

Ancient Greek THESIS 1908

UMD

THESIS

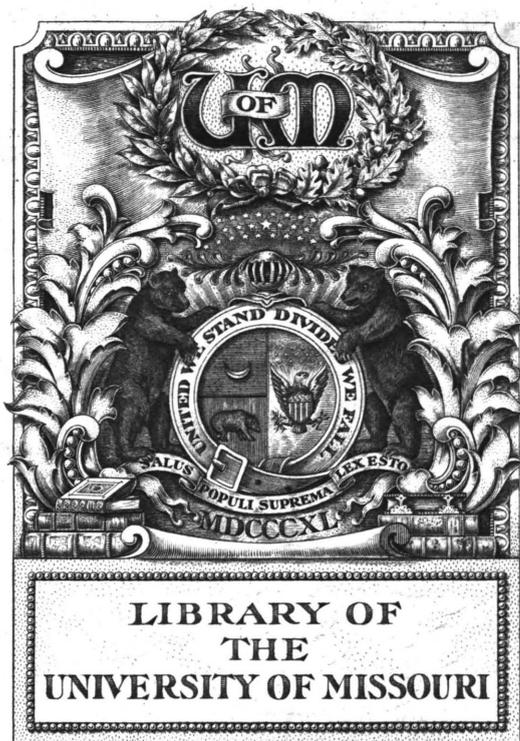
8.1M11-X.5632



UM Libraries Depository



103264708018



THE GIFT OF

Author

This Thesis Has Been

MICROFILMED

Negative No. T-

758

Form 26



THE ATTITUDE OF THE
ANCIENT GREEK WRITERS TOWARD ORACLES.

by

HELEN M. ^{over}JOHNSON, A. B.



SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE
REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF ARTS

in the

GRADUATE DEPARTMENT
(COLLEGE OF ARTS AND SCIENCE)

of the

UNIVERSITY OF MISSOURI

1908.

1991
YRASHILI
1991

378.7M71
XJ632

Introduction.

The object of this dissertation is to show to what extent the educated people of ancient Greece believed in the reality, power, and authority of the oracles. There is no doubt that the common people believed implicitly. The great amount of wealth accumulated at Delphi is evidence of this. That many of the most prominent Grecians firmly believed that the oracles were of divine origin and were guided by their advice, is not unlikely; but others, owing to the undermining influence of philosophic speculation, probably had little or no faith in their reality, though they consulted them in obedience to popular opinion and demand. A quotation from Gardner's *New Chapters In Greek History*(1) will show the method of consultation and answer. "The more important oracles, which were usually connected with some shrine of Apollo, were clear and articulate in question and reply. To them kings and states, and persons of standing brought the problems which had perplexed them to be solved by the higher wisdom of the god. In carefully arranged order they were introduced into the sacred shrine, and the priestess from the tripod filled with an ecstasy of Apolline inspiration gave them their answer, which was carefully taken down and which served often to guide colonies in the choice of a place, or nations in the decision between peace and war. It has often been remarked that the Greeks as a rule, when compared with

Oriental peoples, were decidedly sceptical as to the value of the utterances of those in a state of nervous exaltation. Plato is something of an exception to the rule; in the *Timaeus* he remarks that foresight of the future does not belong to men sane and sensible, but to those under the influence of sleep, disease or inspiration. At the Apolline oracles this divine madness was systematically used as a means for learning the will, and profiting by the wisdom of the gods".

I have endeavored to ascertain the belief of the educated by a careful examination of all references to oracles and their influence in Homer, Hesiod, the Homeric Hymns, Pindar, Solon, Theognis, Aeschylus, Sophocles, Euripides, Aristophanes, Herodotus, Thucydides, Plato and Demosthenes. Owing to lack of time, it was necessary to limit the work and I chose these as the most representative and important writers. I used the various Lexica, when they were available; it was necessary, however, to read the complete works of Euripides.

It is not easy to discover the exact belief of the ancient poets, philosophers, historians and statesmen about the oracles. The evidence is often more negative than positive. Thucydides is an example of this. As a rule he restricts himself to impartial narrative, with no comment. Another difficulty, in the tragedians especially, is to tell how much is the expression of their own belief, and how much due to the influence of the myth they treated, of the dramatic necessities and of the belief of the audience before which the play was

presented. These problems will be treated more at length in connection with the individual writers.

As will be seen, the majority of references was to the oracle at Delphi. There were a few scattering allusions to others. In connection with the oracles, it was necessary to treat the subject of divination. The prophets, like the oracles, received their inspiration from Apollo and some of them had established seats.

I.

Epic and Lyric Poets.

The impersonality of epic poetry makes a difficulty in its treatment in reference to the oracles. The poet confines himself to narrative and does not express any personal opinion. Moreover, at this early date the oracles had not been established long enough to become famous. Delphi was first established as the seat of Apollo's oracle at the time of the Dorian invasion (1). This probably accounts for the few references to the oracles in the epic poets.

There is no reference, whatever, made in the Iliad. The prophet is consulted in times of need and his advice is always taken. Although Agamemnon speaks slightly of Calchas, he obeys his command (2). Priam, in regard to a command of Zeus delivered by Iris, says that if a seer or priest had told him this, he would declare it false, but he would obey the goddess (3). This is the only instance where anyone openly expresses distrust of the prophets.

In the Odyssey two references are found to oracles. This fact is due, perhaps, to its later date. Homer says the quarrel between Agamemnon and Achilles had been predicted by Delphi (4); he also represents Odysseus consulting the oracle of Zeus at Dodona (5). These two instances, though

1. Bouché Leclercq. Vol. I p. 378.

2. A. 100.

3. ν 221.

4. θ 79.

5. π 296

is recognized as the supreme prophet is shown by Hermes saying that he is all-wise in oracles (1).

The poet himself, being a writer of epic, makes no direct comment but the tenor of his whole work shows his belief in the oracle.

Of the three lyric poets consulted, Solon, Theognis and Pindar, nothing was found in the first two. Considering the personal character of lyric poetry, this is rather striking. Theognis, particularly, is given to moralizing and would be expected to mention oracles.

Any mention of them by Pindar is incidental to his celebration of the hero of the ode; but he always speaks of them in terms of greatest confidence. The fact that his family, the Aegidae, was connected with the temples and oracles is probably partly responsible for this faith.

He speaks of Olympia as the seat of a truthful oracle (2) but more frequent mention is made of Delphi. He describes it as "righteously-judging" (3) and says that Apollo knows the predestined end of all things (4). He further specifies that the mind of Apollo knows all things, that it does not deal in falsehood and that neither god nor man can deceive it (5). He mentions several instances where the god's prediction was later verified (6).

Whenever possible, Pindar makes use of the oracles in

-
- | | |
|----------------------|-----------------------------------|
| 1. III. 469. | 4. Pythian IX. 49. |
| 2. Olympian VIII. 1. | 5. Pythian III. 27-30. |
| 3. Pythian XI. 6. | 6. Pythian V. 60-63; VIII. 40-45. |

favor of the man whom he is celebrating. For instance, in the ode to Agesias, he proves his divine descent by the answer of Delphi concerning the parentage of Jamus (1). He makes a flattering comparison between Agesias and the prophet Amphiaraus, whom he praises highly (2). He also makes reference to Teiresias as a true (3) and wise (4) prophet.

Pindar is the first to mention colonization at command of an oracle. He says both Rhodes (5) and Cyrene (6) were colonized in obedience to Delphi. He also says that Apollo, by virtue of his oracles, caused the descendants of Heracles and Aegimius to inhabit Lacedaemonia, Argos and Pylos (7).

1. Olympian VI. 37-51.

5. Olympian VII. 30.

2. Olympian VI. 16.

6. Pythian IV. 5.

3. Nemean I. 61.

7. Pythian V. 68-72.

4. Isthmian VI. 8.

II.

Dramatists.

In the treatment of the dramatists' attitude toward the oracles, the problem is to decide how much of their writing expresses their own opinion. They were necessarily influenced to some extent by the myth as preserved by tradition and by the needs of the dramatic situation. Every expression of faith or scepticism cannot be accepted as the poets' own belief. The problem is clearly stated by Way in his *Euripides in English Verse* (1). "It behooves us, indeed, to exercise extreme caution in assuming that in the expression of this or that opinion by one of his characters we find a self revelation of the poet: it is a principle of interpretation the adoption of which will in the great majority of cases mislead us, and involve us in contradictory conclusions. We might more safely lay it down as a rule, that, whenever there is manifest dramatic propriety in the sentiment put into the mouth of a particular character, there the poet was not making that person the mouthpiece of his own views: the sentiment may indeed in certain cases coincide with his own; but, in a wide range of character and incident, that was inevitable. But to many of these references to mythical religion this rule does not apply. They are often of passing comment, or *obiter dicta*."

In Aeschylus we find almost universal confidence in the

1. Vol. II. pp. XXXIV-XXXV.

oracles. He, like Pindar, may have been influenced by the fact that his family was connected with the celebration of Eleusinian mysteries.

Both the Eumenides and Libation Pourers are based on obedience to Delphi. Orestes is guided in every step by Apollo's advice and seems to consider him infallible (1). When he is in doubt whether to kill Clytemnestra, Pylades reminds him of the Pythian oracles and he is convinced (2). In pleading his case before Athena, Orestes says that he committed the murder at the instigation of Apollo (3). Apollo himself defends Orestes. He says that as a prophet he will not lie and that all his oracles have been in obedience to Zeus (4). He is described, at the beginning of the play also, by the Pythian priestess as the inspired prophet of his father Zeus (5). The Chorus seems to doubt his statement that his oracles are inspired by Zeus (6). Later Apollo explicitly commands obedience to his oracles (7). Here, too, the Chorus complains that he will no longer speak pure oracles because he took a murderer's part. This shows he was expected to discriminate against criminals and that his decrees were not accepted without question. It is to be noticed, however, that the Chorus is composed of the Eumenides themselves, who are naturally opposed to every speech of Apollo in favor

-
- | | |
|------------------------------|----------------------|
| 1. Libation Pourers 269-73. | 5. Eumenides 19. |
| 2. Libation Pourers 900-904. | 6. Eumenides 622-24. |
| 3. Libation Pourers 1029-43. | 7. Eumenides 713-16. |
| 4. Eumenides 614-622. | |

of Orestes. It is significant that Orestes is acquitted, because he committed the crime at the command of Apollo; the poet thus vindicates decisively the authority of the oracle.

Although Aeschylus permitted his characters to complain of the oracles, they considered them inevitable and obeyed them, however unwillingly. For instance, Io describes how Inachos drove her from home, against his will and hers, but forced by the oracles of Loxias (1). Agamemnon submits to the decree of Calchas in regard to the sacrifice of Iphigenia. Here the Chorus complains that oracles never bring good tidings to men (2). This is merely an expression of suffering and not of disbelief. Immediately afterward, they believe Cassandra when she prophesies a new evil, the death of Agamemnon. Again, Darius expresses regret at the swift fulfillment of the oracle, but he realizes it must come true, sooner or later (3).

The one instance of disobedience (that of Laius) was severely punished (4). This disobedience was the cause of all the misfortunes of his house. Tydeus is represented as having small respect for omens and prophets (5). He is mentioned, however, particularly in contrast to the prophet Amphiaraus. This prophet is spoken of in the highest terms of praise, even by his enemies (6). But because of his association with the goddess, he must die in this battle, "if

-
- | | |
|------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| 1. Prometheus Bound 658-672. | 4. Seven Against Thebes 742-750. |
| 2. Agamemnon 1130-35. | 5. Seven Against Thebes 372-383. |
| 3. The Persians 739-43. | 6. Seven Against Thebes 568-592. |

these is any fruit in the oracles of Loxias, and he either keeps silent or speaks opportunely" (1).

Sophocles, too, shows complete confidence in both oracles and prophets. Every action is taken in accordance with their advice. This obedience, however, is not due to fear, as in Aeschylus, but to perfect trust. Orestes, after consulting the oracle at Delphi, proceeds without question, "since we have heard so clear an oracle" (2). This same confidence is shown in all his plays (3), but it is worked out most completely in the *Antigone*, *Oedipus Rex* and *Oedipus Coloneus*.

In the *Antigone*, it is the seer Teiresias who prophesies. He first compels Creon to acknowledge the benefits derived from his previous advice (4). He then advises Creon to bury Polyneices, contrary to his edict. This angers Creon and he denounces the whole race of seers as mercenary and prophesying for the sake of gain (5). Even in his anger, however, he admits that Teiresias is a wise seer (6). Now thoroughly aroused, Teiresias prophesies that Creon's own son, Haemon, shall die as an atonement for the death of Antigone and the refusal to bury Polyneices (7). The Chorus reminds Creon that Teiresias has never been a false prophet (8). Creon admits that is true and suddenly yields.

-
- | | |
|--|----------------------|
| 1. Seven Against Thebes 619. | 5. Antigone 1033-63. |
| 2. Electra 32-38. | 6. Antigone 1059. |
| 3. See Philoctetes 1336-39;
Trachinae 1164-68;
Ajax 748. | 7. Antigone 1064-90. |
| 4. Antigone 990-5. | 8. Antigone 1092- |

He is too late to prevent the deaths of Antigone and Haemen. The prophecy of Teiresias is already fulfilled and his reputation for infallibility is confirmed (1).

The most striking example of the inevitable, though slow, fulfillment of the oracle is the Oedipus Rex. Delphi had predicted to Laius that his son would be the cause of his death. He thought that he would evade the oracle by exposing the child. Delphi had also predicted to Oedipus that he would kill his father and marry his mother. He also tried to evade the oracle by leaving Corinth. Both these predictions had been made so long ago that they were almost forgotten. At the time the play opens, Thebes is afflicted with a pestilence and Oedipus has sent Creon to consult Delphi about means of delivery (2). Delphi commands them to drive out the murderer of Laius, who is the cause of the pestilence (3). Accordingly Oedipus makes a proclamation to this effect. He gives as his authority the Pythian oracle (4). He then consults Teiresias, whom the Chorus describes as a "divine man, in whom, alone of men, the truth is implanted" (5). Teiresias tells Oedipus that he himself is the murderer of Laius. Oedipus does not believe this and denounces Teiresias as a "quack with eyes only for gain" He cites as a proof of his inability the fact that he could not read the riddle of the Sphynx, which he himself read (6).

-
- | | |
|------------------------|-------------------------|
| 1. Antigone 1178. | 4. Oedipus Rex 242. |
| 2. Oedipus Rex 70. | 5. Oedipus Rex 298 |
| 3. Oedipus Rex 94-107. | 6. Oedipus Rex 385-398. |

Teiresias angered by his scorn, predicts that he will be found to be the husband of his mother and that he will become blind (1).

The Chorus here supports Oedipus. It says that Zeus and Apollo know the things of earth; but there is no sure proof that prophets know more than they and they will not believe the prophecy until it is proved (2). It considers, however, that the prophecies of Apollo are inevitable (3). Jocasta also makes a similar distinction. She mentions the oracle to Laius as a proof of the fallacy of oracles, but specifies that it was not from Phoebus himself, but from his ministers (4). Oedipus, on the contrary, is much alarmed, on hearing the oracle and, after making inquiries, fears "that the prophet sees" (5). He recalls the murder of a man under circumstances similar to those described by Jocasta and also recalls the oracle given to him in his youth. He is distracted by fear that Teiresias will be found correct and that he will be banished by his own decree (6). He cannot return to his own country, because he still fears the fulfillment of the other oracle. He thinks this is inevitable if he returns to Corinth.

At this point the Chorus says that it will go to Delphi no longer, if these things do not manifestly come true (7).

1. Oedipus Rex 454-62.

5. Oedipus Rex 747.

2. Oedipus Rex 499-512.

6. Oedipus Rex 813-827.

3. Oedipus Rex 480-2.

7. Oedipus Rex 898-910.

4. Oedipus Rex 707-25.

It says also that the old prophecies concerning Laius are fading and that Apollo is nowhere honored. This may perhaps be considered descriptive of Sophocles' own time; this question, however, will be considered later.

A messenger now appears with news of the death of Polybus. Jocasta is now convinced more than ever of the fallacy of the oracles and speaks of them with great scorn (1). Oedipus himself wavers in his faith and agrees with Jocasta that the oracles are worth nothing (2). He still fears, however, the fulfillment of the prophecy concerning his mother. His fear is much increased by learning from the messenger that he was not the son of Merope and Polybus. By questioning the messenger and the old herdsman, he discovers that both the oracles have already been fulfilled (3). He says that Apollo is responsible for all his troubles (4). He blinds himself and thus the prediction of Teiresias also is verified.

The Oedipus Coloneus is a continuation of the Oedipus Rex. Oedipus with Antigone arrives at the grove of the Eumenides. Oedipus says that Apollo told him, when he made his first prediction, that this would be his resting place, that he would benefit those who sheltered him and injure those who drove him away, and that there would be signs from Zeus of his approaching death (5). The Thebans are still sufficiently worried about Oedipus to consult Delphi about him

1. Oedipus Rex 946-53.

2. Oedipus Rex 964-72.

3. Oedipus Rex 1182.

4. Oedipus Rex 1329-30.

5. Oedipus Coloneus 84-93.

and Ismene keeps him informed about these oracles. The most recent one is that he will be desired by the Thebans, alive or dead. (1). They will suffer if his tomb is neglected. Oedipus inquires where Ismene learned this oracle and when she says from the Delphian envoys, he accepts it (2). Because of this oracle, Creon comes and tries to persuade him to return to Thebes. He refuses to do so and Creon taunts him with his former crimes. Oedipus defends himself on the ground that he was not responsible; but that they were inevitable, because Apollo had predicted them (3).

Polyneices also shows confidence in the oracles. He comes and implores Oedipus to join him, because it was predicted that the side, which he joined would be victorious (4).

Soon after the departure of Polyneices, thunder is heard and Oedipus realizes that it is time for him to die, according to Apollo's prophecy (5). Thus, throughout both plays, Oedipus shows supreme faith in Apollo's oracle. He wavers only once, when the news of Polybus' death is brought. For the time he agrees with Jocasta; but, when he discovers his mistake, his faith is stronger than before.

The question is now to be considered whether the Oedipus Rex was intended by Sophocles to apply to his own time. The date of the play is very uncertain. It was composed after the Antigone, which was produced in 441 B.C., and

-
1. Oedipus Coloneus 385-90. 4. Oedipus Coloneus 1326-32.
 2. Oedipus Coloneus 413. 5. Oedipus Coloneus 1456-61.
 3. Oedipus Coloneus 969-96.

before the *Philoctetes*, produced in 409 B.C. It has been attributed by some critics to the period of the plague at Athens. This is supposed to correspond to the pestilence at Thebes and *Oedipus* to represent Pericles. It is not probable, however, that Sophocles would have thus represented a recent disaster. The play probably belongs to an earlier date, when there was a decided tendency toward scepticism. The passage cited above (1) may well apply to that period. The play may be considered a protest against this scepticism and a defense of oracles. The moral lesson conveyed is the importance of oracles as warnings of inevitable destiny and the terrible consequences attendant upon attempts at evasion of that destiny.

The fact that oracles are given so much more prominence in the *Antigone*, *Oedipus Rex* and *Oedipus Coloneus* is probably partly due to the exigencies of the myth; but the power of the oracle is emphasized entirely too much not to be an expression of the poet's own faith.

Euripides has the reputation, perhaps partly due to his philosophic tendencies, of an atheist, but this seems undeserved. It is true we do not find the unquestioning faith of Sophocles nor the fear of Aeschylus, but by no means does he show absolute disbelief. The character of Orestes before the murder of Clytemnestra is typical of the attitude of each. Sophocles' Orestes, in the *Electra*, after consulting Delphi, proceeds as a matter of course, without fear or

1. *Oedipus Rex* 898-910.

hesitancy. Aeschylus' Orestes, in the Libation Pourers, hesitates between his natural affection and obedience to the oracle. The oracle is his incentive to action and he fears the punishment threatened by Apollo. The oracle is not the principal incentive to Euripides' Orestes, but he uses it more as a justification. This Orestes too hesitates between his affection and duty, and doubts and criticizes the wisdom of the oracle (1). Electra assures him of its wisdom and he is convinced more by her arguments than by fear of disobedience. After the murder he repents and puts the responsibility on Phoebus, rather unjustly (2). The play as a whole supports Orestes' doubt of the wisdom of the oracle, though it defends his obedience to it (3). The Dioscuri describe the oracle as foolish, but one that must be fulfilled (4). This seems to be the attitude of Euripides himself. Although he firmly believes in the gods and the revelation of their will through oracles, he does not accept their decrees without question, as Sophocles does. He cannot understand the wisdom of a god who avenges himself like a common mortal (5). "In this way, the king, who gives oracles to others and is the judge of what is right for everyone, avenged himself on the son of Achilles, remembering their ancient feud, like a wicked man. How, then, can he be wise?" This, however, is probably a protest against the popular conception of the gods.

 1. Electra 971-81.

2. Electra 1190-5.

3. Electra 1266-7.

4. Electra 1244-8.

Cf. Electra 1301-2.

5. Andromache 1161-5.

In several other instances he censures the oracles of Apollo: Electra describes it as "a wicked utterance by a wicked god" (1), Orestes complains that he has been deceived by the prophecies of Apollo and is ruined by obedience to them (2). Pylades reassures him both here and elsewhere (3). He probably represents Euripides' true feeling, as may be concluded from the outcome of the play. The complaints of Electra and Orestes are natural under the circumstances. In refutation of Orestes' charge of deceit and neglect, he is protected and rescued by Athena on account of his obedience to the oracle (4). At another time Orestes defends his obedience to Apollo and describes him as one "who gives utterances most wise to mortals and whom we obey in everything he says" (5). His inconsistencies are due to Euripides' truthful delineation of human nature. Although Orestes believes in Apollo's wisdom, he begins to doubt when he finds himself in misfortune. He finally says that his doubts have been removed and Apollo is a true seer (6).

That Apollo's decree is superior to the will of a god is clearly shown. Eurystheus disregarded one of his oracles, thinking that Hera was superior to an oracle; but he found that the oracle was the stronger and suffered death as a result of his neglect (7).

-
- | | |
|--------------------------------|-------------------------|
| 1. Orestes 162-5. | 5. Orestes 591-4. |
| 2. Iphigenia in Tauris 711-24. | 6. Orestes 1666-70. |
| 3. Iphigenia in Tauris 104-5. | 7. Heracleidae 1026-39. |
| 4. Iphigenia in Tauris 1437. | |

Ion is one of Euripides' best illustrations of perfect faith. Though he cannot understand the oracle, he accepts it and seeks some explanation.

Euripides' treatment of the prophets is very different. He distinguishes very carefully between Apollo's oracles and mortal prophecy (1). It is true there are examples of obedience to their prophecies. Hector takes their advice in war (2); Agamemnon sacrifices Iphigenia at their command; Adrastus is censured for disobeying the seers' advice and his ruin is attributed to this (3); Menoeceus sacrifices himself to save the city, in obedience to Teiresias. Creon, however, does not hesitate to urge disregard of the oracle, when he finds that it is particularly disagreeable to him (4). All these examples of obedience are probably due to the dramatic necessities of the case. On the other hand, he describes prophecy as "a bait to catch a livelihood" and says the tricks of seers are worthless and full of falsehood (5). Although Agamemnon obeys Calchas on account of the popular belief in him, he and Menelaus describe the whole race of prophets as "useless and good for nothing" (6). Achilles describes a prophet as one who "tells a few truths and many falsehoods when he is fortunate" (7). The denunciations are so severe and explicit that they are more likely to represent

1. Electra 399.
Cf. Helen 1148-50.

2. Rhesus 65-7.

3. Suppliants 154-9

4. Phoenissae 970-1

5. Helen 745-60.

6. Iphigenia at Aulis 518-2

7. Iphigenia at Aulis 956-8

Euripides' own sentiments.

The attitude of Aristophanes is very different from that of Euripides. Euripides believed in the divine oracles, but denounced and distrusted mortal prophecy. Aristophanes makes no direct statements but ridicules both divine and mortal prophecy. He makes a distinction, however, between a "prophet" (*πάντις*) and an "oracle-monger" (*χρησμολόγος*) (1). He has no character of a true prophet in his comedies.

He represents the Athenian populace in *The Knights* as having great confidence in a book of oracles by Bacis. Bacis was a Boeotian soothsayer, supposed to have been inspired by the Nymphs. Aristophanes makes a reference to this (2), but seems to make no distinction between him and Apollo. Cleon says that his oracles are from Bacis (3) and then quotes the words of Apollo (4). This apparent confusion may be due to the fact that all prophecy was supposed to be inspired by Apollo. The oracles of Bacis seem to have been held in high esteem generally (5), but Aristophanes has his surpassed by those of Glanis, who was merely an invention (6). This comedy is the first in which he introduces the oracles and he ridicules unmercifully the Athenians for their credulity. In *The Birds* he opposes an oracle from Apollo to some of Bacis quoted by an oracle-monger (7). This

-
- | | |
|--------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| 1. Peace 1046-7. | 5. Cf. Herod. VIII. 77. |
| 2. Peace 1070-2. | 6. <i>The Knights</i> 1097. |
| 3. <i>The Knights</i> 1003. | 7. <i>The Birds</i> 981-2. |
| 4. <i>The Knights</i> 1015-16. | |

indicates nothing on the part of Aristophanes, but was merely for dramatic effect to get rid of the false^{prophet}. A similar character is treated with small ceremony in the Peace also (1). For Delphi he seems to show a little more respect. Chremylus consults Delphi and obeys its command (2). He shows confidence throughout (3). Aristophanes here describes Apollo as one who is called a wise prophet (4). Philocleon also quotes with confidence an oracle from Delphi (5). On the other hand, Aristophanes parodies Delphi, Dodona, Ammon and Apollo (6). He says, "Are we not Delphi, Dodona, Ammon and Phoebus Apollo to you? You came first to the birds and then turn to everything, commerce, acquirement of livelihood and marriage". This may be taken as a criticism of the frequent consultations of the oracles on more or less trivial matters; but, in any case, shows lack of respect.

In Plutus he represents an absurd discussion concerning the meaning of the oracle (7). This can be construed either as a parody on the discussions that frequently took place as to the meaning, or as a criticism of the ambiguity of the oracles themselves.

His most favorable comment is where he says Musaeus had been useful to mankind, because he made oracles known (8).

-
- | | |
|---------------------|----------------------|
| 1. Peace 1046-1126. | 5. Wasps 161. |
| 2. Plutus 8-14. | 6. The Birds 716-22. |
| 3. Plutus 212-13. | 7. Plutus 32-55. |
| 4. Plutus 11. | 8. Frogs 1033. |

This speech, however, is put into the mouth of Aeschylus, whose sentiments would agree with this.

Distrust of the oracles is inconsistent with Aristophanes' reputation as a "laudator temporis acti" and also with his ridicule of the philosophic speculations that were largely responsible for the growing scepticism. His ridicule may be purely superficial and intended more for the exaggerated faith of the common people than the oracles themselves. It is strange that the public would tolerate such lack of reverence, but this is in accordance with the license given comic poets.

III.

Historians.

In the historians the difficulty is the lack of positive evidence. With few exceptions, they restrict themselves to a relation of facts as commonly accepted, with no personal comment.

In Herodotus Delphi first appears prominently as a bureau d'administration. It is consulted on all questions of government, politics and colonization as well as private affairs, and its advice is considered by the people authoritative. Herodotus also shows great faith in its reliability. This is consistent with his former reputation for general credulity. It has been shown, however, that he did not accept unreservedly all traditions and his faith in oracles was probably not due to excessive credulity on his part, but is representative of the belief of men of his class.

He mentions numerous important government affairs settled by the advice of Delphi. For instance, he attributes the dual sovereignty of Sparta to a Delphic oracle (1) The expulsion of the Pisistratidae also was due to Delphi (2) Again, Miltiades of Athens was made king of the Chersonese in obedience to an oracle (3). The important step of building a navy was taken by the Athenians in accordance

1. VI. 52. Cf. VI. 66 and I. 65. 2. V. 63.

3. VI. 34-36. Cf. IV. 161.

with their interpretation of a rather ambiguous oracle (1).

Delphi was also a very important factor in colonization and took the initiative in commanding it. Thus, when Battus consulted about his lisp, he was told to establish a colony in Libya (2). Here Herodotus clearly shows his faith. In discussing the origin of the name Battus, the Libyan word for "king," he says, "This was the reason, I think, why the Pythoness addressed him as she did, she knew he was to be king in Libya". That it became customary to consult an oracle before establishing a colony is shown by Herodotus' surprise when Dorieus failed to do this (3). He comments on the fact that he left Sparta without consulting an oracle or observing the customary usages. The expedition failed, presumably on account of this omission. Later, Dorieus made an expedition sanctioned by the Pythoness. During this expedition he took part, according to the Sybarites, in the war between them and the Crotoniats. This was not included in the command of the Pythoness. The Sybarites bring forward the death of Dorieus as proof of their statement and say that he perished as a result of his disobedience to the oracle. The Crotoniats, on the other hand, deny that Dorieus participated in the war. Herodotus treats the matter impartially. He gives the testimony on each side and leaves the decision to the reader.

He also cites a great many predictions of Delphi which

1. VII. 140-1.

3. V. 42-45.

2. IV. 155-158. Cf. 159.

were afterwards verified. For example, the answer to Croesus in regard to his dumb son (1). The well known fact of the death of Miltiades in unhappy circumstances was in accordance with a prediction of Delphi (2). The answer to the Dodecarchy in regard to the future monarch of Egypt was marvelously verified, the unintelligible at the time (3). Another instance of this is the oracle given to the Bacchiadae (4). Herodotus says they could not understand this oracle until they heard the one given to Aetion; the two agreed so well, they immediately understood the former prophecy.

In several instances he is very careful to point out that the oracle was in reality correct. Thus, Croesus' failure was due to his misinterpretation of the answer, not to lack of knowledge on the part of Delphi (5). Again, he points out that the oracle was realized in the death of Cambyses (6). Also in his account of the destruction of Miletus, he notes the fact that the event agreed with a previous oracle (7). Likewise in his description of the death of Arcesilaus (8) he remarks, "So Arcesilaus, intentionally or unintentionally, disobeyed the oracle and fulfilled his destiny".

1. I. 85.

5. I. 90.

2. VI. 135-36.

6. III. 64.

3. II. 147-9.

7. VI. 18.

Cf. II. 152; III. 57.

8. IV. 164.

4. V. 92.

In some cases he exaggerates the importance of the oracles and their influence on other people. For instance, an oracle had been given the Spartans at the beginning of the Persian war to the effect that Sparta must either be conquered or lose one of her kings (1). Herodotus believes this influenced Leonidas to remain at Thermopylae and dismiss the allies, in order to secure the glory for himself and Sparta. He also says that the Euboeans were in danger of misfortune as a punishment for their disregard of an oracle of Bacis (2).

The fact that Delphi showed a decided tendency to "Medize", of which he cites two examples (3), apparently did not cause it to lose favor in his eyes. This is especially striking, as its decided lack of patriotism at first, together with its haste to adopt the Panhellenic attitude when the Greek cause was secure, would naturally throw discredit upon its reliability and divine inspiration; and Herodotus lived at a time when these events were fresh in men's minds. Neither is he affected by the two instances of bribery (4) which he mentions. It is true he prefaces his account of the bribery by the Alcimaeonidae with the words, "As the Athenians say" (5). Later, however, he speaks of the incident as tho there were no doubt about it (6). It is to be noticed that the bribery of the

1. VII. 220.

2. VIII. 20.

3. VII. 140; VII. 169.

4. V. 63 and VI. 66.

5. V. 63.

6. V. 90.

Pythoiness would not affect the reliability of the oracle itself.

Altho he says Croesus was convinced of the reliability of only Delphi and Amphiaraus (1), Herodotus himself seems to show equal confidence in all. He does, however, describe the oracle of Leto as the most truthful one among the Egyptians (2) apparently implying that there were some which were not reliable. In one instance he describes an oracle from Delphi as "deceitful" (κίβδηλος) (3). The word is probably used in the sense of "equivocal" rather than "unreliable". In many cases, the very lack of comment is strong testimony of his faith. His most decided declaration is made in reference to an oracle of Bacis, tho it applies to all (4). "I cannot say that oracles are not true, nor do I wish to reject those speaking with clearness, having considered the following When I consider this and see how clearly Bacis spoke, I myself do not venture to speak against oracles, nor do I approve of others doing so".

Thucydides, unlike Herodotus, shows decided scepticism. He points out that the oracles were absolutely useless during the plague (5), when they would be expected to be of more service than at any other time. He also severely criticizes them in the consultation between the Athenians

1. I. 46-48.

4. VIII. 77.

2. II. 152.

5. II. 47.

3. I. 66.

and Melians (1). The words which Thucydides puts into the mouths of the Athenians, ^{probably} express his own sentiments. He says, "Do not resemble the majority who, altho they could save themselves by natural means, when visible grounds of confidence forsake them when they are in trouble, have recourse to the invisible, prophecy and oracles, and similar things, which cause ruin by the hopes they inspire".

In reference to an oracle that the war would be twenty seven years long, he says, (2) "This was the only event that justified those who trust oracles. For I remember, from the beginning to the end of the war, that it was declared by many that the war would last twenty seven years". He apparently overlooks ^{here} the prediction of Delphi that the Spartans would be victorious in the war (3), and also the oracle concerning the Pelasgian ground (4).

But, altho Thucydides does not believe in oracles himself, he does not say that it is impossible for them to have some truth. For example, he says in reference to the oracle about the Pelasgian ground (5), "I think the prophecy resulted in a way contrary to that in which it was received. For the calamities did not befall the city on account of the unlawful occupation, but the occupation was on account of the war; and the oracle without mentioning this, foresaw that the place would sometime be occupied for

1. V. 103.

4. II. 17.

2. V. 26.

5. II. 17.

3. V. 26.

no good purpose".

Further, in regard to the unsuccessful attempt of Cylon to seize the Acropolis, he explains that the oracle was ambiguous and that Cylon may not have carried out its instructions correctly (1).

The author mentions numerous instances of the consultation of Delphi about war, colonization, etc. (2). He narrates these very impartially and usually with no comment whatever.

1. I. 126.

2. I. 25; 28; 118; III. 192.

IV.

Plato and Demosthenes.

Considering the fact that Plato lived at a time when scepticism, largely due to the philosophers, was common, we might expect to find some evidence of this in his writing. On the contrary however, perhaps owing to the difference in the character of his philosophy, he seems to have faith in both oracles and prophecy. For instance, in reference to sacrifices, he says the matter must be considered with the help of Delphi (1). It is necessary, also, for the judges of states to take the advice of oracles, particularly of Delphi (2). His opinion is most explicitly stated in the Apology. Socrates' friend, Chaerephon, asked Delphi if anyone were wiser than Socrates (3). The Pythoness answered in the negative. Socrates could not understand this answer of the god; but reflected, "He is not lying, because it is not right for him to do so". He tests the oracle repeatedly and finds it correct. "It is right for me to describe my wandering and the labors I performed, in order to prove the oracle irrefutable". Plato also speaks of prophecy with respect. He considers it a kind of divine madness and says true prophecies are uttered only by people out of their minds (4). He makes a distinction between the inspired prophets (*μαντιες*) and the

1. Laws VIII. 828 B.

2. Laws III. 686 A.

3. Apology 21 A. - 22 B.

4. Timaeus 71 D. - 72 B.

interpreters (*προφῆται*). The interpreters must be people of great wisdom, but are not inspired by prophecy. He says further that the prophets at Delphi and the priestess at Dodona have conferred great benefits on Greece, when out of their senses; and that *μαντική* and *μαρτυρική* are in reality the same word. (1). He makes a comparison here between prophecy and augury, to the advantage of the former, tho he speaks favorably of both. Prophecy is described as a "most beautiful art, by which the future is determined (2) " and a prophet as "one who knows the future " (3) and an "interpreter of the gods for men" (4). In apparent contrast to this high opinion of the prophet, in his theory of reincarnation he places the prophet fifth in rank (5).

Altho he believes in prophecy, he does not accept unreservedly all pretenders to the art. In his ideal conditions, prophecy under the control of wisdom "will deter the impostors and establish the true prophets as revealers of the future " (6). He speaks slightly of the begging priests and prophets who frequent the gates of the wealthy and persuade them that they have power to expiate any sin by sacrifice and incantation (7). These are not the true prophets, but the inventions of

-
- | | |
|--|---------------------------------------|
| 1. Phaedrus 244. Cf. Meno 99 C and Apology 22 C. | 4. Statesman 290 D. |
| 2. Phaedrus 244 C. | 5. Phaedrus 248 E. |
| 3. Charmides 174 A. | 6. Charmides 173 C. Cf. Phaedo 111 C. |
| | 7. Republic II. 364 B. |

the writers who represent injustice preferable to justice.

As Demosthenes always used the preceding century as a model, frequent reference to oracles would be expected. Such is not the case. He mentions them seldom and then merely to support his argument. In his prosecution of Midias for a personal attack, he claims that it was an act of impiety, because he was chorus-leader, and the dances and hymns in honor of the gods were instituted in obedience to the oracles of Delphi and Dodona (1). "You know, of course, that you appoint all these dances and hymns in honor of the god, not only in accordance with the laws concerning the Dionysia, but according to the oracles, in all of which you will find a command to the city, from Delphi as well as Dodona, to institute dances". In his discussion of burial rites, he cites a law of Solon and then quotes an oracle from Delphi which agrees with the law (2). The citation of oracles by Demosthenes may indicate faith on his part or may have been merely for effect. In every instance that he quotes them, they are in his favor.

In the Epistles he advises the Athenians to invoke Dodonaean Juppiter and the other gods, "who have given you many auspicious, good and true oracles" (3). It is doubtful, however, whether the Epistles were written by Demosthenes.

1. Against Midias 530-2.

2. Against Macartatus
1072-3.

3. Epistle I. 1466.

As a result of this investigation, we arrive at the conclusion that the most highly educated ancient Greeks did believe in the oracles and their divine inspiration. This is to be expected in the earlier period, when the fame of Delphi was at its height; but is rather remarkable in the fourth and latter part of the fifth century. Scepticism began to make itself felt at the time of Euripides and is shown in his treatment of the prophets. Toward the close of the fifth century, owing to the philosophic influence and the changes in the forms of government, this scepticism became prevalent and would be expected to manifest itself in the educated classes. The contrary, however, seems to be true. Plato's attitude as has been shown, is a striking example of this.

---oOo---

DUE	RETURNED
Ju'7 '64	Ju' 8 '64
Jul 8 '64	JUL 13 1964
Jul 31 '64	JUL 28 1964
MAY 17 1968	MAY 17 1968
DEC 4 1970	
DEC 18 1970	DEC 18 1970
APR 19 1974	FEB 17 1974

378.7M71
XJ632

University of Missouri - Columbia



010-100743304

RECEIVED
NOV 29 1909
UNIV. OF MO.

