not in his body but in his mind.'<sup>171</sup>

It is abundantly clear, therefore, from the plentiful evidence we have surveyed thus far that the ancient Greeks were acutely aware of the benefits of psychological warfare. Kiesling, moreover, points to two examples from Herodotus that distinctly illustrate that the Greeks and Persians clearly understood and employed psychological warfare: Xerxes' decision to allow the Greek spies to return to Greece with intelligence about the size of this force;<sup>172</sup> and Themistokles, during the retreat from Artemisium, leaving messages carved into rocks inviting the Ionians to desert the barbarians, with the purpose of either encouraging the Ionians and Karians to switch sides, or, if that was not possible, at least sow seeds of doubt into Xerxes' mind about the loyalty and commitment of the Ionian men under his command.<sup>173</sup> Consequently, taking into account both the religiosity and superstitiousness of the ancient Greeks, and the profusion of war oracles recorded in the sources, we must accept that oracular prognostications would have had a profound effect on the psychology of the *polis* and the army

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<sup>169</sup> Oracle no. 59, *supra*, p. 150.

<sup>170</sup> Thuc. 6.91.6.

<sup>171</sup> Polyb. 3.81.1-3, trans. Ian Scott-Kilvert (*The Rise of the Roman Empire*): see Polybius, *The Rise of the Roman Empire*, translated by Ian Scott-Kilvert, with an introduction by F. W. Walbank (London, 1979).

<sup>172</sup> Hdt. 7.146.

<sup>173</sup> Hdt. 8.22.1-3.

in times of war, and that *poleis* and *strategoi* would most assuredly have also used them to their advantage against their enemies. As Kiesling so shrewdly avers: ‘Modern historians who scoff at Herodotos’ interest in prophecy might be less supercilious if they thought about oracles in the context of psychological factors in warfare.’<sup>174</sup>

Thus, it appears that the Oracles were universally and habitually consulted by the ancient Greeks in matters of war, and their pronouncements obeyed, exploited, manipulated, and even fabricated by *poleis* and *strategoi* to achieve key psychological goals: chiefly, to raise one’s own morale, and to deflate, and hopefully damage irreparably, the enemy’s spirits; to persuade friendly *poleis* to join in military alliances, or to convince potential enemy *poleis* to remain neutral in the conflict; and to overtly establish a moral and virtuous *casus belli* to begin with. As Edwin G. Boring states: ‘Defeat in war is ultimately a conquest of the mind.’<sup>175</sup> It is in this context that the belief in, and exploitation of, the divine and supernatural played a crucial and intricate role in ancient Greek warfare.

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<sup>174</sup> Kiesling, E. C., ‘The Oldest ‘New’ Military Historians: Herodotos, W.G. Forrest, and the Historiography of War’, in Derow, P. and Parker, R. eds., *Herodotus and his World: Essays from a Conference in Memory of George Forrest* (Oxford; New York, 2003) 97.

<sup>175</sup> Boring, 1945: 485.

## CONCLUSION

For far too long historians have been too concerned with the veracity and authenticity of oracular consultations and prophecies instead of concentrating on what the oracular episodes recorded by our sources reveal about what the ancient Greeks believed apropos, and expected from, their oracular shrines in times of war, and, crucially, what they reveal about the psychological impact of the actual consultations themselves and their resultant prophecies on the citizens and armies of ancient Greek *poleis* in wartime.

Although our survey has been as far as possible a historical and philosophical enquiry, most of the evidence we have looked at comes from literature and takes the form of oracular stories preserved in the historical accounts of our ancient writers. It is essentially for this reason why many modern historians have too often dismissed war oracles as being merely narrative tools used by the ancient authors to develop a series of events into a plot.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, the question of whether the oracles were actually delivered by the Delphic Oracle and all the other oracular shrines of ancient Greece arises in virtually every discussion of divination in ancient Greece. When dealing with this issue, one must wade through a sea of scepticism regarding the prognostications of the Oracles of ancient Greece, based on the rational premise that the Oracles were unable to predict the future, therefore all of their prophecies must be fabricated or *post-eventum* inventions.

However, such a conservative approach to the historicity of the oracles propounded by the likes of Crahay and Fontenrose is erroneous at best and fundamentally wrong. To do so is to totally neglect the Greek mindset of the time: to the Greeks, the Oracles of Delphi, Dodona, Olympia, Didyma, and the profusion of other oracular shrines strewn throughout ancient Greece and the Mediterranean basin, existed and the gods spoke through them. Beyond a shadow of a doubt there is a great deal of *post-eventum* fabrication, but at the same time there is also a plethora of authentic prophecies. Time after time the ambiguity of the Oracles' language enabled it to be adapted to all manner of circumstances and events through the interpretation of the Greeks who sought their counsel. Even when the oracles are too good to be true and their prophecies contain too much specific historical reality to be anything other than *post-eventum* inventions, the fact

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<sup>1</sup> For further discussion, see Stoneman, 2011: 12-13. See also Winkler, J. J., 'The Mendacity of Kalasiris and the Narrative Strategy of Heliodorus' *Aithiopika*', *Yale Classical Studies* 27 (1982) 93-158; Said, S., 'Oracles et devins dans le roman grec', in Heintz, J. G. ed., *Oracles et Prophéties dans l'Antiquité: Actes du Colloque de Strasbourg, 15-17 juin 1995* (Paris, 1997) 367-403.

that *poleis* went to the trouble of creating such tales, whether it be for political clout, divine sanction, propagandistic purposes, or psychological machinations, shows us clearly that the Oracles wielded great power and influence in the ancient Greek world.

However, in reality, a more important question to ask for our purposes is whether the ancient Greeks themselves considered the oracles recorded by writers such as Herodotus and Pausanias to be authentic.<sup>2</sup> Mikalson argues correctly and persuasively that they did: he asserts that there is simply no evidence that they did not, and that none of the oracles are rejected as forgeries in classical times.<sup>3</sup> Even the ever-sceptical Crahay deigns to admit the same when he states: ‘Tout ce que nous pouvons attendre d’Herodote, c’est une idée de ce que l’on croyait de son temps.’ (‘All you can expect from Herodotus, is an idea of what was believed in his times.’)<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, as Mikalson neatly summarises: ‘Whatever their origins, however they may have been revised or reshaped, the Delphic oracles seem to have been accepted after Herodotus as Herodotus presented them. And if so, they become part of the corpus of Greek religious beliefs, whatever fact or fiction lies behind them.’<sup>5</sup>

It has certainly been important to distinguish between ‘historical’ and ‘legendary’ responses of the Oracles during our analysis, as Fontenrose does with the prophecies of the Delphic Oracle, but in truth, in terms of understanding the ancient Greeks’ attitude to Oracles, it matters very little, for even the legendary war oracles strengthen our understanding of the historical consultations and what they reveal about the ancient Greeks’ beliefs regarding oracles in war. Indeed, as Stoneman quite rightly argues: ‘Stories are also an important buttress of religious ideas. Stories have a mnemonic value, they help you to fix certain patterns (such as gods) in your mind. So stories about oracles are a way of emphasizing the power of the gods and ensuring that, in real life, people find it worthwhile to turn to them.’<sup>6</sup> In this regard Fontenrose’s and Parke and Wormell’s attempts to distinguish between authentic and fictional Delphic responses prove both difficult and futile. Moreover, as Juul points out, even Fontenrose himself paradoxically recognises time and again that most Greeks in Antiquity considered all oracular

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<sup>2</sup> It is clear from Herodotus’ own words that he himself believed unequivocally in the power of prophecy: see Hdt. 8.77; Harrison, 2000: 130.

<sup>3</sup> Mikalson, 2003: 58.

<sup>4</sup> Crahay, 1956: 107. See also Gould, J., ‘On Making Sense of Greek Religion’, in Easterling, P. E. and Muir, J. V. eds., *Greek Religion and Society* (Cambridge, 1985) 221 n. 17; Flower, H. I., ‘Herodotus and Delphic Traditions about Croesus’, in Flower, M. A. and Toher, M. eds., *Georgica: Greek Studies in Honour of George Cawkwell* (London, 1991) 65-66.

<sup>5</sup> Mikalson, 2003: 58. See also Raphals, 2013: 28-30; and Maurizio on oracles as part of an evolving oral tradition: Maurizio, 1997: 312-313; *supra*, p. 11.

<sup>6</sup> Stoneman, 2011: 13.

responses to be true, even the legendary responses, which were regarded as belonging to early Greek history.<sup>7</sup>

Therefore, taking into account all of the war oracles recorded by the ancient writers and discussed in this enquiry, what is abundantly clear from the extant evidence is that the ancient Greeks fervently believed in and habitually consulted Oracles pre-war, intra-war, and post-war on all different kinds of matters concerning warfare and foreign policy, and that in doing so the Oracles played an intrinsic and key role in the psychological preparation and decision-making processes of *poleis* before war, had an ongoing involvement and powerful influence on troop morale and army tactics during a conflict, and their prognostications were regularly utilised as powerful tools in the psychological intrigues between *poleis* both on and off the battlefield.

### **Psychological reasons for consulting oracles**

Having examined and established the ancient Greeks' avid belief in divine intervention in warfare and the expected participation of the gods and heroes in battle (along with a wider belief in other supernatural forces at play in ancient warfare),<sup>8</sup> it should come as no surprise to see why oracular divination played such a key role in ancient Greek warfare.

As Chapter 1 demonstrated, there were numerous motivations at work behind the ancient Greeks' consultations of the Oracles before and during war, which are often extremely difficult to disentangle from one another, and which, in fact, must have frequently been operating concomitantly. These multifarious motives for seeking the counsel of the gods on matters of war all had, in same way or another, a significant influence on *polis* and troop psychology and consequent foreign policy and military decision-making.

The most obvious way in which the Oracles could affect *polis* psychology and decision-making was through genuine reverence and deference to the gods. One must accept that if a genuinely religious *polis* or individual consulted the Oracle on a matter of war then the resultant prophecy from the god would have had a powerful impact upon the recipient and affected their mindset and influenced their decision-making processes. It is a view vigorously shared by Bowden, when he says of ancient Athens that: 'decision-making in democratic Athens was heavily

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<sup>7</sup> Juul, 2010: 20; Fontenrose, 1978: 9, 89, 215.

<sup>8</sup> Chapter 2, *supra*, pp. 112-137.



influenced by concern to establish and to follow the will of the gods.’<sup>9</sup> If this can be said of enlightened democratic Athens of the fifth and fourth centuries B.C., the same can surely be safely applied to the rest of the ‘less progressive’ ancient Greek *poleis* as well.

It was this need to obtain the divine sanction of the gods which was the most important reason behind the ancient Greeks’ consultation of Oracles before war and on campaign, for several crucial psychological purposes. First and foremost, there was, as we have seen, a great fear among the ancient Greeks of what might happen to them if they neglected or ignored the gods on matters of great import, hence there was a strong compulsion to habitually consult the oracular shrines on issues of war in order to fulfil protocol and ensure that they did not upset the gods at such a perilous time. As Dodds emphatically states: ‘To offend the gods by doubting their existence, or by calling the sun a stone, was risky enough in peacetime; but in war it was practically treason – it amounted to helping the enemy.’<sup>10</sup> Simultaneously, of course, there was an immense desire to obtain the support and aid of the gods for one’s side in the forthcoming conflict or battle. It is this last motive, in conjunction with the need to establish a moral high ground in a war, which was potentially the most important psychological reason for obtaining the divine sanction of the gods in war. To begin with, obtaining the positive affirmation of the god would obviously help to mollify the fears and anxiety of the citizenry and soldiery of the *polis* at such a hazardous and uncertain time in their lives, and provide reassurance and comfort to a *polis* that their decision to go to war was the correct one. As Parker succinctly and rightly asserts: ‘Oracles traditionally set the seal of absolute rightness on a crucial collective decision.’<sup>11</sup> Secondly, by clearly obtaining divine sanction for a military venture, the *polis* was able to overtly establish the righteousness of the forthcoming war, ensuring that the citizens and warriors rallied to the cause and entered the fray with sufficient courage and resolve, the importance of which was something that was patently understood by the historians and generals of the time.<sup>12</sup> Thus, in one fell swoop obtaining divine sanction provided both reassurance and comfort in a time of great uncertainty and provided a clear *ius ad bellum*, which was absolutely vital for the successful prosecution of a war.

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<sup>9</sup> Bowden, 2005: 1.

<sup>10</sup> Dodds, 1951: 191.

<sup>11</sup> Parker, 2000: 103.

<sup>12</sup> Q.v. *supra*, p. 53ff.

Furthermore, due to the ancient Greeks' widespread and deep-seated belief in divine intervention in war, the obtainment of positive affirmation from an Oracle provided an additional psychological boost to the citizens' and army's morale and courage, as they could enter the war emboldened by the conviction that the gods and heroes would come to their aid against their foes when combat commenced: a truth borne out by the phenomenon of the widely-reported battlefield epiphany.<sup>13</sup> In this way, the divine sanction of the Oracle played an absolutely vital role in psychologically preparing the ancient Greeks for war, with each side believing that they went into battle with the gods on their side, bolstered by the belief that if the gods were on their side, who could stand against them?<sup>14</sup>

On a more personal level, particularly in the cases of individuals consulting the Oracles on questions of war, the consultation of the gods was also a way of managing risk and giving individuals some feeling of control over their fate, especially when they were about to embark upon such a dangerous venture. Moreover, as we have also seen, we must not forget that there was a widely-held, genuine belief that the Oracles could give humans a glimpse into the future, which would help them gain an advantage in war against their enemies. As well as this, of course, there was also a more practical and earthly incentive to consult the oracular shrines in order to obtain military and political intelligence of one's enemies by availing of the Oracles' unique position in the ancient Greek world and their invaluable knowledge of current affairs, gossip, and local terrain.

### **The role and influence of the Oracles in *polis* decision-making.**

However, although there were major psychological (and pragmatic) incentives for obtaining divine sanction on questions of war and a strong desire by *poleis* to establish and fulfil the directives of the gods, it does not mean that Greeks blindly put their faith and fate in the hands of the Oracles or that their utterances were mechanically followed and obeyed by even the most religious and reverent of the Greeks: several of our examples clearly demonstrate that this was certainly not the case.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Q.v. *supra*, p. 124ff.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. the biblical adage (*Romans* 8:31): 'If God is for us, who can be against us?'

<sup>15</sup> For example, Sparta's consultation of the Delphic Oracle before the Peloponnesian War (Oracle no. 41, *supra*, p. 59ff.), and Xenophon's personal consultation of Delphic Apollo before this expedition to Persia (Oracle no. 45, *supra*, p. 95ff.).

This, of course, raises the enduring question of whether the Oracles were instigators of foreign policy and military strategy or merely tools to authorise decisions that were already made by individuals and *poleis*. It is a recurring question, which perhaps will never be definitively answered.<sup>16</sup>

In terms of initiating foreign policy and inciting *poleis* to military action, I do not think that we can accredit the Oracles with such tremendous power and influence. The only real example we possess of this is the Delphic Oracle impelling the Lakedaimonians to expel the Peisistratidai from Athens,<sup>17</sup> but the instigation of such inter-*polis* conflict has to be seen as the exception rather than the rule. There is some evidence from elsewhere, outside the realm of warfare, where the Delphic Oracle can be seen to provoke *poleis* into certain actions and heavily influence the course of events, such as the Pythia in 532 B.C. refusing to issue any oracles on any matter to Athenian consultants until Athens had paid the sacred Olympic fine issued by the Eleians,<sup>18</sup> or the Oracle's pronouncements concerning the restoration of Pleistoanax in 427/426 B.C.<sup>19</sup> Furthermore, Parker argues that if Lysander had been successful in bribing the authorities at Delphi, Dodona, and Ammon to suggest that the Spartans make their kingship elective,<sup>20</sup> it would have probably been through similar spontaneous utterances that the divine command would have been delivered to the Spartan *pythioi*.<sup>21</sup> However, it is also striking to note that, with the exception of the Athenians and the Olympic fine, in all of the aforementioned instances of the Delphic Oracle inciting a *polis* to action there were ancient allegations of bribery and corruption surrounding them. Thus, as Parker astutely argues, for the Oracles to proactively influence the affairs of the ancient Greeks it was seen as 'a perversion of its proper nature.'<sup>22</sup> That being said, the accusations of bribery in themselves are demonstrative evidence of the power and influence of the Oracle in the ancient Greek world.

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<sup>16</sup> As Parke and Wormell state vis-à-vis the Delphic Oracle: 'There remains the deeper and not completely soluble question how far in issuing responses the Pythia was directing the enquirer on any matter and how far she was merely registering a decision on which the enquirer's mind was already made up.' See Parke and Wormell, 1956b: 416.

<sup>17</sup> Oracle no. 22, *supra*, p. 203ff.; Hdt. 5.63. For further discussion of the Alkmaionidai's influence at Delphi and alleged incitement of the Pythia to urge the Spartans to liberate Athens from the Peisistratidai, see Scott, 2014b: 99-101.

<sup>18</sup> Paus. 5.21.5.

<sup>19</sup> Thuc. 5.16. See also Hodkinson, 1983: 273-274; Parker, 2000: 99, 105-106. Cf. also the Delphic Oracle's role in the deposal of Demaratos in 491 B.C.: Hdt. 6.66.

<sup>20</sup> Diod. Sic. 14.13.4-5; Plut. *Lys.* 25.2; Nep. *Lys.* 3.2.3.

<sup>21</sup> Parker, 2000: 99; Cartledge, 1987: 96.

<sup>22</sup> Parker, 2000: 105.

Consequently, in terms of the Oracle's influence in warfare, apart from the exceptional example of the Spartans' expulsion of the Peisistratidai, it is fair to say that the oracular shrines were not really a driving force in initiating foreign policy, but their subsequent prophecies *did* have a major influence on military strategy and psychology. As Raphals correctly asserts: 'In short, there is little reason to believe that a response from Delphi could entirely prevent a prior decision to go to war, but it could affect how military action was conducted.'<sup>23</sup> That in no way, however, detracts from the importance of oracular consultations before war in the first place – we have seen already the significant psychological reasons for doing so and the vital part it played in psychologically preparing the ancient Greeks for war. Badian, when discussing Sparta's consultation of Delphi before the Peloponnesian War,<sup>24</sup> acknowledges that the Spartans had to consult their allies before the Peloponnesian War, but above all, they had to consult Delphi, which was probably traditional Spartan practice in any serious situation.<sup>25</sup> However, as we have seen, it went far beyond straightforward custom and habit, and, that in times of war, as Badian neatly puts it: 'a mission to Delphi was an inescapable necessity.'<sup>26</sup>

The real power and influence of the Oracles lay, therefore, not in the devising and instigation of the foreign policies of Greek *poleis*, but in the psychological impact of their prognostications in response to the enquiries of the ancient Greeks. It is clear that the Oracles' prophecies played a vital role in *polis* and military decision-making, as demonstrated by the intense debate and discussion of them in *poleis*' assemblies.<sup>27</sup> Moreover, all of this public debate of the oracles was assisted by the expert help (or hindrance, depending on one's outlook) of the *manteis* and *chresmologoi*, who recited and interpreted the oracles, and helped sway the *demos* towards making their final decisions. This is most clearly demonstrated in Thucydides' condemnation of the Athenians for listening to the *manteis* and *chresmologoi* in the aftermath of the failed Sicilian expedition,<sup>28</sup> in the furore and debate stirred up by the sight of Archidamos laying waste to Athenian farming land at Acharnai in 431 B.C.,<sup>29</sup> and in the Messenian elder who

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<sup>23</sup> Raphals, 2013: 244.

<sup>24</sup> Oracle no. 41, *supra*, p. 59ff.

<sup>25</sup> Badian, 1990: 74.

<sup>26</sup> Badian, 1990: 74.

<sup>27</sup> For instance, the Athenians' debate of the 'wooden wall' oracle: Oracle no. 31, *supra*, p. 275ff.; the Athenians' discussion of various oracles before the Sicilian expedition: Oracle no. 43, *supra*, p. 246ff.; the Thebans' discussion of the Delphic prophecy during the Thebo-Athenian conflict at the end of the sixth century B.C.: Oracle no. 23, *supra*, p. 229ff.; and the Spartans' discussion of the 'tripod' oracle delivered to the Messenians: Oracle no. 5, *supra*, p. 294ff.

<sup>28</sup> Thuc. 8.1.1; Oracle no. 43, *supra*, p. 246ff.

<sup>29</sup> Thuc. 2.21.3: 'the *chresmologoi* declaimed oracles of every kind, and everyone listened to them according to their own dispositions.'; *supra*, p. 281ff.

chided the Messenian people for listening to the offhand pronouncements of the *manteis* during the Spartan siege of Mt. Ithome c. 725 B.C.<sup>30</sup> From examples such as these it becomes clear that, as both Parker and Johnston correctly argue, the Oracle was only one link in a long line of transmission.<sup>31</sup> Once the envoys from the various Greek *poleis* received their responses and carried them back home, often to a distant *polis*, they then underwent a further process of lengthy debate and intense scrutiny by the citizens of the *polis* before a common interpretation could be agreed upon. In this way, as Parker succinctly puts it: ‘Arguments about the interpretation of particular oracles are so common as to suggest that they are not a by-product but an essential part of the institution’s working.’<sup>32</sup>

### **Know Thyself: the gift of interpretation**

It is at this point in the divine consultation process that the critical importance of interpretation comes to the fore, and it is here where the ancient Greeks perhaps best demonstrate their independence of thought and free will, and their innate reluctance to comply with oracular pronouncements with blind obedience. We have already seen on several occasions that the ancient Greeks sometimes refused to follow the Oracle’s commands or did not heed its warnings, or contorted and twisted the oracle’s meaning to extremes to suit their own purposes and intent.<sup>33</sup>

The most compelling example, however, of the power of interpretation is the ‘wooden wall’ oracle given to the Athenians on the eve of the Persian invasion. In this famous episode, the Athenian *demos*, with the help of Themistokles, were able to glean a slim glimmer of hope from the ominous and foreboding words of the Priestess and, overlooking the unmistakably menacing oracles, determined to stand against the Persians.<sup>34</sup> Moreover, Robertson maintains that the Athenian military strategy must have been debated in the Ekklesia beforehand, just as the response would have been afterwards, and that the wooden fence and navy were not the only suggestions put forward at the debate – the Oracle may have in fact been referring to the wall being built across the Isthmus by the Peloponnesians.<sup>35</sup> Consequently, the Delphic

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<sup>30</sup> Diod. Sic. 8.8.2; Oracle no. 2, *supra*, p. 272ff.

<sup>31</sup> See Parker, 2000: 80; Johnston, 2008: 51.

<sup>32</sup> Parker, 2000: 80.

<sup>33</sup> For example, the Athenians’ occupation of the Pelasgian ground: Oracle no. 42, *supra*, p. 281ff.; the Athenians’ disregard of the Pythia’s advice to avoid going to war with Aigina for thirty years: Oracle no. 24, *supra*, p. 314ff.; and Argos’ declaration that they would join the allied Greek confederacy against Xerxes in spite of Delphic Apollo’s prohibition: Oracle no. 30, *supra*, p. 222ff.

<sup>34</sup> Oracle no. 31, *supra*, p. 275ff.

<sup>35</sup> Robertson, 1987: 2-3.

Oracle's pessimistic prophecy to the Athenians can be argued to be an attempt to dissuade the Athenians from their strategy, whilst advocating and supporting the Spartans' plan of defending the Isthmus wall. Yet ultimately the ambiguity of the Pythia's words, despite being extremely foreboding and discouraging, empowered the Athenians to stick with their strategy by way of their own interpretation.<sup>36</sup>

Consequently, as Parker correctly argues, divination 'left room for manoeuvre even to the pious.'<sup>37</sup> Indeed, Parker goes on to astutely assert that even the devout Spartans manipulated it without even realising that this was what they were doing.<sup>38</sup> It is why we see many examples of, as Parker neatly puts it, the 'obdurate capacity not to expose oneself to unpalatable advice, or at least to evade it when it comes.'<sup>39</sup> Xenophon, for instance, not asking the Delphic Oracle if he should go on campaign, merely which gods he should propitiate to ensure success, is a way, whether it be consciously or subconsciously, of avoiding a negative prophecy he does not want to hear. Whereas, the Athenian *theopropoi*, upon receiving the dismal prognostication from Delphic Apollo at the first time of asking, refused to leave the shrine until they received a more favourable response from the god. Even if an unfavourable prophecy or omen did occur, a clever interpretation could transform it from something ominous and foreboding to something positive and encouraging. Frontinus, for instance, provides several examples of how past generals were able to adroitly dispel the fears inspired in soldiers by adverse omens.<sup>40</sup>

In many ways, therefore, the purpose of oracular consultations on matters of war can be argued to be 'one of confirming the consultants in their own inclinations.'<sup>41</sup> From this perspective the role of interpretation is absolutely vital in allowing the Greeks to hear the answer they want to receive and in particular to overcome problematical oracles, such as the 'wooden wall' oracle, or that of the oracle directing the Thebans to seek the nearest to them for help. It is in this light that the ancient Greek aphorism γνῶθι σαυτὸν ('Know Thyself'), inscribed in the *pronaos* of

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<sup>36</sup> Robertson, 1987: 1-20. See also Mikalson, 2003: 52-59.

<sup>37</sup> Parker, 1989: 159.

<sup>38</sup> Parker, 1989: 160.

<sup>39</sup> Parker, 2000: 105.

<sup>40</sup> Front. *Strat.* 1.12. Cf. Lysander's clever interpretation of the Delphic oracle warning the Spartans against a lame kingship, which Lysander twisted to mean illegitimacy rather than physical lameness in support of Agesilaos' claim to the Spartan throne: Plut. *Mor.* 399bc; Plut. *Ages.* 3; Plut. *Lys.* 22; Paus. 3.8.9; Justin. 6.2.5; Xen. *Hell.* 3.3.1-3; Diod. *Sic.* 11.50.4; P-W 112; Fontenrose, Q163; Brock, R., 'Xenophon's Political Imagery', in Tuplin, C. and Azoulay, V. eds., *Xenophon and his World: Papers from a Conference held in Liverpool in July 1999* (Stuttgart, 2004) 252.

<sup>41</sup> Parker, 2000: 98.

the Temple of Apollo at Delphi, takes on huge significance.<sup>42</sup> It is perhaps best interpreted to mean that the ancient Greeks already knew what they wanted from the Oracle before they entered the *adyton* and asked their question of the Pythia, but they just needed to obtain divine sanction, reassurance, and confidence before embarking upon the perilous business of war.<sup>43</sup> That being said, the Oracle still must have had substantial influence either way, for the ancient Greeks were always constrained to a certain extent by the fact that they could only work with what words the Oracle felt fit to give them. Moreover, we must not forget the many examples we possess of misinterpretations of the Oracles' words leading to disaster for the hapless consultants,<sup>44</sup> and numerous other legendary *avertissements incompris*.<sup>45</sup>

It is clear, therefore, that the ancient Greeks could maintain control of their decision-making abilities through shrewd interpretation of the equivocal prognostications of the Oracles' words, whilst, ultimately, on the rare occasion when an Oracle's words were so unambiguous that they could not be construed in any other way, they could retain their powers of autonomous decision-making by the execution of their own free wills and choosing to disregard the warnings and advice of the Oracles, albeit at their own peril. We must not for one moment think that the ancient Greeks would willingly, like lemmings from a cliff, stumble blindly into danger or destruction in order simply to fulfil the prophecies of the Oracles. In the end they were always masters of their own destinies. That being said, to ignore or flout such advice or commands from the Oracles might have been easier said than done. Herodotus, commenting upon the Athenians' decision to stand against Xerxes in spite of the ominous prophecies from Delphi, states: 'Not even the terrifying warnings of the Oracle at Delphi could persuade them to abandon Greece.'<sup>46</sup> The implication of Herodotus' words is that, although the Athenians had chosen to overlook the obvious warnings from the god, to ignore such advice from an Oracle would have been an extremely difficult thing to overcome and would no doubt have required a significant amount of bravery and nerve. Such sentiment is further demonstrated by the reaction of the Athenians occupying the Pelargikon in contravention to Apollo's edict.<sup>47</sup> Furthermore,

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<sup>42</sup> For the inscription, see Paus. 10.24.1.

<sup>43</sup> Cf. Xen. *Mem.* 4.2.24. For further discussion of the famous maxim at Delphi, see Lipsey, R., *Have You Been to Delphi?: Tales of the Ancient Oracle for Modern Minds*, *SUNY Series in Western Esoteric Traditions* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2001) 229-257; McPherran, M. L., *The Religion of Socrates* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1996) 217-218.

<sup>44</sup> Such as in the cases of Sparta and Arkadia (Oracle no. 14, *supra*, p. 244ff.), Athens and the Sicilian expedition (Oracle no. 43, *supra*, p. 246ff.), Croesus (Oracle no. 19, *supra*, p. 248ff.), Arkesilaos (Oracle no. 20, *supra*, p. 252ff.), Philip II (Oracle no. 57, *supra*, p. 254ff.), and Julian (Oracle no. 68, *supra*, p. 255ff.).

<sup>45</sup> Q.v. *supra*, p. 257ff.

<sup>46</sup> Hdt. 7.139.6.

<sup>47</sup> Oracle no. 43, *supra*, p. 246ff.

the act of disobeying the Oracle would have had serious psychological ramifications, for, as we have seen, to deliberately ignore the will or warnings of the gods would have weighed heavily upon the ancient Greeks and would undoubtedly have detrimentally affected their state of mind and morale from the outset in a conflict.<sup>48</sup>

### **The impact of oracles on psychology and strategy**

As Chapter 1 established, ancient Greek *poleis* and *strategoï* habitually consulted the Oracles in times of war in order to fulfil protocol, ensure divine support, acquire supernatural and practical intelligence, and above all obtain the necessary psychological preparation for war. However, in the same way that there were multifaceted reasons for oracular consultations in the first place, it is important to appreciate that the oracular responses to those enquiries were not homogenous entities either. The Oracles were consulted on all kinds of different foreign policy and military issues and consequently gave all manner of different responses, ranging from ambiguous statements open to interpretation, direct commands, practical advice, and warnings. Accordingly, Chapter 3 demonstrated how those prophecies had a significant impact on ancient Greek warfare, whether through direct obedience to the god's commands, the positive interpretation or misinterpretation of the Oracles' words, or the deliberate (or indeed accidental) fulfilment of the Oracle's pronouncements.

We have seen, for instance, the profound effect positive affirmation from an Oracle had upon the morale of the citizenry and soldiery of a *polis*. The ancient Greeks often went into war and battle bolstered by the belief that they had been granted victory and the support of the gods in their struggle against their foes, which frequently in the eyes of the ancient writers played a key part in bringing about the desired victory.<sup>49</sup> The power of positive affirmation, or at least *perceived* positive affirmation, on *polis* and army psychology is further illustrated by the examples recorded in our sources, such as that of Sparta and Tegea,<sup>50</sup> or Croesus,<sup>51</sup> where

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<sup>48</sup> For further discussion of the Greeks' unique view of the Oracles, in that while they readily accepted the need for human reasoning in making decisions after they consulted the gods, they still believed the prophecies of the Oracles must be fulfilled, see Nock, 1942: 472-482.

<sup>49</sup> This is clearly the belief of Pausanias in the case of Phokis' war against Thessaly: Oracle no. 26, *supra*, p. 142ff.; and in the Delphians' consultation of Apollo during the Gallic invasion: Oracle no. 63, *supra*, p. 143ff.; and likewise Herodotus' conviction that the Delphians' dissemination of Apollo's advice to the allied Greek League to 'Pray to the winds' was crucial in steadying and steeling Greek nerves on the eve of Xerxes' invasion and in bringing about the Greeks' ultimate triumph over the barbarians: Oracle no. 34, *supra*, p. 140ff.

<sup>50</sup> Oracle no. 14, *supra*, p. 244ff.

<sup>51</sup> Oracle no. 19, *supra*, p. 248ff.



misguided *poleis* or *strategoi* embark upon a military venture filled with false hope and confidence, erroneously believing they have been given the seal of approval by the gods and have them on their side.<sup>52</sup> The importance of such positive affirmation and divine sanction was certainly not lost upon military commanders in the ancient Greek world, who used divine sanction and oracular authority throughout their campaigns to rouse spirits and maintain troop morale.<sup>53</sup>

We also see, of course, the exact opposite happening to citizen and army psychology when faced with a negative prophecy, particularly one which prophesies suffering or defeat, such as the oracle delivered to the Argives before the Battle of Sepeia.<sup>54</sup> Likewise, the same deleterious effects on army and citizen morale is demonstrated in those examples where an apodotic oracle, prophesying defeat when certain conditions are met, is fulfilled either by intent or by accident, creating despondency and panic in the city and ranks of the army.<sup>55</sup>

Furthermore, it must also be appreciated that a positive war oracle for one *polis* had the added boon of detrimentally affecting their opponents' psychology. In short, oracular prophecies that promised victory or prophesied defeat proved to be a blessing for one side and an anathema for the other.

It is keeping this last perspective in mind that helps us best to understand the eager and deliberate fulfilment of an Oracle's prognostications by ancient Greek *poleis* and *strategoi* during war. There is a formidable body of evidence within our study, which shows repeatedly a desire by *poleis* and armies to consciously fulfil the commands of the Oracles and to satisfy any specified prerequisites for victory. Aside from a genuine pious desire to obey and please the gods, which undoubtedly must have often played its part, there were ulterior, psychological reasons behind carrying out the stipulations of oracular prophecies: that being to raise one's own spirits and hopes, and if possible to strike a blow against enemy morale and weaken their resolve. This is demonstrably illustrated by Kleisthenes of Sikyon's dedication of the land

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<sup>52</sup> For further discussion and examples, see *supra*, p. 244ff.

<sup>53</sup> Q.v. *supra*, p. 102ff.

<sup>54</sup> Oracle no. 27, *supra*, p. 266ff. Similar examples can be seen with the Spartans' distressing consultation at Dodona before the Battle of Leuktra: Oracle no. 53, *supra*, p. 270ff.; and the Thessalians' consultation of Delphi regarding their siege of Keressos: Oracle no. 21, *supra*, p. 268ff.

<sup>55</sup> For example, the Athenian *demos*' anxiety at having to occupy the Pelargikon: Oracle no. 42, *supra*, p. 281ff.; the Messenians' reaction to Ophioneus becoming blind again: Oracle no. 4, *supra*, p. 285ff.; and the fulfilment of the oracle presaging the *tragos* drinking from Neda's waters: Oracle no. 8, *supra*, p. 286ff.

between the sea and Delphi during the Amphictyons' war with Kirrha;<sup>56</sup> and Aristeides' meticulous fulfilment of all the stipulations of the Delphic oracle at Plataea.<sup>57</sup>

The same can be also said for those oracles which gave divine sanction for a military alliance to proceed, such as Thebes and Aigina's alliance against Athens c. 506 B.C.,<sup>58</sup> and Philip and Chalkidike's alliance in 356 B.C.,<sup>59</sup> as by obtaining and fulfilling the oracular mandate, and then overtly making the fact known to all parties concerned in a conflict, it would no doubt have had the desired effect of emboldening the newly-born alliance on one side and unnerving the opposition on the other.

It is this awareness and appreciation on the part of the ancient Greeks of the psychological power of oracular prophecy, not only for their own citizens and soldiers, but crucially against their enemies, which explains why we see so many examples of religion and oracular prophecy being used as stratagems in ancient Greek warfare. Indeed, as demonstrated in Chapter 4, the strength of belief in the value of fulfilling oracular prophecy was such that it developed into a potent form of psychological warfare between *poleis*.

As Boring states, when discussing the uses of psychological warfare in modern warfare: 'all warfare has as its aim the bringing about of a change of mind, the conversion of the *determination to resist* into a *willingness to accept defeat*.'<sup>60</sup> When viewed under this lens, the ancient Greeks' determination and fervour to fulfil oracular prognostications that either heralded their own victory or harbingered their enemies' doom assumes a much greater significance. It is for this very reason why Greek *poleis* and *strategoí* so vigorously endeavoured to fulfil the commands and directives of the Oracles, in order to reap the clear rewards for the 'home audience' and to strike a telling blow against the 'enemy audience'. Hence, this explains why we see Epaminondas eagerly displaying Aristomenes' shield on the battlefield at Leuktra and ostentatiously garlanding the tomb of the Leuktrides in full view of the Lakedaimonians.<sup>61</sup> In each of these instances, of course, it is vital to note, as recorded by

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<sup>56</sup> Oracle no. 12, *supra*, p. 175ff.

<sup>57</sup> Oracle no. 36, *supra*, p. 169ff. *Cf.* also the Krotoniates' and Lokrians' attempts to fulfil the Delphic oracle declaring that the victor would be the one who would conquer the other with vows rather than arms (Oracle no. 15, *supra*, p. 183ff.).

<sup>58</sup> Oracle no. 23, *supra*, p. 229ff.

<sup>59</sup> Oracle no. 55, *supra*, p. 220ff.

<sup>60</sup> Boring, 1945: 485.

<sup>61</sup> Oracle no. 51, *supra*, p. 181ff.; Oracle no. 52, *supra*, p. 297ff. *Cf.* also the Spartans covertly fulfilling the Delphic Oracle given to the Messenians, which stated that victory would be given to whichever side dedicated a

our sources, the devastating effect the deliberate fulfilment of the oracle's words has on the citizenry and soldiery on the receiving end of the psychological tactic.

It is pertinent to return at this point to the phenomenon of bones transferral, for the translation of heroes' bones in times of war not only provides us with one of the most striking illustrations we possess of psychological warfare, but also conveniently encapsulates so much else of what we have examined thus far in the course of this study, in terms of what it also reveals to us about the ancient Greeks' belief in the role of the Oracles and divine intervention in warfare.

The two most obvious examples are, of course, that of Sparta and the bones of Orestes,<sup>62</sup> and Athens and the bones of Theseus.<sup>63</sup> It is clear from such episodes that the transference of a hero's bones from the territory of one *polis* to another had several potent psychological and supernatural benefits, in that it robbed one *polis* of the supernatural protection and aid of the hero, while strengthening their enemy, thus striking a massive psychological blow at the same time. Furthermore, the sanction of the Oracle for such action provided *poleis* with divine authority for their foreign policies and a powerful propagandistic tool to assert and justify their right to rule over others. Once more, though, the Oracles played a key role in directing, or providing divine assent for the act, and then afterwards playing a key role in the successful foundation of the hero cult. For even if it was the *poleis* who were driving force behind the acquisition of heroes' bones for supernatural, psychological, and propagandistic purposes, the Oracle remained essential in ensuring that the removal of the bones was divinely sanctioned and that the subsequent foundation of the hero cult was established correctly to ensure the assistance and protection of the hero was successfully secured.<sup>64</sup>

From examining all the oracles and other evidence gathered in this study, it is abundantly clear that the Greeks strongly believed that the gods could, and often would, interfere in human wars. Consequently, it makes sense that the Greeks would attempt to control or limit the impact and involvement of the gods, or to sway their support and favour. Xenophon believes that the Ten

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hundred tripods to Ithomaian Zeus first: Oracle no. 5, *supra*, p. 294ff. It is also important to note in Pausanias' account of this affair that the Spartans were tipped off by an unknown Delphian about the prophecy, which further strengthens the impression of oracles being used as psychological weapons in inter-*polis* warfare: see Russell, 1999: 89.

<sup>62</sup> Oracle no. 17, *supra*, p. 66ff.

<sup>63</sup> Oracle no. 37, *supra*, p. 70ff.

<sup>64</sup> The topic of cult foundation was, according to Fontenrose, the largest percentage overall of all the historical, quasi-historical, and legendary consultations of the Delphic Oracle: see Fontenrose, 1978: 50; Mikalson, 2010: 101.

Thousand will have the gods on their side because they have kept their oaths to the gods, while their enemies have not.<sup>65</sup> The idea that everyday religious obedience and deference could aid victory in war is echoed in the oracle delivered to the Athenians by the Oracle of Ammon, which declared that the Lakedaimonians were being granted victory in the war because of their genuine piety and devotion to the gods.<sup>66</sup> Likewise, Socrates is reported as saying that: ‘Those who honour the gods most finely with choruses are best in war.’<sup>67</sup> Spivey correctly asserts that this is a psychological insight into the ancient Greek world of warfare, in that it is ‘a recognition of how much hoplite fighting relied upon collective self-confidence, group morale, and faith in divine support.’<sup>68</sup> It is the Oracles of ancient Greece, of course, which helped provide the *polis* and the army with all of these things before and during war.

It is also important to recognise that Oracles and their prophecies played a central role within a wider panoply of divination that surrounded and permeated ancient Greek warfare, though it is certainly clear that the Oracles were deemed much more powerful than other forms of divination.<sup>69</sup> Raphals makes a useful distinction between Oracles and *manteis*, when she states: ‘Questions on whether to go to war were referred to Delphi, but divinations about immediate battlefield decisions were performed by military *manteis*.’<sup>70</sup> The superior and infallible knowledge of the Oracle over the *mantis* is something we have seen before with Aristeides’ consultation of Delphi before Plataea to override the pronouncements of the *manteis*,<sup>71</sup> and likewise Mardonius’ use of a Delphic oracle to supersede the negative omens of his seers at Plataea also.<sup>72</sup> Although the role of the *mantis* and the *chresmologos* has been touched upon numerous times throughout the course of our discussion, there is unfortunately no room in this thesis for a wider examination and analysis of the psychological impact of the *mantis* and *chresmologos* in ancient Greek warfare, but there is clearly a need for further investigation into their contribution to *polis* and army decision-making and morale in wartime. Their role in interpreting oracles and omens, as we have seen, patently had dramatic effects on the *demos*’

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<sup>65</sup> Xen. *Anab.* 3.1.21-3.

<sup>66</sup> Oracle no. 50, *supra*, p. 41.

<sup>67</sup> Athenaios, *Deipnosophistai*, 14.628f.

<sup>68</sup> Spivey, N. J., *The Ancient Olympics*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012) 28-29. See also Pritchett, 1974: 216.

<sup>69</sup> See Parker, 2000: 81.

<sup>70</sup> Raphals, 2013: 105. For further discussion of the differences between Oracles and *manteis*, see Raphals, 2013: 84-86.

<sup>71</sup> Oracle no. 36, *supra*, p. 169ff.

<sup>72</sup> Oracle no. 33, *supra*, p. 185ff.

mindset during war,<sup>73</sup> and their ongoing provision of prophecies to an army on campaign and interpretation of battlefield omens was of immense importance to army strategy and psychology.<sup>74</sup>

Although it is clearly evident that divination was a pervasive force in ancient Greek warfare from beginning to end, that is not to say that all people put stock in the Oracles or were guided by their prophecies, or that the Oracles were unswervingly and unquestioningly obeyed by those who fervently did believe in them. However, in a world where life was so precious and often so precarious, and never more so than in times of war, belief and faith in the supernatural was heightened and needed for people to cope and survive times of tribulation. Even if the *polis* leaders or *strategoi* did not believe in the power of the Oracles and the supernatural, it was nevertheless still vitally important that they carry out the customary rites and traditions in order to placate the superstitious masses and the rank-and-file in the army. The assumption must be that in the main the ordinary Greek citizen and hoplite warrior were god-fearing and superstitious folk.<sup>75</sup> This is further proven, for instance, by the widespread usage of magic, *katadesmoi*, amulets and wards, and the plethora of other ancient divinatory methods found in both the city and on the battlefield. But the belief in the divine and the power of divination was by no means confined to the uneducated masses, and applied equally to the elite in Greek society from the Archaic period right through to the Hellenistic age.<sup>76</sup> As Vandenberg states:

‘the eminent, self-confident, admired men of history – the men who were accustomed to decide matters of life and death or war and peace at a nod – were almost without exception believers in the oracle, helpless at times without a prophetic pronouncement.

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<sup>73</sup> Cf. Oracle no. 43, *supra*, p. 246ff.; Oracle no. 42, *supra*, p. 281ff.

<sup>74</sup> Cf. Oracle no. 33, *supra*, p. 185ff. For further discussion of the role of the *mantis* in warfare, see Flower, 2008: 153-187; *supra*, p. 132ff. For an excellent examination of the role of seers and divination on the battlefield, see Jameson, M. H., 'Sacrifice Before Battle', in Hanson, V. D. ed., *Hoplites: the Classical Greek Battle Experience* (London; New York, 1991) 197-227. For more general discussion of *manteis* and *chresmologoi*, see Dillery, J., 'Chresmologues and *Manteis*: Independent Diviners and the Problem of Authority', in Johnston, S. I. and Struck, P. T. eds., *Mantikê: Studies in Ancient Divination* (Leiden, 2005) 167-232; Bowden, H., 'Oracles for Sale', in Derow, P. and Parker, R. eds., *Herodotus and his World: Essays from a Conference in Memory of George Forrest* (Oxford; New York, 2003) 256-274; Bowden, 2005: 11, 34-36, 72, 149-150, 153-156; Johnston, 2008: 109-179; Bonnechere, P., 'Divination', in Ogden, D. ed., *A Companion to Greek Religion* (Malden, Mass.; Oxford, 2007) 145-149; Dickie, 2001: 61-74, 237-243; Russell, 1999: 91, 39-42.

<sup>75</sup> Cf. Baynes' similar argument about the role of religion in bolstering morale in WWI: 'Just as the class divisions in Britain in 1914 were generally accepted without rancour, so one can say that people at that time were generally religious. They were by no means all devout, but the majority were ready to accept the Christian religion without much question.' See Baynes, 1967: 199.

<sup>76</sup> See Flower, 2008: 104-105.

Themistocles and Alexander, Cicero, Caesar and Augustus in their decisions were all dependent on interpreters of the future.<sup>77</sup>

Thus, when looking at the role of Oracles in war and their impact upon the decision-making process of *poleis* and *strategoi*, a sliding scale needs to be applied. To the devout believer the Oracle's commands must have had a major impact on their state of mind and decision-making. For those doubters, agnostics, and waverers sitting on the fence, the Oracle would still, at the very least, have formed a crutch to confirm and comfort them that they had made the right decision, or to help persuade others of the same, and interpretations, of course, could be manipulated until they were the right fit for the mood and strategy of the *polis*. To the atheists and cynics, on the other hand, oracular consultations and prophecies could be used to keep the *hoi polloi* happy and placated, and as stratagems and psychological weapons in war.

Returning to our paradigmatic *strategos*, Xenophon, we see how military commanders regularly consulted the gods out of piety and religious respect, and to obtain divine sanction and hopefully its attendant concrete assistance in war. On a personal level, they undoubtedly consulted the oracles for personal reassurance and for management of risk. Once the divine pronouncements were obtained, we then see *strategoi* using oracles and divination as a means of motivating troops and raising morale, and as religious stratagems to damage enemy morale and undermine their will to resist in ongoing psychological warfare between *poleis*.

Apropos the question of historicity, it is essential to reiterate and acknowledge once more that it is not of vital importance for the purposes of this study. In many ways, it is immaterial whether the stories recorded by our sources are absolutely true and precise, because, crucially, they had to be historically plausible to be believed by a contemporary Greek audience. Likewise, whether or not we possess the exact words of the oracular prophecies issued by the Oracles is really not important either. The oracles were an oral tradition, built on and adapted over the years by subsequent generations, and as such, they reveal the contemporary expectations and perceived reactions of the ancient Greek audience to the oracular prophecies of the past.

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<sup>77</sup> Vandenberg, 2007: 174. Cf. Cic. *Div.* 1.2: 'Now I am aware of no people, however refined and learned or however savage and ignorant, which does not think that signs are given of future events, and that certain persons can recognise those signs and foretell those events before they occur.'

The abundance of evidence of both historical war oracles, and those enshrined in the legendary oracles and Greek myth, demonstrates the essential role of oracular consultation in ancient Greek warfare and the deep-seated belief in the role of the divine in human wars. As Bowden correctly asserts, when discussing the role of the Delphic Oracle in military decision-making in Classical Athens: ‘the gods were a constant presence in Athenian public discourse, and divination was a frequent activity on all military campaigns. Under these circumstances it would be more surprising if concern for the gods did *not* play an important role in Athenian decisions about going to war.’<sup>78</sup> Moreover, he also goes on to argue prudently that, although religious considerations were certainly not the only reason for Greek *poleis* to go to war with each other, ‘religious motivations were considerably more significant than is at first apparent from the ancient evidence.’<sup>79</sup>

Nevertheless, aside from the extraordinary example of Delphi instigating the Spartans’ removal of the Peisistratidai, there is no real evidence of the Oracles initiating decisions to go to war. It appears, rather, that a *polis*’ decision to go to war was often made up before they consulted the oracular gods on the matter, and that the prognostications very seldom stopped *poleis* from continuing to pursue the course they had already chosen. Of course, that by no means diminishes the vitally important psychological reasons behind the consultation of the Oracles on matters of war in the first instance.

However, those same prognostications issued in response to such enquiries, without doubt, could and *did* have a dramatic impact on *polis* and troop psychology and military decision-making once the war commenced; time and time again we see from the ancient sources examples of armies’ morale being positively or adversely affected by oracular prophecies, and strategy and tactics on the battlefield being influenced and adapted accordingly to *poleis*’ and *strategoi*’s interpretations of the oracles’ words. Consequently, to underestimate, or worse still, dismiss the role of oracular prophecy in ancient Greek warfare, would be to overlook the profound psychological effects that oracles had on both the citizenry and the army in times of war, and would therefore seriously hinder and impede our understanding of ancient Greek warfare and culture. Instead, the war oracles recorded by the likes of Herodotus, Pausanias, Xenophon, and our other sources, give us an invaluable insight into what the ancient Greeks

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<sup>78</sup> Bowden, 2005: 151.

<sup>79</sup> Bowden, 2005: 151.

believed about the role of the divine in warfare and crucially how they attempted to channel and utilise that supernatural power and prescience to their advantage against their foes, using it above all as a means to steel one's own nerve for the dreadful fight ahead, and as a weapon to weaken the resolve and morale of one's enemies. In this way, the Oracles were an essential and inextricable part of ancient Greek warfare.



## Appendix I - Index of War Oracles

### Historical War Oracles

- 1) *c.* 776 B.C. The Eleians consult Delphi regarding the Spartans' war with Helos.
- 2) *c.* 725 B.C. The Messenians consult Delphi during the First Messenian War with Sparta.
- 3) *c.* 725 B.C. The Spartans consult Delphi during the First Messenian War.
- 4) *c.* 725 B.C. King Aristodemos of Messenia consults the Delphi Oracle during the First Messenian War.
- 5) *c.* 720 B.C. The Messenians consult the Delphic Oracle regarding their war with the Lakedaimonians during the First Messenian War.
- 6) *c.* 685 B.C. The Spartans consult the Delphic Oracle regarding their war with the Messenians during the Second Messenian War.
- 7) *c.* 680 B.C. King Aristomenes of Messenia consults the Delphic Oracle during the Second Messenian War.
- 8) *c.* 680 B.C. The Messenians consult Delphi during the Second Messenian War.
- 9) 659 B.C. Phigaleia consults the Delphic Oracle regarding their war with Sparta.
- 10) *c.* 630 B.C. Kylon of Athens consults the Delphic Oracle concerning his plot to seize Athens.
- 11) *c.* 590 B.C. The Amphictyons consult the Delphic Oracle concerning sacrilege committed by the Kirrhaeans.
- 12) *c.* 590 B.C. The Amphictyons consult the Delphic Oracle during the First Sacred War.
- 13) *c.* 590 B.C. The Amphictyons, beset by plague, consult the Delphic Oracle during the First Sacred War.
- 14) *c.* 580 B.C. Sparta consults the Delphic Oracle concerning a proposed conquest of Arkadia.
- 15) *c.* 580 B.C. The Krotoniates consult Delphi regarding their war with Epizephyrian Lokris.
- 16) *c.* 600 B.C. Solon consults Delphi during the war with Megara over Salamis.
- 17) *c.* 560 B.C. Sparta consults the Delphic Oracle on how to gain divine assistance in their war against Tegea.
- 18) *c.* 550 B.C. The Dolonkoi consult Delphi concerning their war with the Apsinthians.
- 19) *c.* 548 B.C. Croesus consults the Delphic Oracle and the Oracle of Amphiaraos regarding a contemplated invasion of Persia.
- 20) *c.* 530 B.C. Arkesilaos III consults the Delphic Oracle regarding his planned attack on Kyrene.
- 21) *c.* 520 B.C. The Thessalians consult the Delphic Oracle during their war with Boeotian Thespiiai.
- 22) 511 B.C. Sparta is prompted by the Delphic Oracle to liberate Athens from the Peisistratidai.
- 23) *c.* after 506 B.C. The Thebans consult Delphi after their defeat by the Athenians.
- 24) *c.* 505 B.C. The Athenians consult the Delphi Oracle concerning possible war with Aegina.
- 25) *c.* 500 B.C. The Karians consult Didyma regarding their war against the Persians.

- 26) *c.* 500 B.C. The Phokians consult the Oracle at Delphi concerning their war with the Thessalians.
- 27) *c.* 494 B.C. Argos consults the Delphic Oracle concerning war with Sparta.
- 28) *c.* 494 B.C. Kleomenes consults the Pythia at Delphi before his campaign against Argos.
- 29) 481 B.C. The Spartans consult the Delphic Oracle for guidance regarding the imminent invasion by Xerxes.
- 30) 481 B.C. The Argives consult the Delphic Oracle regarding the impending Persian invasion.
- 31) 481 B.C. The Athenians consult the Delphic Oracle for guidance regarding the impending Persian invasion.
- 32) 481 B.C. The Cretans consult the Delphic Oracle regarding the impending Persian invasion.
- 33) 481/0 B.C. The Delphic Oracle issues a prophecy concerning the Persian invasion of Hellas.
- 34) 480 B.C. The Delphians consult the Pythia before the Battles of Thermopylae and Artemisium.
- 35) 480/79 B.C. Mardonius consults several Oracles before the Battle of Plataea.
- 36) 479 B.C. The Athenians consult the Delphic Oracle before the Battle of Plataea.
- 37) 476/5 B.C. The Athenians receive an oracle concerning the bones of Theseus on Skyros.
- 38) 449 B.C. Kimon consults the Oracle at Ammon during the siege of Kition.
- 39) 437 B.C. The Athenians receive an oracle regarding the bones of Rhesos.
- 40) 435 B.C. Epidamnos consults the Delphic Oracle during their war with the oligarchs and Illyrians.
- 41) 432/1 B.C. The Spartans consult the Delphic Oracle on the eve of the Peloponnesian War.
- 42) 431 B.C. The Athenians occupy cursed ground in the Akropolis against the advice of the Delphic Oracle during the Peloponnesian War.
- 43) 415 B.C. The Athenians consult Delphi, Ammon, and Dodona concerning the Sicilian expedition.
- 44) 404 B.C. Sparta consults the Delphic Oracle on foreign policy during the Peloponnesian War.
- 45) 401 B.C. Xenophon consults the Delphic Oracle regarding a proposed expedition to Persia.
- 46) *c.* 399-375 B.C. The Oracle of Zeus at Dodona is consulted concerning a military campaign.
- 47) 396 B.C. Agesilaos consults the Oracles at Dodona and Delphi before his campaign against the Persians.
- 48) 388 B.C. Agesipolis consults the Oracles at Olympia and Delphi regarding an expedition against Argos.
- 49) *c.* 385 B.C. Tiribazos consults the Delphic Oracle regarding a contemplated revolt against Artaxerxes II.
- 50) ? The Athenians consult the Oracle of Zeus at Ammon regarding their war with Sparta.
- 51) 371 B.C. The Thebans consult various Oracles before the Battle of Leuktra.
- 52) 371 B.C. The Thebans obey the Oracle of Trophonios before the Battle of Leuktra.
- 53) 371 B.C. The Spartans consult the Oracle at Dodona before the Battle of Leuktra.
- 54) 367 B.C. The Spartans consult the Oracle at Dodona after the Battle of Leuktra.

- 55) 356 B.C. Philip and Chalkidike consult the Delphic Oracle regarding a proposed military alliance.
- 56) 344 B.C. Timoleon of Corinth consults the Delphic Oracle before an expedition to Sicily.
- 57) 336 B.C. Philip II of Macedon consults Delphi before an expedition to Persia.
- 58) 335 B.C. Alexander (Philomelos) consults the Delphic Oracle before his expedition to Persia.
- 59) 333 B.C. Alexander fulfils an ancient oracle at Gordion.
- 60) 331 B.C. Alexander consults the Oracle of Ammon during his campaign against Darius III.
- 61) 331 B.C. The Oracle of Apollo Didymeus prophesises victory for Alexander against the Persians.
- 62) *c.* fourth to third century B.C. (possibly *c.* 281-261 B.C.) The Oracle of Dodona is consulted regarding a military expedition against Antiochos.
- 63) 279 B.C. The Delphians consult the Pythia during the Gallic invasion of Greece.
- 64) 189 B.C. The Akhaians consult the Delphic Oracle during a siege of Phana.
- 65) *c.* 100 B.C. The Syedrans consult the Oracle of Apollo at Klaros regarding attacks by Cilician pirates.
- 66) 48 B.C. Appius Claudius Pulcher consults the Delphic Oracle concerning the civil war between Caesar and Pompey.
- 67) 323 A.D. The Emperor Licinius consults the Oracle at Didyma on his war with Constantine I.
- 68) 362 A.D. The Emperor Julian consults the Oracles at Delphi, Dodona, and Didyma on his contemplated war with Persia.

## Pre-historical and Legendary War Oracles

- N1) *c.* 1674 B.C. The Delphians consult the Pythia before an impending attack Python and his army.
- N2) *c.* 1387 B.C. King Erechtheus of Athens consults the Delphic Oracle during the Eleusinian War.
- N3) *c.* 1252 B.C. The Athenians consult the Delphic Oracle concerning their war with the Amazons.
- N4) *c.* 1248 B.C. Herakles consults the Delphic Oracle concerning his war with the Dryopes.
- N5) *c.* 1246 B.C. Jason consults the Delphic Oracle before embarking upon his quest for the Golden Fleece.
- N6) *c.* 1246 B.C. Jason consults the Pythia at Delphi before embarking upon his quest for the Golden Fleece.
- N7) *c.* 1242 B.C. Herakles consults the Delphic Oracle during his war with Elis.
- N8) *c.* 1215 B.C. The Epigonoï consult an Oracle regarding their plan for a war on Thebes.
- N9) *c.* 1215 B.C. Alkmaion consults an Oracle regarding leading an expedition against Thebes.
- N10) *c.* 1194 B.C. Agamemnon consults the Delphic Oracle before the Akhaian campaign against Troy.
- N11) *c.* 1194 B.C. Agamemnon consults Delphic Apollo before the Akhaian campaign against Troy.
- N12) *c.* 1194 B.C. Menelaos consults the Delphic Oracle at the beginning of the Trojan War.
- N13) *c.* 1194 B.C. The Akhaians consult the Delphic Oracle before the Trojan War.
- N14) *c.* 1174 B.C. The Boeotians consult the Delphic Oracle regarding their war with the Aiolians.
- N15) *c.* 1154 B.C. The Delphic Oracle commands the Heraklids to invade the Peloponnese.
- N16) *c.* 1154 B.C. Herakles' son, Hyllos, consults the Delphic Oracle for advice on when to return to the Peloponnese.
- N17) *c.* 1154 B.C. The Heraklids consult the Delphic Oracle before their planned invasion of the Peloponnese.
- N18) *c.* 1104 B.C. King Temenos of the Herakleidai consults the Delphic Oracle before the planned invasion of the Peloponnese.
- N19) *c.* 1104 B.C. Oxylos consults the Delphic Oracle regarding the Heraklid invasion of the Peloponnese.
- N20) *c.* 1104 B.C. The Herakleidai consult an Oracle regarding the impending invasion of the Peloponnese.
- N21) *c.* 1104 B.C. The Herakleidai (or *c.* 750 B.C. the Spartans) consult the Delphic Oracle about who they should take as allies in war.
- N22) *c.* 1127 B.C. Athens (or Xanthos) consults an Oracle regarding war with the Boeotians.
- N23) *c.* 1069 B.C. Sparta consults the Delphic Oracle concerning war with Athens.

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