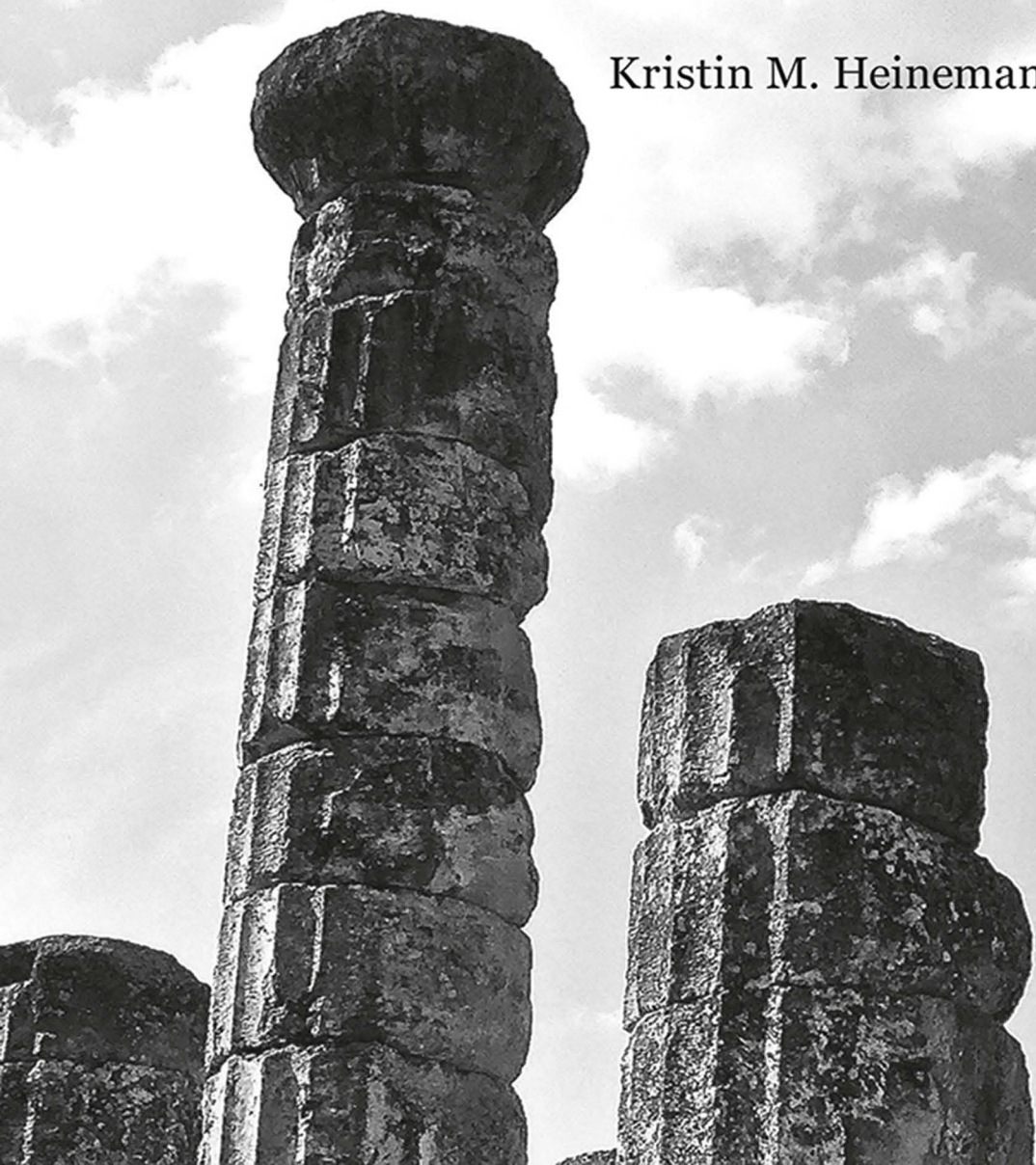


The  
*Decadence*  
of Delphi

The Oracle in the Second Century  
AD and Beyond

Kristin M. Heineman



# The Decadence of Delphi

Examining the final years of Delphic consultation, this monograph argues that the sanctuary operated on two connected, yet distinct levels: the oracle, which was in decline, and the remaining religious, political, and social elements at the site which continued to thrive. In contrast to Delphi, other oracular counterparts in Asia Minor, such as Claros and Didyma, rose in prestige as they engaged with new “theological” issues. Issues such as these were not presented to Apollo at Delphi and this lack of expertise could help to explain why Delphi began to decline in importance. The second and third centuries AD witnessed the development of new ways of access to divine wisdom. Particularly widespread were the practices of astrology and the Neoplatonic divinatory system, theurgy. This monograph examines the correlation between the rise of such practices and the decline of oracular consultation at Delphi, analyzing several examples from the Chaldean Oracles to demonstrate the new interest in a personal, soteriological religion. These cases reveal the transfer of Delphi’s sacred space, which further impacted the status of the oracle. Delphi’s interaction with Christianity in the final years of oracular operation is also discussed. Oracular utterances with Christian overtones are examined along with archaeological remains which demonstrate a shift in the use of space at Delphi from a “pagan” Panhellenic center to one in which Christianity is accepted and promoted.

**Kristin M. Heineman** completed her PhD at the University of Newcastle, Australia in 2012. Her research interests include the history of religion, women in the ancient world, and the intersection between Christianity and paganism. She is currently an adjunct at Colorado State University in Fort Collins, USA, and teaches widely in Greek and Roman history.

This page intentionally left blank

# **The Decadence of Delphi**

The Oracle in the Second Century AD  
and Beyond

**Kristin M. Heineman**

First published 2018  
by Routledge  
2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon OX14 4RN

and by Routledge  
711 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10017

*Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business*

© 2018 Kristin M. Heineman

The right of Kristin M. Heineman to be identified as author of this work has been asserted by her in accordance with sections 77 and 78 of the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988.

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reprinted or reproduced or utilised in any form or by any electronic, mechanical, or other means, now known or hereafter invented, including photocopying and recording, or in any information storage or retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publishers.

*Trademark notice:* Product or corporate names may be trademarks or registered trademarks, and are used only for identification and explanation without intent to infringe.

*British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data*

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

*Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data*

Names: Heineman, Kristin M., author.

Title: The decadence of Delphi : the oracle in the second century AD and beyond / Kristin M. Heineman.

Description: First edition. | Abingdon, Oxon, New York, NY : Routledge, [2017] | Includes index.

Identifiers: LCCN 2017007780 | ISBN 9781472481801 (hardback : alk. paper) | ISBN 9781315615356 (ebook)

Subjects: LCSH: Delphian oracle--History. | Greece--Religion--History. | Occultism--Greece--History. | Christianity and other religions--Greek--History.

Classification: LCC DF261.D35 H45 2017 | DDC 292.3/209383--dc23

LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2017007780>

ISBN: 978-1-472-48180-1 (hbk)

ISBN: 978-1-315-61535-6 (ebk)

Typeset in Bembo  
by Taylor & Francis Books

# Contents

<i>Acknowledgments</i>	vi
<i>Abbreviations</i>	viii
Introduction	1
1 The history of Delphi	10
2 Plutarch and the duality of Delphi	41
3 Delphi: sacred space and cultural memory	71
4 Theological oracles from Didyma	96
5 Theological oracles from Claros	117
6 Occult practices: astrology	142
7 Theurgy and soteriology	173
Conclusion	204
<i>Index</i>	207

# Acknowledgments

Without the assistance of a great number of people, this project would not have been possible; I am deeply grateful for all the help and support.

I would like to extend my gratitude to all the teachers and scholars who have, directly or indirectly, helped me complete this book. This project began as my doctoral thesis at the University of Newcastle, Australia and so I owe a huge debt to the entire Classics department there, including Harold Tarrant, Marguerite Johnson, Hugh Lindsay, Jane Bellemore, and Liz Baynham. You all helped greatly with your advice, discussions, and encouragement. And, of course, Terry Ryan who not only helped me with the research and formulation of my ideas, he also helped me grow into a proper scholar. Thank you.

I would also like to express my deepest gratitude to the Australian Archaeological Institute at Athens for partially funding my trip to Greece and Turkey, allowing me to see the oracular centers in a whole new light, and providing accommodation at the institute in Athens. Additionally, my sincerest thanks are due to the American School of Classical Studies at Athens for their assistance during much of my stay there. Parts of this work were presented at a number of ASCS, and their junior affiliate, AMPHORAE, conferences. I am indebted to the audiences of those conferences for their questions, criticisms and comments on my presented work, which helped me a great deal with the formation of my ideas. Likewise, I would like to thank the audience at the 2012 APA conference in Philadelphia, where the criticisms, opinions, and questions were kind and helpful.

A special thanks to Phoebe Garrett for the final edits of this book. She took a lot of time out of her busy schedule to help me with formatting, advice, and assistance. She is a great inspiration. All remaining errors found within are my own. I would also like to thank the History Department at CSU for allowing me to share some of my research at the Faculty Seminars and the excellent input from everyone there. I am happy to be a part of such a caring and helpful department. Also, I would like to thank my editor, Michael Greenwood who was quick to answer all my questions and help me along the way.

Finally, I would like to express my deepest thanks to my family and friends who have stood by and supported me over the last several years. Thank you especially to my parents, Rob and Jennifer, with their undying support and

love. Their consistent encouragement has helped me achieve my goals and I owe a great deal to them. Thanks to my brother who always reminds me to laugh and has been by my side since day one. Most of all, I would like to thank my baby boy for giving me a deadline to stick to and my husband, Erik, for everything. I dedicate this book to them.

I couldn't have done it without any of you. Thank you.



# Abbreviations

All citations of ancient text refer to editions in the *Thesaurus Linguae Graecae* (for Greek authors) and *The Packard Humanities Institute* (for Latin authors). The abbreviations of ancient sources cited follow those of the *Oxford Classical Dictionary* for both Greek and Latin authors. English translations are given first, followed by the ancient text.

The oracular responses from Delphi correspond to the numbers of the 2004 edition of P&W (for example P&W R233 without page citation to distinguish from a non-oracular reference). Where necessary, Fontenrose's classification system will be used (for example H13).

## Journal and Book Series Abbreviations

AJA	<i>American Journal of Archaeology</i>
AJPh	<i>American Journal of Philology</i>
AncW	<i>Ancient World</i>
ANRW	<i>Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt</i>
BAR	<i>British Archaeological Review</i>
BCH	<i>Bulletin de Correspondance Hellénique</i>
BICS	<i>Bulletin of the Institute of Classical Studies, London</i>
CCAG	<i>Catalogus Codicum Astrologorum Graecorum</i>
CIG	<i>Corpus Inscriptionum Graecorum</i>
CIL	<i>Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum</i>
CJ	<i>Classical Journal</i>
ClAnt	<i>Classical Antiquity</i>
CPh	<i>Classical Philology</i>
CQ	<i>Classical Quarterly</i>
CRAI	<i>Comptes rendus de l'Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-lettres</i>
FD	<i>Fouilles de Delphes</i>
FGrH	<i>Fragmente der griechischen Historiker</i>
GRBS	<i>Greek, Roman and Byzantine Studies</i>
IDidyma	<i>Die Inschriften. Milet 3</i>
IGRom	<i>Inscriptiones Graecae ad res Romanas pertinentes</i>

IJCT	<i>International Journal of the Classical Tradition</i>
JBL	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>
JHS	<i>Journal of Hellenic Studies</i>
JÖAI	<i>Jahreshefte des Österreichischen Archäologischen Institutes in Wien</i>
JRS	<i>Journal of Roman Studies</i>
MHR	<i>Mediterranean Historical Review</i>
P&W	Parke, H.W. and Wormell, D.E.W. (2004) <i>The Delphic Oracle</i> , 2 Vols. Chicago University Press, Chicago, (reprint of the Oxford 1956 ed.).
PGM	<i>Papyri Graecae Magicae</i>
REA	<i>Revue des études anciennes</i>
REG	<i>Revue des études grecques</i>
RHR	<i>Revue de l'histoire des religions</i>
SEG	<i>Supplementum epigraphicum Graecum</i>
SIG	<i>Sylloge Inscriptionum Graecarum</i>
TAPhA	<i>Transactions of the American Philological Association</i>
ZPE	<i>Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik</i>

This page intentionally left blank

# Introduction

As Rome wasn't built in a day so the oracle at Delphi did not cease to operate overnight. Rather, the eventual silencing of the most famous oracle in ancient Greece witnessed a gradual and complicated evanescence. One of the old tropes used to describe the life cycle of empires and institutions is deeply engrained in historical thought – a civilization begins by hard work, determination, and unification. The dawn of new societies or institutions often is imagined as tough; from there, the civilization reaches its zenith, the heyday of culture, success, and development. Finally, often due to a lack of hard work and the softening of the population through greed or luxury, the society begins its steady descent into obscurity. This notion, like many tropes, is too black and white to truly capture the nuance of historical development. However, the reign of the oracle of Delphi has often been viewed in this light – the slow and crucial development in the Archaic period, its dominance as a political arbiter in the Classical age, and its decline into myth and superstition by the Hellenistic and Roman ages. Due to this idea of ascent, reign, and decline, much of the modern scholarship has focused on the first two periods of Delphic history, and not nearly enough attention has been paid to the later eras of oracular operations at Delphi. Although there is a kernel of truth to this model, the history and outline of Delphi's decline is far more complicated. This book aims to shed further light on a more neglected period in Delphic history, from the second century AD down to the final centuries of the oracle's operation at the end of the fourth century. In addition to establishing the status of the oracle and the sanctuary in the second century and beyond, this book examines the correlation between the decline of oracular consultation and the rise of a variety of arcane practices. As Delphi declined in frequency of consultation and in the political significance of issues presented, other, new forms of divination were increasingly sought. Astrology and theurgy offered a new dimension of divinatory access that better suited the needs of individuals in the second, third, and fourth centuries AD, while Delphi was in its final days of operation.

Before we begin, a few definitions must be understood, including what is meant by the “decline” of Delphi. By the second century AD and beyond, fewer oracular consultations from Delphi appear in our record, whether literary or epigraphical. Out of the 600-odd extant responses catalogued by Parke and

## 2 Introduction

Wormell (P&W), about 350 (58%) can be dated with some accuracy; the other 250 are of uncertain date. Of the datable 350, only 74 (21%) of those come from Alexander's death onwards and the majority, 278 (78%), are of an earlier date. To demonstrate further, of the 74 issued after 323 BC, only about 24 (32%) post-date the birth of Christ which, of the 350 datable responses, amounts to a mere 7%. It is clear that the oracular function of Delphi declined in the number of extant responses from the Roman period.<sup>1</sup> This trend is also reflected in the extant literary sources and has led many modern scholars to note the decline of Delphi after the Hellenistic age, with a brief revival in the second century, followed by a steep and irreversible decline during the Severan age.<sup>2</sup>

The decline of Delphi has also been characterized by the decrease in political oracles after the Persian Wars, and Parker notes that "even enquiries about cultic reform by whole states seem to become rarer after 300."<sup>3</sup> The decline in oracles generally, and political oracles specifically, indicates a lessening of Delphi's influence on the Greek *polis*. The decline of "political" oracles from Delphi has been of considerable interest to scholars since the days of Plutarch in the second century AD. He observed that Delphi was consulted far less than previous centuries on political issues, and was now sought for simply personal matters.<sup>4</sup> However, by contrasting the literary sources, which feature many fantastical oracles of extreme political importance, with the picture gained from inscriptional evidence a more practical and pragmatic character of Delphic divination is revealed.<sup>5</sup>

Likewise, Bonnechere warned of the skewed perception of Delphi's political importance, as seen from the literary sources, and notes that the epigraphical evidence from Delphi does not support a strong political tradition at the sanctuary.<sup>6</sup> Indeed, the 52 total epigraphical responses from Delphi, out of the 517 responses compiled by Fontenrose, amount to only 10% of the corpus. Of those 52, only six concern political matters, 10 concern personal issues and 18 are religious in nature. This gives the impression those political matters were not the most significant concern at Delphi, at least as far as inscriptional evidence is concerned. Additionally, most of these inscriptions are not found at Delphi itself, but rather in the home towns of the consultants; this led Busine to observe that "apparently, the procedure of consultation did not involve the recording of the responses on a hard imperishable material, like the lead tablets found at Dodona or the stone inscriptions, like in Didyma."<sup>7</sup>

What then of the famous oracles of the "Wooden Wall" and Croesus defeating empires? Kindt has provided an excellent method of approaching the literary oracles and states that they "need to be understood not as accounts of actual responses but as aspects of a cultural discourse concerning the possibilities and limits of the divine-human communication institutionalized in premier oracles" and goes on to say "this also applies to many of the famous 'political oracles,' which should be interpreted first in the ideological and historiographic context in which they feature before general statements about the role of oracles in Greek politics can be made."<sup>8</sup> Still, the decrease in political importance of oracular responses is important, and so I will define "political" oracles as those

that affect the entire community or *polis*, which could include religious concerns or famine, as opposed to those strictly concerning matters of the state in a legislative or governmental sense.

Many modern scholars have investigated the historicity of oracular responses from Delphi. Once P&W catalogued all the extant responses, the foundation of Delphic scholarship had begun. They categorized each response chronologically and examined the history of the oracle through the lens of the responses. Fontenrose built upon the work of P&W and restricted the parameters of oracular authenticity by dismissing several responses as not historically genuine. He arranged the oracles by category, not by chronology, dividing the responses into four groups: Historical, Quasi-historical, Legendary and Fictional.<sup>9</sup> His criteria for objective classification are not always clear. He attempted to determine the veracity of the oracles in order to gain a perspective of what was actually said by the Pythia for a “more objective division of the responses.”<sup>10</sup> This framework for dealing with the responses attempts to discredit several extant oracles and many of the traditional beliefs about Delphi. Fontenrose rejects almost all of the responses said to have been spoken in the first three centuries of the oracle’s history, 750–450 BC.

The system developed by Fontenrose does not allow for complete assessment of the evidence. If one were to disregard a response’s historical importance simply because, for example, it was recorded by an author of a late date, evidence that is crucial for the understanding of Delphi’s decline would also be disregarded: an author of a later date does not imply inaccuracy. By adhering to such a strict form of classification, the responses fail to be understood in terms of Greek history, thought, religion, and poetics. Oracular responses may or may not have been actually produced by a Pythian priestess, but they still represent what the Greeks *thought was acceptable* to attribute to the oracular function of Apollo, which is just as important as an actual utterance.

The examination of individual oracles is beyond the scope of our investigation. Rather, for our purposes, the “decline” of Delphi will be examined through the fact that fewer oracular consultations of *all sorts* are issued from the sanctuary from the second century AD and afterwards. Even oracles stemming from fiction, as Iles Johnston notes, give “no reason to assume that fiction presented a significantly different picture of what sorts of things Delphi was concerned with than did reality.”<sup>11</sup> Even if it cannot be proven whether an oracular response was given in the manner recorded, we can still learn a great deal from suspicious or fictitious oracles. In this sense, the *authenticity* is not questioned, but rather the context in which the oracles are placed within the larger circumstance of Delphi’s history. Many oracles that would otherwise be excluded from examination, under the rubric of Fontenrose, constitute valuable evidence. Rather than examining the merit of each political oracle to determine whether they were indeed prevalent at Delphi, we can examine the status of the oracle in the first centuries of our era through the lack of recorded responses.

The decreasing number of oracular utterances, however, should not be taken uncritically. Simply because there are fewer recorded oracles from Delphi does

#### 4 Introduction

not necessarily mean that fewer consultations were taking place. However, in the absence of additional evidence, and the presence of the obvious fact that Delphi did cease to be consulted it can be cautiously assumed that the falling number of recorded oracles reflects some reality. Perhaps, though, the oracles in the latter centuries of operation were of a personal nature and so were not recorded. This alone is evidence that Delphi no longer held a position of authority. No longer was Delphi *thought* to play a substantial role and so even fantastic fictional stories of political involvement disappear from the record. The focus of our inquiry will be *why* Delphi was called upon less frequently for important political matters as well as general inquiries throughout the second and third centuries AD and what the status of the sanctuary was during this time.

The analysis of these issues begins during the Archaic and Classical periods, the era of Delphi's greatest prestige and impact. Chapter 1 examines the history of the Delphic oracle through important political oracles to demonstrate the extent to which Delphi was involved in Greek *poleis*. This will establish the peak of Delphic prominence so that the decline of the oracle, when it arises, can better be understood. A brief examination of the method of oracular divination will also be included. Delphi's history will be traced through the Archaic period, the Persian and Peloponnesian Wars, the Hellenistic period, and finally, Roman conquest of Greece. By the second century AD, our examination will become more focused on the literary evidence provided by Plutarch.

Plutarch is our best source for the decline of Delphi, particularly in the second century AD. He wrote three essays directly concerning Delphi, one of which specifically addresses the decline. These will be analyzed systematically in Chapter 2 to uncover the state of Delphi at this time as perceived by an insider through the proxy of contemporary visitors. First, Plutarch's *De Defectu Oraculorum* is examined to demonstrate the ancients' opinion of the reason for the decline of Delphi, including geological factors, population variance, and divine intervention. Second, evidence for the decline of Delphi from the essay *De Pythiae Oraculis* is addressed. The analysis of this second essay reveals the contradictory state of the sanctuary at the time when Plutarch was intimately involved with it: on the one hand, Plutarch writes extensively on the decline of the oracle, and on the other, hints at a thriving sanctuary and a revival in the form of new and restored buildings. This creates something of a conundrum. How can Plutarch be contemporaneous with both a decline and a revival at Delphi? This book offers a new approach to the decline of Delphi – the oracle was sought less frequently, but the sanctuary itself could still operate and thrive as a religious and cultural center. Delphi functioned on a variety of social, political, and religious levels; the oracle was an essential aspect of the religious activity of the sanctuary, but was not the sole attraction.

As such, Chapter 3 will examine the distinction between the oracle and other religious, political, and social procedures existing at the sanctuary during the second and third centuries AD. Through the investigation of the use of space at Delphi, both sacred and profane, a clearer picture of the status of

Delphi can be revealed. The sanctuary was able to thrive through the various religious festivals, the Pythian Games, the unique administration of the site, and dedications to Apollo. The chapter will end with an examination of the Christianization of the sanctuary during the fourth, fifth, and sixth centuries AD. The way sacred space was shared and repurposed is crucial to understanding the decline of the oracle.

As the examination of Plutarch's essays shows, many of the oracular centers throughout the Mediterranean were declining by the second century AD. However, as Delphi's significance as an oracle was dwindling, Claros and Didyma in Asia Minor were experiencing a revival, not only in terms of the sanctuaries themselves (as at Delphi) but in the frequency and types of questions presented to Apollo. Political and state concerns were addressed to the god on the eastern side of the Aegean, as well as questions concerning magic, the nature of god, and theurgic concerns of the soul.<sup>12</sup> Nock has described these latter oracular responses as "theological" and I shall employ this term as well. I define the term as those questions presented to an oracular site which fall outside the established oracle-seeking queries, particularly focused on religious sentiments, which are not common to traditional Greco-Roman religion. Chapter 4 will examine the status of Didyma in the second and third centuries AD to contrast the oracular success in Asia Minor as compared to the extant oracular record at Delphi. Chapter 5 will do the same thing, but with Claros as the focus. Both chapters will investigate the nature of the questions presented at Didyma and Claros which, I suggest, contributed to their success. The lack of this expertise at Delphi helps to explain why the oracle there slipped further into silence as the oracles of Asia Minor continued to thrive.

By analyzing the different practices at the various sanctuaries, these oracles provide a broader perspective as to why there was not a universal, uniform decline of traditional oracles. The extant responses from Claros and Didyma demonstrate the capacity for these oracles to exercise unprecedented oracular authority in occult matters. This trend of consultation concerning issues such as theurgy, magic, and the nature of god – which were gaining more popularity within a civic context – is not seen at Delphi. It is therefore not only the movement from political to individual concerns which illustrates the decline, but also issues of new, esoteric practices about which we find little evidence from Delphi.

The final two chapters of this book examine the impact which the rise of new divinatory practices – astrology, Neoplatonism, and theurgy – had on the decline of Delphi.<sup>13</sup> First, the words of Dodds must be remembered before entering into this area of research:

A new belief-pattern very seldom effaces completely the pattern that was there before: either the old lives on as an element in the new – sometimes an unconfessed and half-unconscious element – or else the two persist side by side, logically incompatible, but contemporaneously accepted by different individuals or even by the same individual.<sup>14</sup>



Indeed, astrology, Neoplatonic beliefs, and theurgy operated alongside Delphi for several centuries and, in a certain sense, adapted aspects of each other to fit into a certain method or way of thinking. People increasingly sought rational and scientific answers to questions previously left to the gods. Astrology was seen as highly effective since the correlations with planetary movements and earthly phenomena could be seen by all; the predictions of celestial movement showcased the prophetic and scientific nature of the craft. In the case of religion, there was a growing preference for a personal relationship with the divine in the second and third centuries AD. Neoplatonism and theurgy provided access to this relationship. These chapters do not argue that these developments in astrology and theurgy instantly replaced oracular consultation; rather, these occult practices should be viewed as, in the nomenclature of Thomas Kuhn, paradigms.<sup>15</sup>

Kuhn's monumental work, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, describes how new ways of thought come to dominate old methods of thinking. His theory concerns scientific thought, method, and theory. However, with due caution, this theory can be applied to a broader range of human thinking and even belief. First, he describes "Normal Science" namely "research firmly based upon one or more past scientific achievements."<sup>16</sup> For Chapters 6 and 7, the term "traditional religion" or "Greco-Roman cult" describes the religious practices of the Mediterranean which are based on centuries of convention. Traditional Greek religion, including the practice of oracular consultation is a "religion," firmly based on tradition, ancient beliefs, rituals, and practices. These were the foundation of acceptable beliefs and actions. Greek religion operated for centuries in a "Normal" way, adhering to age-old observances.

"Paradigm" is a key term in relation to "Normal Science" and for Kuhn this means, "some accepted examples of actual scientific practice – examples which include law, theory, application, and instrumentation together – that provide models from which spring particular coherent traditions for scientific research."<sup>17</sup> He cites the rubrics of "Ptolemaic or Copernican astronomy" and "Newtonian physics" as examples. For our purposes, there are two sets of paradigms, the first being oracular consultation situated within traditional Greek religion, and secondly, the grouping together of the esoteric practices of astrology, Neoplatonism, and theurgy into another paradigm. These paradigms exist side by side, for a time, but eventually one paradigm gains status "because," as Kuhn explains, "they are more successful than their competitors in solving a few problems that the group of practitioners has come to recognize as acute."<sup>18</sup> This book aims to evaluate the degree to which astrology, Neoplatonism, and theurgy offered new ways to solve the problem of access to divine knowledge, thereby creating competition for Delphic consultation, ultimately contributing to the decline of the oracle.

One paradigm eventually succeeds over another because it can better deal with, answer, explain, and assimilate various "anomalies." According to Kuhn, "anomalies" can be considered "new and unsuspected phenomena" and are the catalyst for change in practice and theory.<sup>19</sup> In the case of oracles, certain

“anomalies” also built up within traditional religion which challenged the foundation of cult. Such anomalies include the scientific forms of prediction seen from astrological observations, the increasing concern for the role of Fate in the lives of men, the ways in which theurgy could influence, change, and manipulate Fate, new philosophies such as Neoplatonism which postulated ideas of a personal connection with the divine, and the Chaldean Oracles that facilitated this connection. These new paradigms created anomalies through the services they offered, which were better adapted than Delphi to respond to the divinatory needs of the day. As society was infiltrated with new ideas, the oracles found it increasingly difficult to accommodate these new concerns. Delphi operated within traditional religion and to a significant degree helped, over the centuries, to establish what that entailed, and so breaking from that tradition was not only unfavorable, but, to a certain extent, impossible.<sup>20</sup> Eventually, a sufficient amount of anomalies built up and Delphi, as an oracle, ceased to be viable in a society which had turned toward rational explanations and scientific understanding on the one hand, and a personal religion and salvation of the soul on the other. I shall examine the possibility that these occult practices assisted in the decline of Delphi.

Thus, Chapter 6 examines the impact which astrology had on the Delphic Oracle in the first, second, and third centuries AD, with Kuhn’s theory utilized as a mental rubric. The scientific basis of astrology contributed to its popularity, drawing an ever-more rational crowd to its process and method to gain divine access: it had appeal for a learned audience. This chapter compares the various reasons for astrological consultations with those of Delphic consultation to demonstrate how the two forms of divination offered a similar function, thereby increasing the competition between the two; they became alternative means to the same ends. Furthermore, Chapter 6 demonstrates the familiarity of astrological notions for the Greeks, which created an easier transition into this particular form of access to divine knowledge. I examine the ability of astrology to provide a function similar to Delphi’s and how, once it had gained sufficient authority, it contributed to the decline of the oracle.

Chapter 7 focuses on occult issues, particularly the ways in which Neoplatonism and theurgy offered a new dimension of divinatory practice. First, the associations between theurgy, Neoplatonism and the written revelation of the Chaldean Oracles are analyzed to demonstrate a new conception of divine interaction with humanity. The divine formation, proposed by the Neoplatonists and utilized by the theurgists, is not entirely novel and so a brief outline of the philosophical background better situates the concepts within their historical and philosophical contexts. Chapter 7 analyzes the various beliefs of the Neoplatonists – focusing specifically on Porphyry and Iamblichus – and the effect these notions had on society. With the spread of ideas such as salvation of the soul and personal unification with the ultimate divinity, Delphi was declining in relevance. The increase in soteriological concerns throughout the Mediterranean is also demonstrated through a brief examination of Christianity, and particularly some Gnostic ideas. This chapter argues that the decline was

## 8 Introduction

assisted by the fact that the oracle did not specialize in these new religious features of society.

These new, esoteric practices represent the need for different levels of society to gain access to the divine. Although it is difficult to correlate such a relationship, based on the extant evidence, it may cautiously be suggested that oracular consultation declined as these forms of occult wisdom increased. The forms of divine access addressed here may not have *caused* Delphi to decline but, at the very least, demonstrate the types of sentiments, questions, and concerns people had during the decline of Delphi, which had changed over the course of Delphic operations. They reveal the sorts of issues with which people were concerned, and provide examples of the types of practices to which people progressively turned, just as Delphi was consulted less often.

## Notes

- 1 All figures are rounded to the nearest per cent.
- 2 Homolle (1896), Parker (1985), Athanassiadi (1989), and Levin (1989) all note the substantial decline starting around AD 200.
- 3 Parker (1985), p. 320.
- 4 Plut. *De Pyth.*, or. 408b–c. See Chapter 2.
- 5 See *FD* 3.1.560; *SEG* 9.72 for examples.
- 6 Bonnechere (2013), p. 375.
- 7 Busine (2005), p. 11.
- 8 Kindt (2015), p. 273.
- 9 The responses deemed Historical, are defined as “those which appear in contemporary records; that is, the accepted probable date of the response [which] fell within the lifetime of the writer who attests it, or of the earliest writer when several attest it, or not long before the date of the inscription which records it.” He defines Quasi-Historical as “those which were allegedly spoken within historical times, i.e. after the legendary period, but which are, to our knowledge, first attested by a writer whose lifetime was later than the accepted or supposed date of the response.” Next, Legendary responses are “those which belong to admittedly legendary narratives, i.e., the traditional tales of events which were supposed to have taken place in the dim past, sometime before the eighth century B.C., and those which belong to timeless folktales and fables.” Finally, fictional responses are, “those invented by poets, dramatists, and romancers to serve their creative purpose,” Fontenrose (1978), pp. 7–9.
- 10 Fontenrose (1978), p. 7.
- 11 Johnston (2005), p. 286.
- 12 Nock (1928).
- 13 I am not the first to suggest that these forms of worship and divination contributed to the decline of Delphi; P&W, p. 375 suggest an influence of astrology on Delphi, Cumont (1956), p. 163 also mentions a connection between astrology and the decline of traditional divination; Levin (1989), p. 1599 also suggests this; and Parke (1967b), p. 141 suggests the rise of theurgy may have assisted in the decline of oracular divination. Here, I attempt to amplify these statements with evidence of preference, or at least potential preference, for the occult practices instead of Delphic consultation.
- 14 Dodds (1951), p. 179.
- 15 Kuhn (1970).
- 16 Kuhn (1970), p. 10.
- 17 Kuhn (1970), p. 10.

- 18 Kuhn (1970), p. 23.
- 19 Kuhn (1979), p. 52.
- 20 Many oracles from Delphi concerned the establishment and sanction of various aspects of traditional Greek religion, such as how to honor which gods appropriately, how best to conduct various religious observances, to which gods a temple should be erected, the best way to appease the gods in times of trouble and direct commands of cult and ritual practices. For examples of these see P&W responses 73; 85; 88; 90; 102; 104; 113; 114; 118; 124; 126; 125; 132; 138; 158; 164; 169; 179; 211; 226; 238; 239; 240; 241; 242; 243; 246; 256; 265; 279; 280; 281; 282; 283; 284; 285; 328; 330; 340; 341; 342; 343; 344; 345; 346; 347; 348; 349; 353; 354; 356; 383; 426; 427; 432; 433; 457; 458; 459; 464; 466; 467; 471; 508; 509; 529; 530; 533; 538; 540; 541; 545; 546; 554; 560; 566; and 573.

## Bibliography

- Athanassiadi, P. (1989) "The fate of oracles in late antiquity," *Deltion Christianikes archaiologikes etaireias* 15: 271–278.
- Bonnechere, P. (2013) "The religious management of the polis," in *A companion to ancient Greek government*. Beck, H. ed., Blackwell, Oxford: 366–381.
- Busine, A. (2005) "Gathering sacred words: Collections of oracles from pagan sanctuaries to Christian books," in *Selecta colligere, II*. Piccione, R.M. and Perkams, M. eds., Ed. dell'Orso, Alessandria: 1–17.
- Cumont, F. (1956) *Oriental religions in Roman paganism*. Dover, New York.
- Dodds, E.R. (1951) *The Greeks and the irrational*. University of California Press, Berkeley.
- Fontenrose, J. (1978) *The Delphic oracle*. University of California Press, Berkeley.
- Homolle, T. (1896) "Le temple de Delphes son histories a ruine," *BCH* 20: 702–732.
- Johnston, S.I. (2005) "Delphi and the dead," in *Mantikê: Studies in ancient divination*. Johnston, S.I and Struck, P.T. eds., Brill, Leiden: 283–306.
- Kindt, J. (2015) "Oracular shrines as places of religious experience," in *A companion to the archaeology of religion in the ancient world*. Raja, R. and Rüpke, J. eds., Wiley Blackwell, Oxford: 268–278.
- Kuhn, T.S. (1970) *The structure of scientific revolutions*. University of Chicago Press, Chicago.
- Levin, S. (1989) "The old Greek oracles in decline," *ANRW* 2.18.2: 1599–1649.
- Nock, A.D. (1928) "Oracles théologiques," *REA* 30: 281–288.
- Parke, H.W. (1967) *Greek oracles*. Hutchinson, London.
- Parke, H.W. and Wormell, D.E.W. (2004) *The Delphic oracle*, 2 Vols. Ares Publishers, Chicago. (reprint of 1956 Oxford ed.)
- Parker, R. (1985) "Greek states and Greek oracles," in *Crux: Essays in Greek history presented to G.E.M. de Ste. Croix on his 75th Birthday*. Cartledge, P.A. and Harvey, F.D. eds., Duckworth, London: 298–326.

# 1 The history of Delphi

εἶπατε τῷ βασιλεῖ, χαμαὶ πέσε δαίδαλος αὐλά.  
οὐκέτι Φοῖβος ἔχει καλύβαν, οὐ μάντιδα δάφνην,  
οὐ παγὰν λαλέουσιν. ἀπέσβετο καὶ ἄλλον ὕδωρ.

Tell the Emperor: the cunningly wrought courtyard has fallen;  
Phoebus no longer holds the veil; nor the prophet[ic] laurel;  
Nor the speaking spring, and the speaking water has dried up.<sup>1</sup>

An unorthodox place to start an examination of Delphi is at the end. This is the Pythia's supposed last reply, addressed to Oribasios, Emperor Julian's personal physician, in c. AD 361/2. As the final extant oracular consultation, it marks the end of our record of prophecies issued at Delphi.<sup>2</sup> There is, however, an oracle issued regarding the birth of Honorius in AD 384 recorded by Claudian; he claims that the oracles of Ammon and Apollo at Delphi had been silent, but spoke again to inaugurate this occasion.<sup>3</sup> Since the edicts forbidding oracular consultation had not yet been passed, it is possible that the oracle was still in operation. So there is no reason to deny that this oracle, or another one like it, could have been issued from Delphi in the fourth century AD. Despite the Christian sources for many of the late oracles, it is likely that the responses reflect a general fact that the oracle was still in operation to some degree. Still, not long after this response was issued, the oracular Apollo at Delphi was closed for good, one of the most symbolic ends to traditional Greek religion.

Shortly after these oracles were thought to have been issued, an edict of Theodosius Valentinian II and Arcadius closed all oracular temples and forbade all types of divination in AD 391.<sup>4</sup> The summary of the law dictates that pagan sacrifice, worship of pagan idols, and worship in pagan temples is forbidden. The law further decrees that prosecutors of rank will be fined, but higher officials will pay a smaller amount than lower-ranking officials. Less than a decade later, an edict of Honorius and Arcadius closed all pagan temples and forbade sacrifices at any time and place.<sup>5</sup> Still, it seems that the sanctuary at Delphi was not yet completely closed. A law passed in AD 424 suggests that the Pythian Games may still have been celebrated at that time, but it is likely that the oracles had stopped by then.<sup>6</sup> The millennium-long practice, which

had advised on some of the most important moments in Greek history, was over. Oracles were silenced by a legislative mandate issued by a Christian Roman emperor. To understand this eventual fate of Delphi, it is important to examine the development of the oracle in terms of its religious and political significance.

## Delphi in the Archaic Period

The sanctuary's rise to prominence can be attributed to several factors, which can be categorized generally as psychological, religious, political, and geographical. Delphi's ascent in a psychological sense can easily be understood in terms of prophecy and divination. Anxieties, fears, and desires have plagued humanity since time immemorial and when normal interaction with the world did not provide solutions to these problems new approaches were developed. People noticed that invisible forces dominated the world, caused rain to fall and plants to grow, seasons to change, and the sun to rise. In this way, appealing to the gods through ritual can be viewed as a reasonable solution to the various unknowns of humanity. The supremacy of Delphi, in a religious sense, can be seen best through the hierarchy of divinatory practitioners distinguished by the Greeks. Soothsayers and magicians initially worked for the community to satisfy the psychological needs of the Mediterranean. Eventually, the *polis* developed through a unification of various settlements and small villages, and this resulted in the establishment of stabilized communities in certain regions.<sup>7</sup> With this came the development of various forms of public worship including festivals, feasts, and sacrifices, creating a comprehensive and communal form of worship that superseded private worship; it is within this context that Delphi was established. The central location of the oracle facilitated a number of consultants to visit the sanctuary with relative ease, particularly compared to Dodona or Siwah, which were far more remote than Delphi.<sup>8</sup>

Greek society began to appeal to the divine forces, agreed upon by the community, for help regarding various issues. Some of the earliest *poleis* to consult Delphi did so regarding important matters of state, which in turn helped to carve out a sort of "national" identity for the Greeks.<sup>9</sup> Thus, the beginning of a Panhellenic sanctuary began its long history. Since there was never any unified political development in Greece within the *poleis*, the Panhellenic sanctuaries served as a gathering place for all of Greece. Individuals from different *poleis* could meet there to share art, knowledge, diplomacy, competition, religious experience and in this sense, a "national" Greek identity. Delphi became an important center for all of Greece, and it is through these means that it continued to develop into a significant institution.

The establishment of the Delphic oracle appears in three separate mythological accounts. Sadly, none of these versions agree and are difficult to reconcile, so it is best to examine the archeological evidence surrounding Delphi's foundation.<sup>10</sup> Before the sanctuary gained Panhellenic status, the *polis* itself was already established, beginning in the Protogeometric period until c. 875/60

BC.<sup>11</sup> The Mycenaean (pre-*polis*) settlement at Delphi was extensive, but after the Mycenaean period, there is a gap of evidence until Delphi was “re-established” in the mid-ninth century, 60 years before monumental votives appeared. The emergence of votives suggests cult activity, but remained at a local level; it was not until the last quarter of the eighth century BC that oracular divination was developed.<sup>12</sup> From c. 800 BC, Corinthian interest at Delphi begins and further ties with northern regions in Greece were established, which helped strengthen relations with Thessaly. By the seventh century BC, consultations and dedications at Delphi are more extensive and constant; the sanctuary had gained Panhellenic status. However, Delphi is a particularly unique case regarding divination because, although the initiation of religious activity began on a local level, the sanctuary soon developed into a Panhellenic sensation. Here, the political aspect of Delphi’s rise to prominence becomes significant. Beginning with Corinth, Chalcis, and Sparta consulting the oracle in the eighth century BC, and Athens in the seventh century BC, Delphi became a tool for Greek communities to deal with unprecedented problems. As opposed to the interests of the elite, the problems were those of community, such as legislation, famine, drought, and over population. Many of these issues were brought to Delphi and often times the solution was colonization.

The importance of the topics as well as the inquirers presented to Apollo added to the fame and prestige of the oracle and the sanctuary, in particular colonization oracles, which allowed the cult of the Pythian Apollo to be spread throughout the Greek Mediterranean.<sup>13</sup> Delphi also contributed to *polis*-formation by giving religious sanction to different problems raised by developing communities. Famously, Sparta’s *Rhetra* was approved by (or perhaps initiated by) Apollo at Delphi, and the consultation of Delphi on behalf of the Athenians regarding Cleisthenes and the Athenian Tribes.<sup>14</sup> In this way, the needs and concerns of the elite were still important, but Delphi provided solutions to them within a communal context and this spread the fame and prestige of the oracle throughout many communities within Greece. Delphi, in time, became the religious authority of Greece and was sustained for centuries by this ancient tradition.

The political aspects of Delphi’s rise are intimately connected to the *polis*.<sup>15</sup> Furthermore, the autonomy which Delphi enjoyed contributed to its long history. Several Sacred Wars were fought to preserve this independence and, early in Delphi’s operation, this degree of autonomy led to its success.<sup>16</sup> Since the sanctuary was not bound by certain political alliances, the oracle quickly became a Panhellenic center open to Greeks and barbarians alike – many barbarians dedicated at Delphi, the first being the legendary King Midas of Phrygia, as well as Gyges and Croesus of Lydia.<sup>17</sup> Indeed, Delphi was consulted by a variety of people and communities for several different reasons. The needs of consultants of Delphi are going to be different in the Archaic period from later periods. For example, the oracle was consulted frequently in the Archaic and Classical periods regarding colonization, however, by the Hellenistic period and beyond, the Mediterranean was largely settled, marginalizing one of the