

The painting depicts a woman, the Oracle at Delphi, with her eyes closed in a state of divine inspiration. She is wearing a red headscarf and a brown, draped garment. A laurel wreath is visible on her right arm. The background is dark, highlighting the figure.

# THE ORACLE AT DELPHI

John Collier, *The Priestess at Delphi*  
Oil on Canvas, 1891

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**STUDY RESOURCES AT  
WWW.DELPHICPHILOSOPHY.COM**

**WWW.DELPHICPHILOSOPHY.COM**



THE LORD WHOSE ORACLE IS AT DELPHI  
NEITHER CONCEALS NOR REVEALS  
BUT GIVES A SIGN (*SĒMAINEI*).

ὁ ἄναξ, οὐ τὸ μαντεῖόν ἐστι τὸ ἐν  
Δελφοῖς, οὔτε λέγει οὔτε κρύπτει ἀλλὰ σημαίνει.  
Ἡρακλῆτος φρ. 93

# TODAY

- **The Oracle at Delphi**
  - Lenses on Delphi: History, Archaeology, Politics
  - Delphi as an *Idea*
  - Memories of the Oracle
- Know Thyself and the Delphic Maxims
- Bonus supplement: Dodona
- Bonus supplement: Delphi in Greek Myth



# DELPHI

## PYTHO

SEAT OF THE PYTHIA  
MOUNT PARNASSUS, MAINLAND GREECE  
FROM 8TH CENTURY BCE OR EARLIER

FROM 8TH CENTURY BCE OR EARLIER



ITALY

GREECE

ANATOLIA

Delphi

Athens

Mycenae

Sparta


Miletus

Knossos

SICILY

CRETE

EGYPT



Zeus according to the Greek legend once wished to determine the exact centre of the earth. So he released two eagles from opposite ends of the world. Flying towards each other they met precisely over Delphi and demonstrated that it was the midmost point. Accordingly in early Greek maps Delphi occupied the exact centre, like Jerusalem in the maps of medieval Christendom. This pretty myth can claim a certain symbolic truth. Delphi for much of Greek history was the spiritual centre of the Hellenic world. Athens in the classical age became the chief home of art and philosophy. Other states in the swaying struggle for hegemony might for a time hold political dominance. But no city for so long or so generally was recognized as a common meeting ground of all Hellenes equally—their central hearth.

H. PARKE & D. WORMELL, *THE DELPHIC ORACLE I*  
(OXFORD, 1956), 1.



MOUNT PARNASSOS REGION (SLOPES)





Maenad with thyrsus, leopard, and snake over head; associated with cave and mountain dances

THE CORYCIAN CAVE • OCCUPIED SINCE NEOLITHIC PERIOD (C. 4300-3000)

# EARLY HISTORY AT DELPHI

- **Neolithic period (4300 BCE):** Human occupation at the Corycian Cave
- **Bronze Age**
  - c. 2800-1550 BCE: Occupation in plain below (Itea)
  - c. 1400-1060 BCE: Young community forming at Delphic sanctuary
    - c. 1100-1000 BCE: Female figurines at the later **Athena and Gaia** Sanctuary, leading up to late **Mycenaean** period.
- **"Dark Ages" or Geometric Period**
  - 9th century BCE: Local occupation

# EARLY HISTORY AT DELPHI

- **Archaic Period**

- 8th century BCE: Evolving centre of international connections during a critical period, growingly “Panhellenic” across Greek *poleis* (city-states), with evidence for trade with Scandinavia, Italy. **Evidence for the practice of the Oracle (Pythia) by 8th century or earlier.**
- 8th-7th century: Historical evidence for *poleis* consulting the Oracle for public decisions (for example, Tyrtaeus in Sparta)
- 8th-6th century: Oracle consulted in the foundation of new *poleis*, and new constitutions; literary memory of Lycurgus of Sparta, Solōn of Athens
- 6th-5th century: Famous literary consultations include Croesus of Lydia, and advice for the Persian-Greek and Peloponnesian-Athenian wars.
- Battles for control from 6th-4th centuries BCE
  - First Sacred War (597-585), reclaimed by Athens for the Amphiictyonic League; Second Sacred War (449-448), leading to control by local Phocians; Third Sacred War (356-346) and Fourth (339), leading to Macedonian control



John Collier, The Priestess at Delphi  
Oil on Canvas, 1891

# EARLY HISTORY AT DELPHI

- **Cultural role**
  - 6th century BCE: **Pythian Games at Delphi**
    - Importance of sport (Olympic Games every 4 years, Pythian games every 4 years, Nemean and Isthmian Games every 2 years) in binding Hellenic city-states together. No wars during major events. Common calendar.
  - 6th-5th century: Philosophers associated with the institution of Pythia, Oracle at Delphi
    - **Pythagoras**, c. 570-c. 495 BCE
    - **Heraclitus**, c. 535-c. 475 BCE
  - 5th-4th century: Evolving relevance of the Oracle in personal religion and life, as for **Socrates** and **Plato**



John Collier, The Priestess at Delphi  
Oil on Canvas, 1891



Themis as the Oracle, with Aegeus  
Codrus Painter, c. 430 BCE



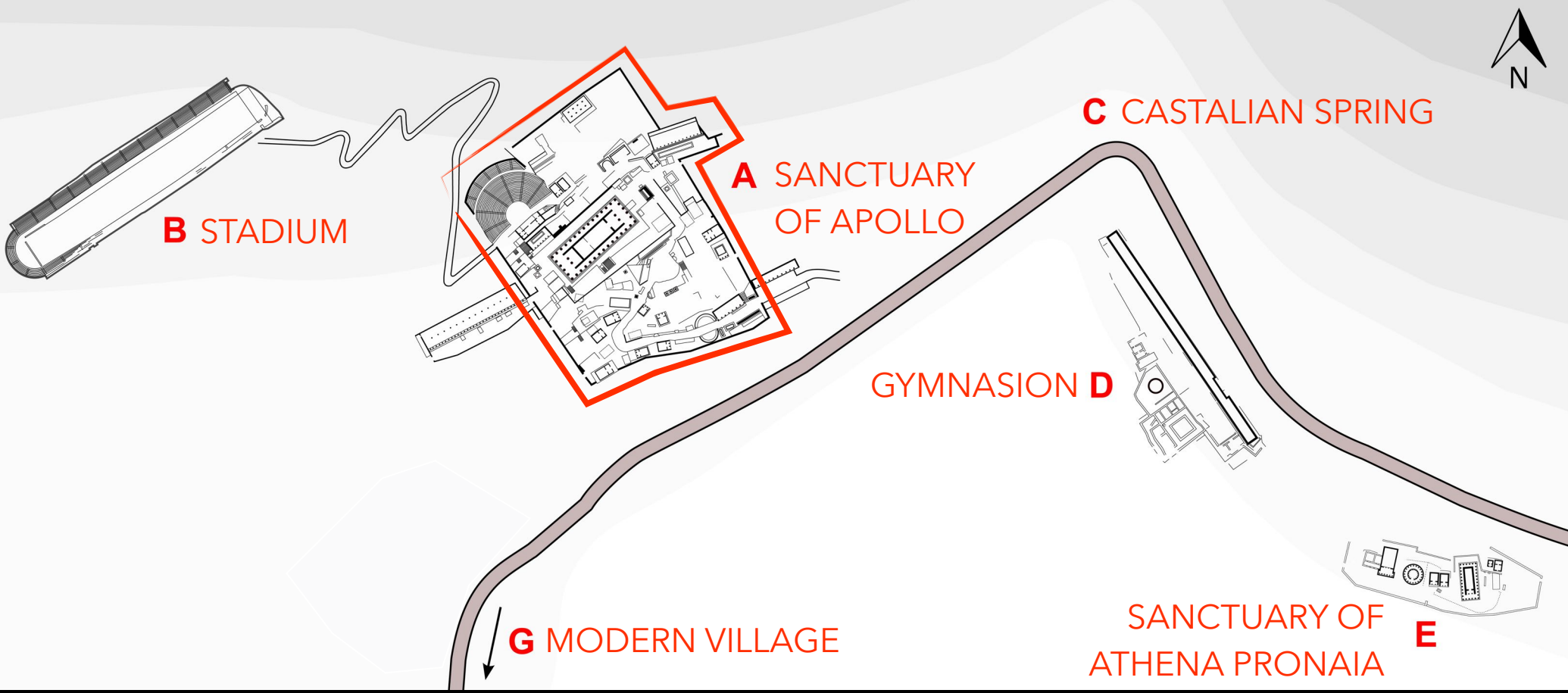
John Collier, The Priestess at Delphi  
Oil on Canvas, 1891



# THE SITE OF DELPHI

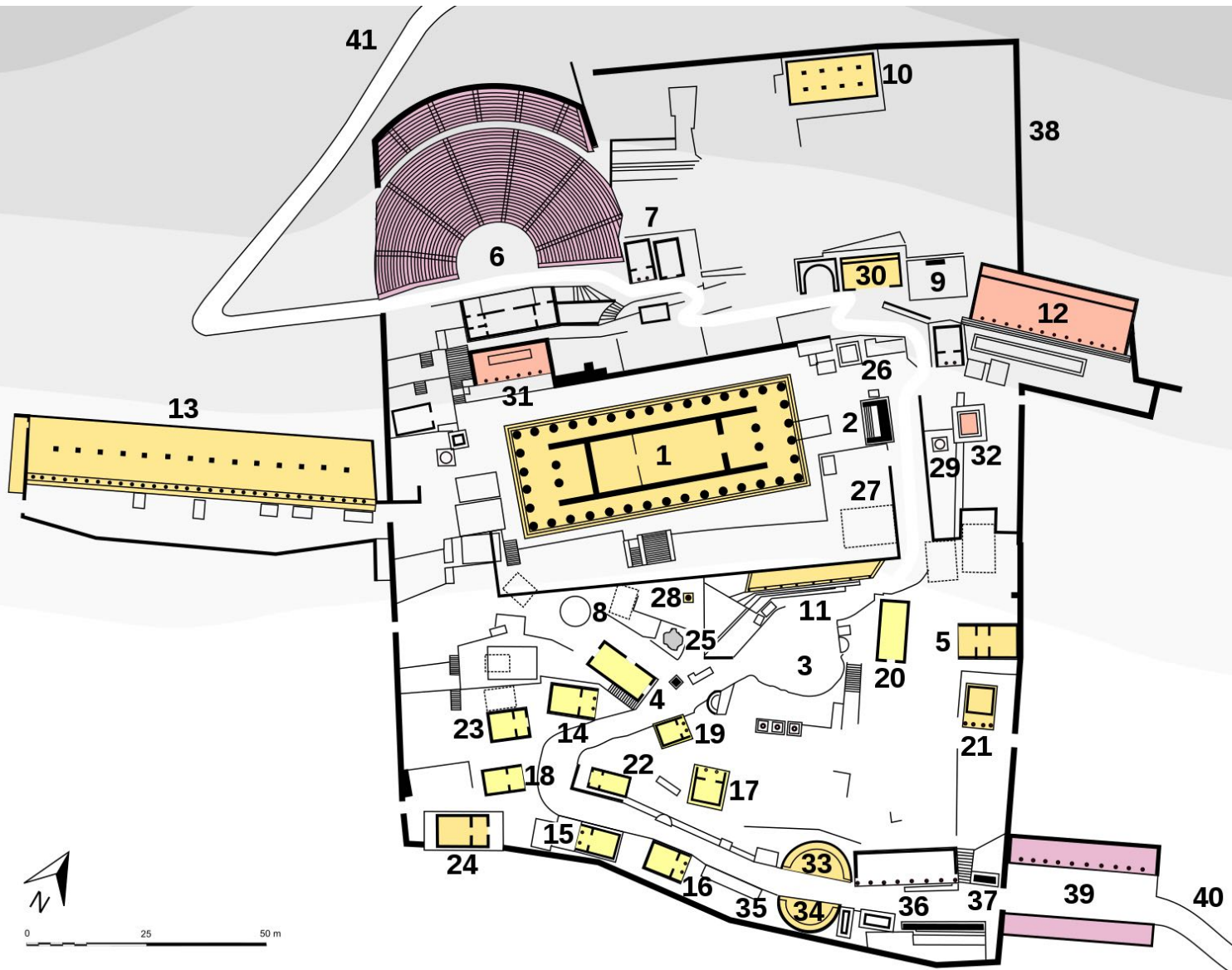
Reconstruction of the sanctuary of Apollo at Delphi in a 1894 painting by Albert Tournaire, now at École nationale supérieure des Beaux-Arts

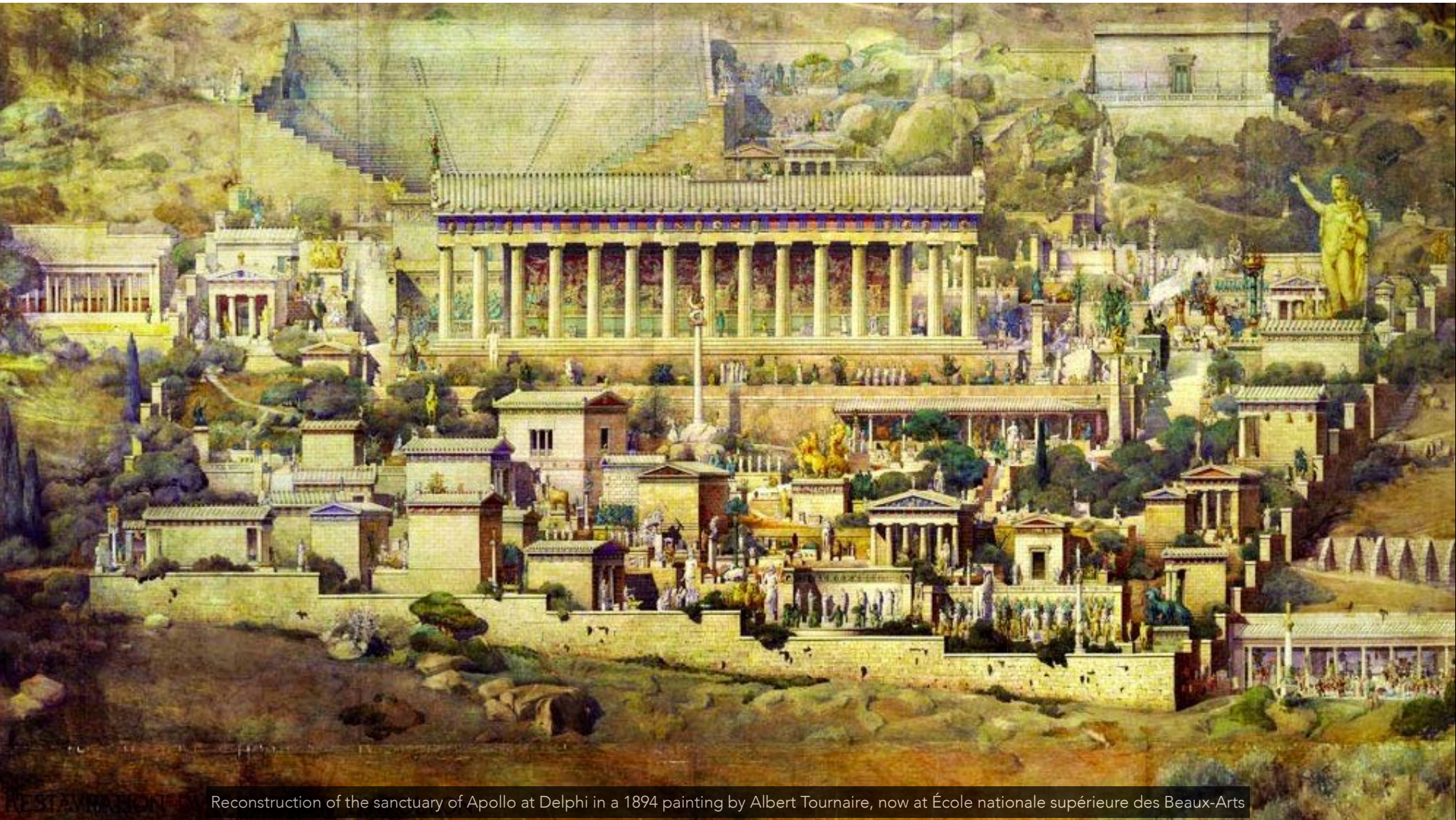




Plan of Ancient Delphi  
Wikimedia | User:Tomisti



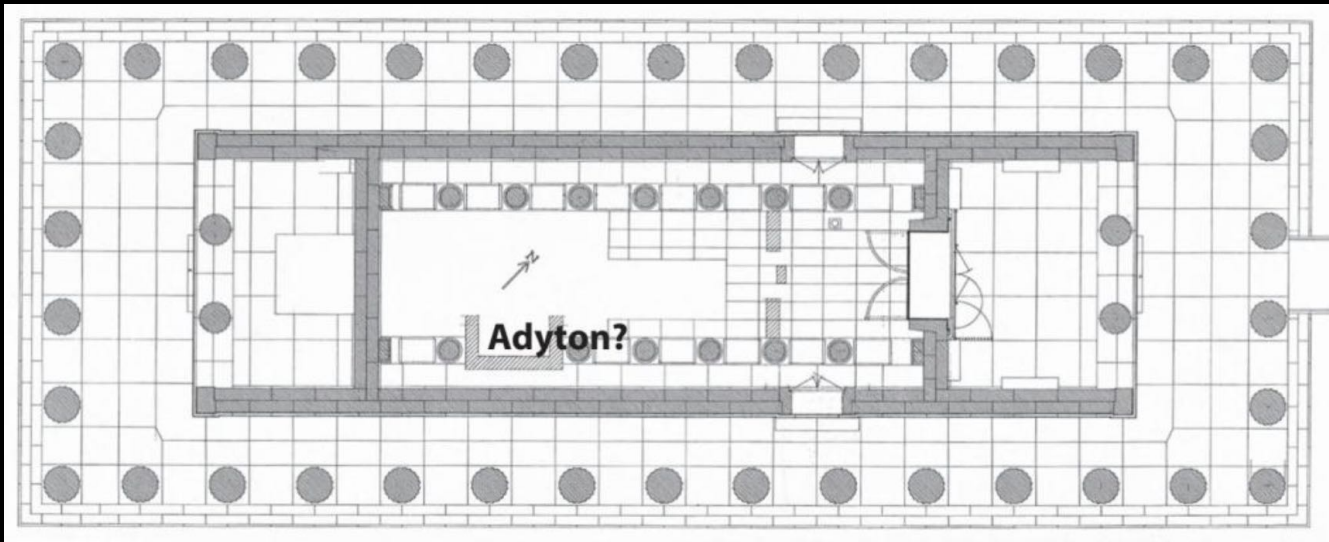




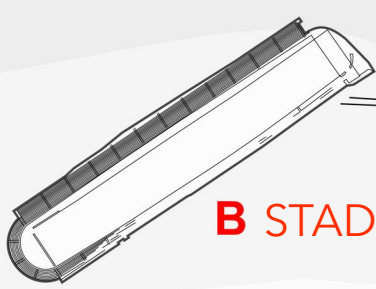
Reconstruction of the sanctuary of Apollo at Delphi in a 1894 painting by Albert Tournaire, now at École nationale supérieure des Beaux-Arts



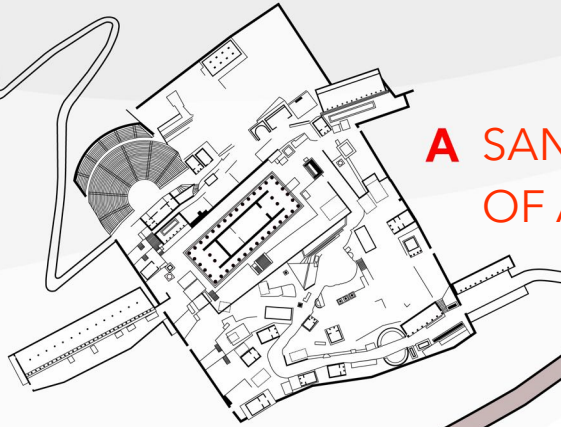
TEMPLE OF APOLLO TODAY



4TH CENTURY BCE TEMPLE OF APOLLO  
AMANDRY & HANSEN FD II TEMPLE DU IVÈME SIÈCLE FIG. 18.19; IN SCOTT 2014, 19



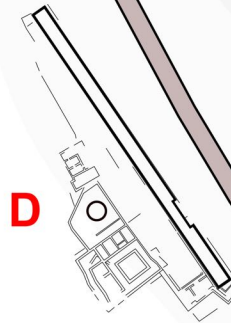
**B** STADIUM



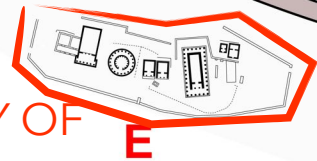
**A** SANCTUARY OF APOLLO

**C** CASTALIAN SPRING

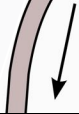
GYMNASION **D**



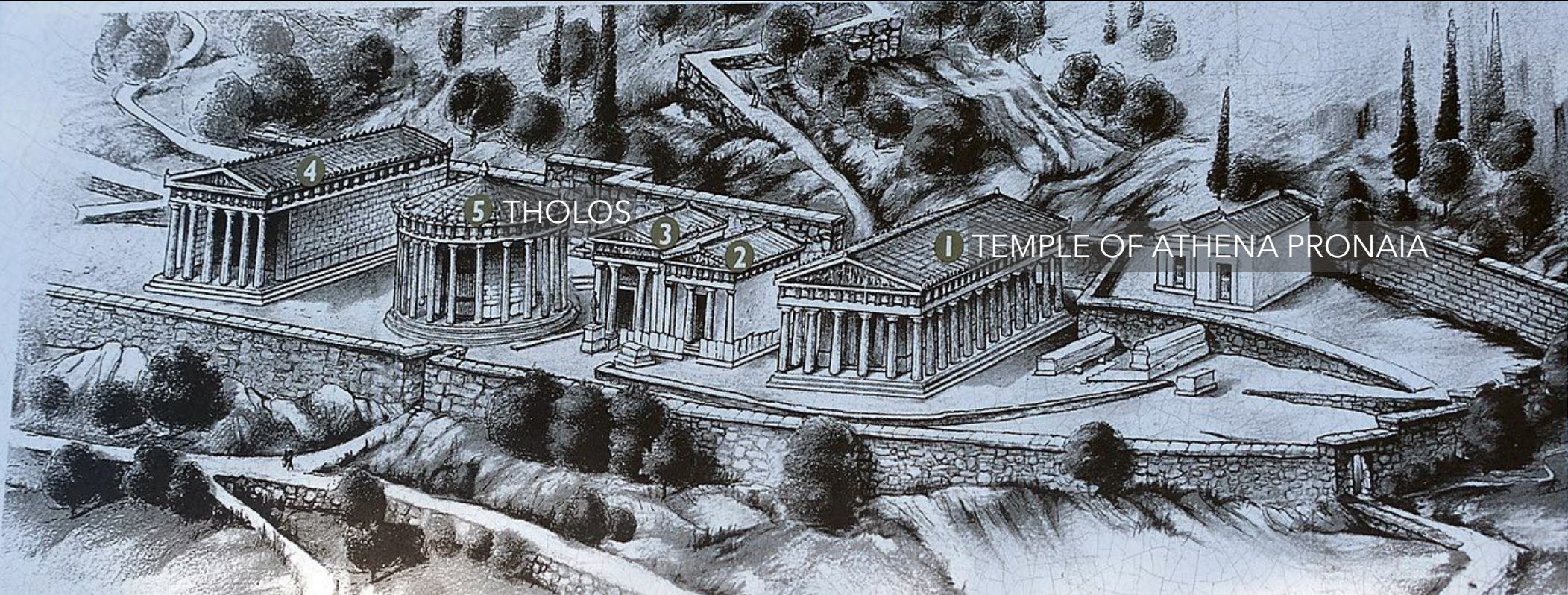
SANCTUARY OF ATHENA PRONAIA **E**



**G** MODERN VILLAGE



Plan of Ancient Delphi  
Wikimedia | User:Tomisti



SANCTUARY OF ATHENA PRONAIA AND GAIA • RECONSTRUCTION  
WIKIMEDIA | USER:CODAS (DAVIDE MAURO)



SANCTUARY OF ATHENA PRONAIA AND GAIA • THE THOLOS



Classical **Delphi**  
Reconstruction for AC: Odyssey (Ubisoft, 2018)



# TODAY

- ◉ **Idea 1: The Oracle at Delphi**
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  - ◉ *Delphi as an Idea*
  - ◉ *Memories of the Oracle*
- ◉ Idea 2: Know Thyself and the Delphic Maxims
- ◉ Bonus supplements: Dodona & Delphi in Greek Myth

# DELPHI AS AN IDEA

- Circular construction in literary sources: authors, politicians claim authority & wisdom *from* Delphi, Delphi represents itself through them as a source of authority & wisdom
- Central role of the **Pythia, Oracle at Delphi**
  - Herodotus and Themistocles, 5th century BCE: 'The wooden wall alone shall stand'
  - Interpretations of the Pythia often a 'mirror' for self-knowledge of each generation




CONSULTING  
THE ORACLE



MICHAEL SCOTT

# DELPHI

A History of the Center of the Ancient World



The appointed day had come. Having journeyed up the winding mountain paths to the sanctuary hidden within the folds of the Parnassian mountains, individuals from near and far, representatives from cities and states, dynasties and kingdoms across the Mediterranean had gathered in Apollo's sanctuary. As dawn broke, the word spread that it would soon be known whether the god Apollo was willing to respond to their questions. Sunlight reflected off the temple's marble frontage, the oracular priestess entered its inner sanctum, and the crowd of consultants moved forward, waiting their turn to know better what the gods had in store. The gods were considered all powerful, all controlling, and all knowing; their decisions, time and again, had proven to be final. The consultants had waited perhaps months, traveled perhaps thousands of miles. Now they waited patiently for their turn, each likely entering the home of the god with a great deal of trepidation as to what he might be told. Some left content. Others disappointed. Most thoughtful. With dusk, the god's priestess fell silent. The crowds dispersed, heading to every corner of the ancient world, bringing with them the prophetic words of the oracle at Delphi.

MICHAEL SCOTT, *DELPHI 9*

# EXAMPLES

- Croesus (6th century BCE)
- Pythagoras (6th century BCE)
- Solon and Lycurgus (9th-5th centuries BCE)
- Themistocles (5th century BCE)  
The Wooden Wall
- Socrates (5th century BCE)
- Sparta (4th century BCE)
- The Celtic Invasion (279 BCE)
- The end of antiquity (362, 393 CE)



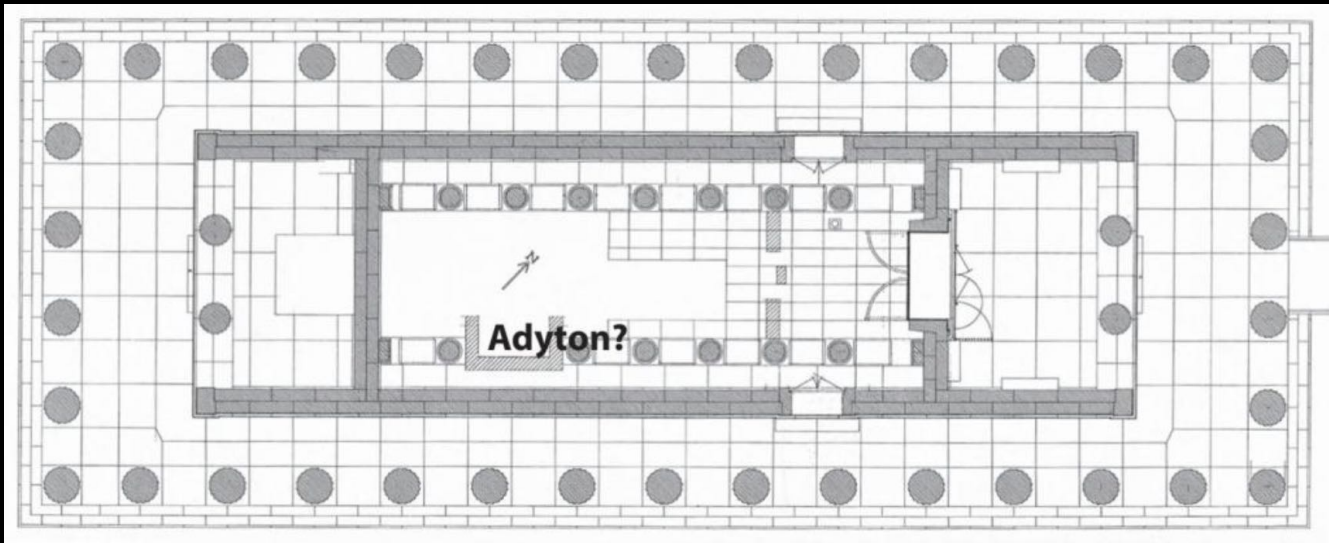
# CONSULTATION

- Consultation on 7th day of the lunar month, beginning in the month of Bysios (spring) and continuing until winter, when Apollo departed to live with the Hyperboreans, Dionysos taking his place
- Pythia bathes at dawn in the Castalian Spring. Returning to the Sanctuary, she burns offering of laurel leaves and barley meal to Apollo and local deities
- Priests verify day suitable for consultation
- Consultants purify, queue as organized by Delphians, and offer the *pelanos*
- Price for a "state" inquiry (402 BCE): 7 drachmas, 2 obols; for a "private" inquiry, 4 obols (10% of a state inquiry); major source of income for Delphi









4TH CENTURY BCE TEMPLE OF APOLLO  
AMANDRY & HANSEN FD II TEMPLE DU IVÈME SIÈCLE FIG. 18.19; IN SCOTT 2014, 19

# THE PYTHIA

- Very likely an early presence at the site, serving as priestess of Gaia, then Apollo
- A lineage of women, supported and protected by a class of priestesses and priests
- Always Delphian, but not necessarily from a noble or wealthy family
- Initially chosen very young, perhaps as a child; in later years, often an elder woman who had led a family life.



# THE PYTHIA

- Practice of the Pythia preserved almost solely as oral tradition passed down between women, not written
- At the height of the Oracle's power, three Pythias served: two central, one understudy (Plutarch, 1st century CE)




## ORACLE TO CROESUS

I count the grains of sand on the beach and measure the sea; I understand the speech of the dumb and hear the voiceless. The smell has come to my sense of a hard shelled tortoise boiling and bubbling with a lamb's flesh in a bronze pot: the cauldron underneath it is of bronze, and bronze is the lid.

HERODOTUS 1.47

... that if Croesus were to wage war against the Persians, he would destroy a great empire...

HERODOTUS 1.53



# IN THE GRECO-PERSIAN WARS

A wall of wood alone shall be uncaptured, a boon to  
you and your children.

TO THE ATHENIANS, HERODOTUS 7.141.3-4, 142.2

# CONSULTATION

- Consultants wait at *chresmographeion* (shelter against north wall of the temple terrace)
- Second offering in the inner hearth of the temple (to gods, and usually providing food for Delphians)
- Consultant moves toward the Pythia, encouraged by priests to “think pure thoughts and speak well-omened words” (Plutarch, *Mor.* 385, 378)
- Pythia prophesies from the Adyton of the Temple, potentially while inquirers wait in the *megaron* (Herodotus 7.140) or *oikos* (Plutarch 437c), likely able to hear the Pythia’s word (Euripides, *Andr., Ion*; Hdt. 1.48)



# INSPIRATION

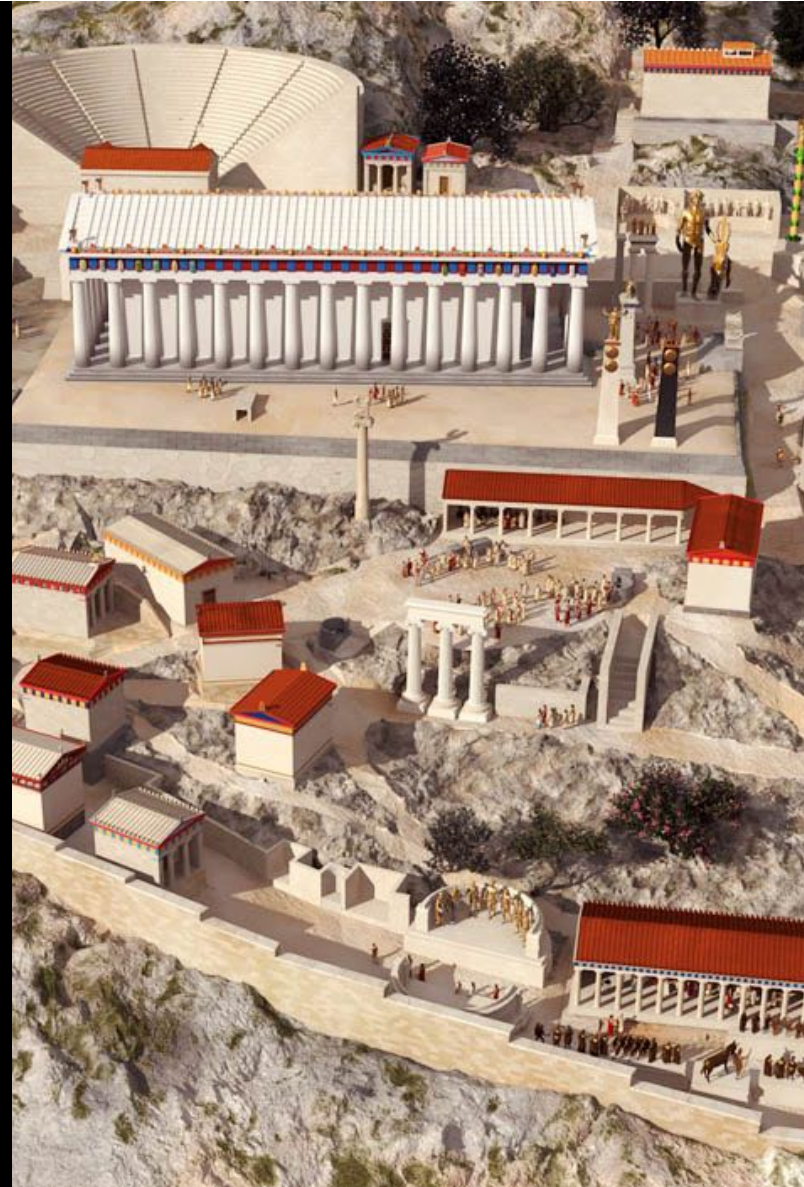
- According to early sources, the Pythia sits on the sacred tripod and utters *boai* (Eur. *Ion* 91, 5th century BCE)
- She holds a laurel branch, which she may shake for purification or inspiration, and wears a bay-leaf crown (Callimachus)
- Later (Diodorus Siculus, 1st century BCE; Plutarch, 1st century CE), we hear that she sits atop a "chasm" from which a certain *pneuma* or "vapour" rises from the ground
- After a consultation, the Pythia is "calm and peaceful" (Plutarch)



# INSPIRATION

- Roman, Christian, and modern readers have focused on the source of the “vapor” or the interpretive role of the priests
- But it seems clear that the Pythia spoke intelligibly and could be heard by the consultant
- Understanding of the Pythia as “mad” may arise from Latin translation of the Greek *mantikē* (Plato, *Phaedrus*)—a “divine mania”—as *insania*

FOR FOLLOWING DISCUSSION, SEE  
MICHAEL SCOTT, *DELPHI* CH. 1





# INSPIRATION

- When Delphi was excavated by a French team in the 1890s, interest in psychic phenomena ran extremely high
- In 1891, *Apollo, or the Oracle at Delphi* played on Broadway, while John Collier painted *Priestess of Delphi* (right), and the Cambridge Society of Psychical Research published its first volume on the Oracle
- Excavators sought and failed to find any "chasm" below the Temple of Apollo, and felt "cheated" by the "deception" of the sources (Homolle, 1894)



# SCHOLARSHIP

- A.P. Oppé argued that the practice at Delphi was a sham or confidence trick by the priests of Delphi (*JHS* 1904)
- Prof. Oesterreich tried eating laurel leaves and noted a disappointing lack of effect.
- Parke and Wormell in the 1950s argued for self-induced hypnosis.
- Scholars recently argued for anthropological approaches to belief in spirit possession.



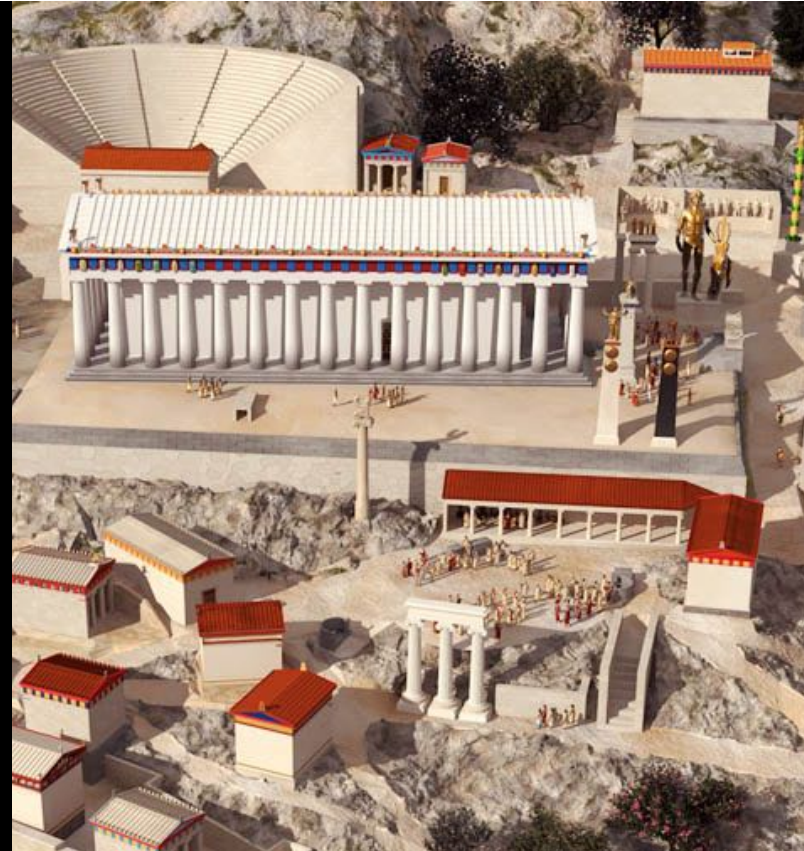
# SCHOLARSHIP

- Rev. T. Dempsey pointed out that according to Plutarch (1st century CE) the "chasm" was already closing in his time, and may have closed by the 19th century
- Holland (1933) suggested that the Pythia may have lit hemp below the tripod



# SCHOLARSHIP

- Analysis by Jelle De Boer and John Hale in the 1980s-1990s has suggested evidence for two major geological fault lines (E-W and N-S) crossing at Delphi directly underneath the temple of Apollo.
- They argue that fissured bedrock beneath the temple would allow gas from bituminous limestone to rise into the temple
- Tests of travertine and water beneath the temple found ethane, methane and **ethylene** (used as an anaesthetic in the 1920s)
- But doubts about this interpretation (inconsistency with sources, effects, odour)



The New York Times

## *For Delphic Oracle, Fumes and Visions*

By William J. Broad

March 19, 2002



# REFLECTION

- Why was the Oracle so consistently successful over nearly 1,500 years?
- Some doubts ("The best seer is the one who guessed right," Euripides fr. 973), but generally very broad acceptance of their insight and efficacy
- Oracles were ubiquitous in the Greek world, with a "constant hum" of divine communication, though Delphi was the most successful
- Longing for a "dialogue" with the divine, often amounting to a mirror of self-knowledge.



# Michael Scott

## The Oracle at Delphi: Unknowability at the Heart of the Ancient Greek World

HISTORY HAS BEEN FAM after another—an endl history as such would t our human past is vast, number of simultaneou and interpretations of and decisions emerging of inquiry, historians t out, are created equal

### Divination as a Decision-Making Technology

Another way of framing these issues is by seeing divination as a technology of decision making. Writing in the United States for a range of individuals in various sectors, Adam Gordon (2008: 211) says that “the test of this forecasting is not a more accurate picture of tomorrow, but better thinking about the future. The payoff is better decisions, not better predictions.” His book targets market makers and advertising agents who aspire to future-influencing actions rather than neutral predictions or forecasts. However, what counts as “better thinking about the future” is highly contentious and is perhaps the most important first question. That there is no single (let alone simple) answer itself has implications about how to approach “thinking about the future” (see Zeitlyn 2020a for other ways of doing this). The different forms of divination and the highly disparate ways in which they are used can illuminate the ways different people think about the future (among other things).<sup>10</sup> And, as was mentioned above, when analyzing actual processes of forecasting or divining, it may help to approach them as sequences of putative translations, or discussions of suggested translations. The procedures and technicalities of divinatory praxis may have different resonances to clients and to diviners who nonetheless are able to continue the divination being undertaken.

### The Oracle at Delphi

Michael Scott

Social Research: An Internation

Johns Hopkins University Press

Volume 87, Number 1, Spring 2020

pp. 51-74

10.1353/sor.2020.0005

## Arrow and Mirror: Interactive Consciousness, Ethnography, and the Tibetan State Oracle's Trance

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**SUMMARY** Oracles and shamans are ambivalent figures, for both members of their own societies and outside observers confronted with their extraordinary status and behavior. Ethnographic narratives dating from the earliest periods of European contact

and departures from servers than in the uses of interaction, consideration in this multimedia process is of trance, or even interpretations is nally conceived as the Oracle himself, insiders as well as s" of the Oracle's ividual state; and istructing shifts of their participation and effects of these e as configurations Oracle's mirror and used here to provide

## Divination and Ontologies

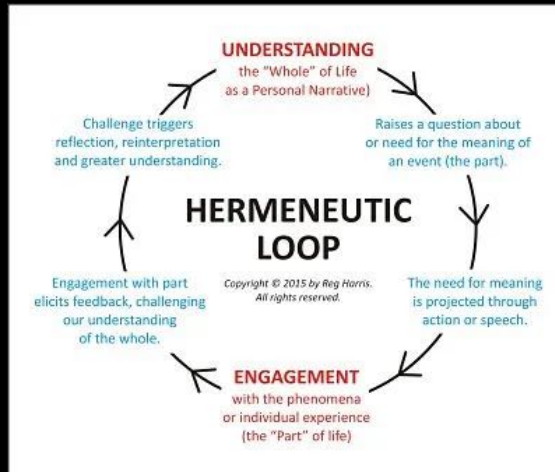
A Reflection

in Social Analysis

Author: David Zeitlyn

# HERMENEUTIC CIRCLES

- The wooden wall
- Socrates' encounter



GADAMER



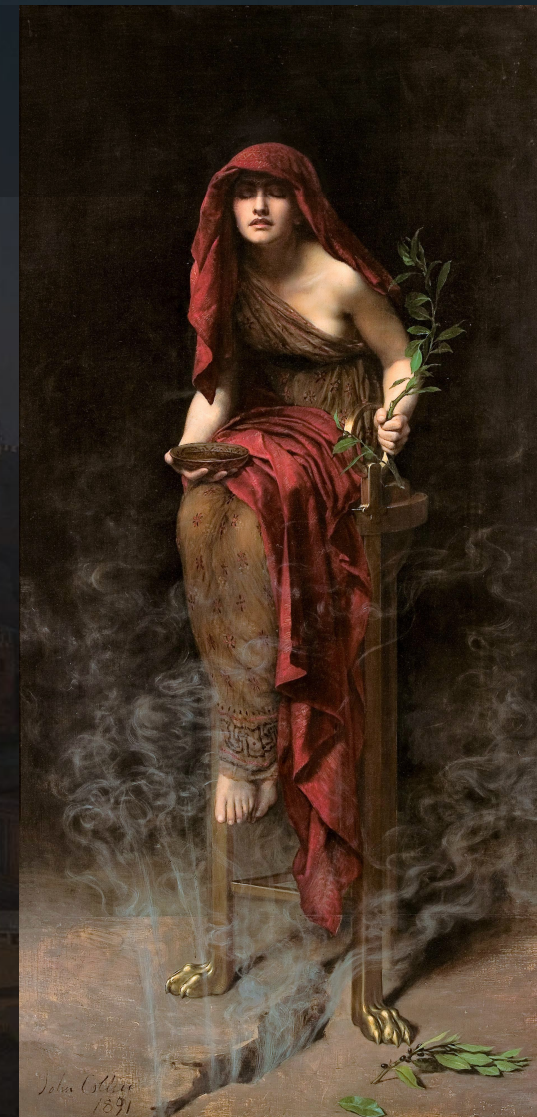
# SOCRATES' LIFE

## Σωκράτης *Sōkratēs* (lit. "Safe strength")

### TRANSFORMATION: THE ORACLE AT DELPHI (PLATO AND XENOPHON)

- Socrates' friend **Chaerephon** made a pilgrimage to **Delphi**, likely either before the war began in 431, or during truces that facilitated travel, as in 426. He asked the **Pythia** a question (Plato, *Apology* 21a). The core of this exchange is often accepted as historical: a legal witness testifies to it at Socrates' trial in 399.
  - **Is anyone wiser than Socrates?\*** εἴ τις... εἶη σοφώτερος.  
**None is wiser.** ἀνεῖλεν\* οὐν ἡ Πυθία μηδένα σοφώτερον εἶναι.
- Socrates was deeply puzzled by the Oracle's response. He treated her answer as a riddle (**ainigma**) to be interpreted and "tested" (**exetazein**, Plato, *Ap.* 21c).
- Socrates grew poorer in a lifelong search for wisdom by **asking questions**, which culminated in unpopularity, as he embarrassed sophists, politicians, poets, and priests, as well as a role as **countercultural hero** with young people.
- Socrates concluded that he was wise for intellectual *humility*, for **recognizing what he does not know** in contrast to the divine (23b).

\* The Pythian question "Is anyone wiser..." or "happier" or "juster" is portrayed in literature as a common **trope**, for instance in the Pythia's audiences with Chilon and Anacharsis; but her answer was expected to be **no**, or a gesture to a wiser person (DL 1.28, 1.106), and ultimately emphasizing the **god's** wisdom in contrast to **human** wisdom. || The verb ἀνεῖλεν with the subject Πυθία does not require a lot oracle, as is sometimes suggested, but is compatible with a verbal response from the Pythia (LSJ s.v. ἀναιρέω A.III).



John Collier, *The Priestess at Delphi*, Oil on Canvas, 1891



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- **Idea 2: Know Thyself and the Delphic Maxims**

D E L P H I C P H I L O S O P H Y



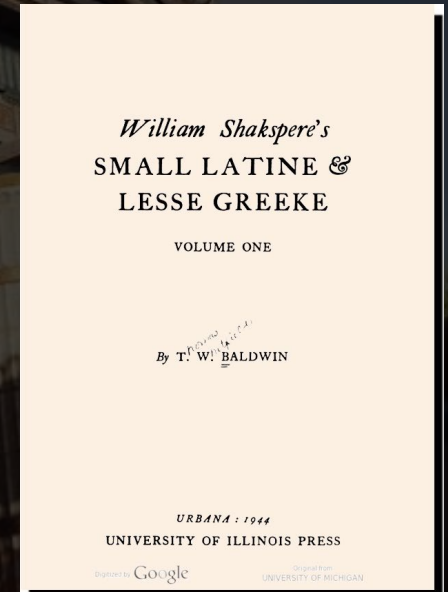
# KNOW THYSELF

This above all: **to thine own self be true,**  
**And it must follow, as the night the day,**  
**Thou canst not then be false** to any man.  
Farewell. My blessing season this in thee.

POLONIUS IN SHAKESPEARE, *HAMLET* 1.3  
COMPOSED BETWEEN 1599-1601 CE



Polonius behind the curtain  
Jehan Georges Vibert, 1868



600 BCE

470 BCE



1600 CE

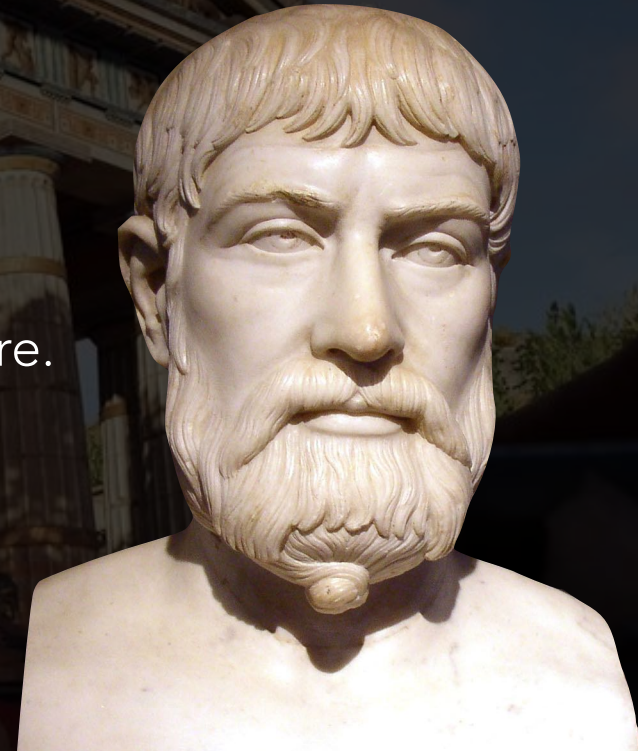
TODAY

# KNOW THYSELF

*γένοι', οἷος ἐσσι̅ μαθῶν*

Be yourself, once you learn who you are.

PINDAR, PYTHIAN 2.72  
COMPOSED C. 470 OR 468 BCE



600 BCE

470 BCE



1600 CE

TODAY



Themis as the Oracle, with Aegeus  
Codrus painter, c. 430 BCE

# γνῶθι σεαυτόν Know Thyself

ATTRIBUTED TO PHĒMONOË, THE FIRST PYTHIA,  
ORACLE AT DELPHI  
C. 600 BCE

INSCRIBED OVER THE CELLA  
OF THE TEMPLE OF APOLLO, DELPHI

In answer to the question  
*'What is most important for a  
human being to learn?'*

Posed by the Spartan sage **Chilon**  
Aristotle fr. 3 Rose, Diogenes Laertius *Lives* 1.40,  
Pausanias 10.5-6

600 BCE

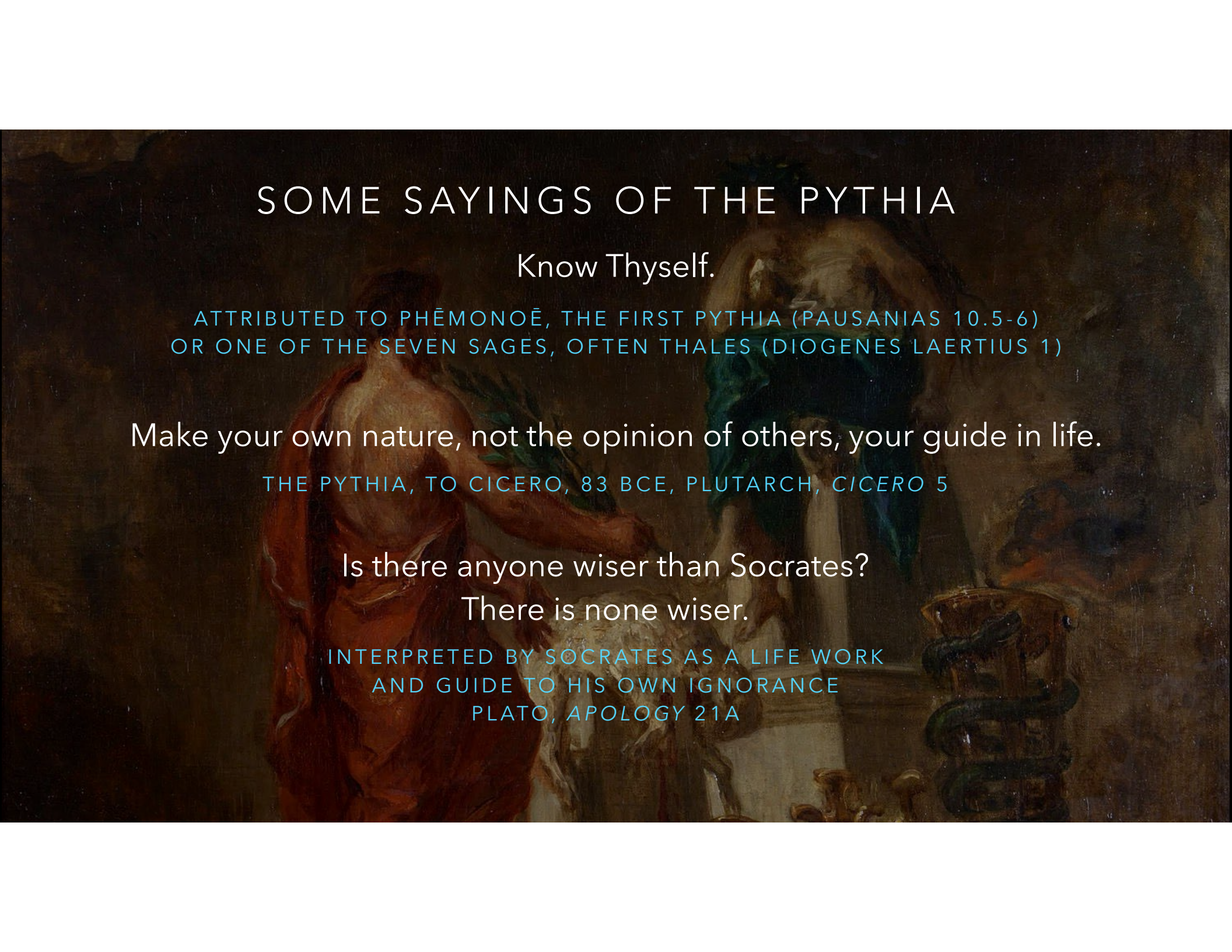
470 BCE



1600 CE



Themis as the Oracle, with Aegeus  
Codrus painter, c. 430 BCE  
John Collier  
1891



# SOME SAYINGS OF THE PYTHIA

Know Thyself.

ATTRIBUTED TO PHĒMONOĒ, THE FIRST PYTHIA (PAUSANIAS 10.5-6)  
OR ONE OF THE SEVEN SAGES, OFTEN THALES (DIOGENES LAERTIUS 1)

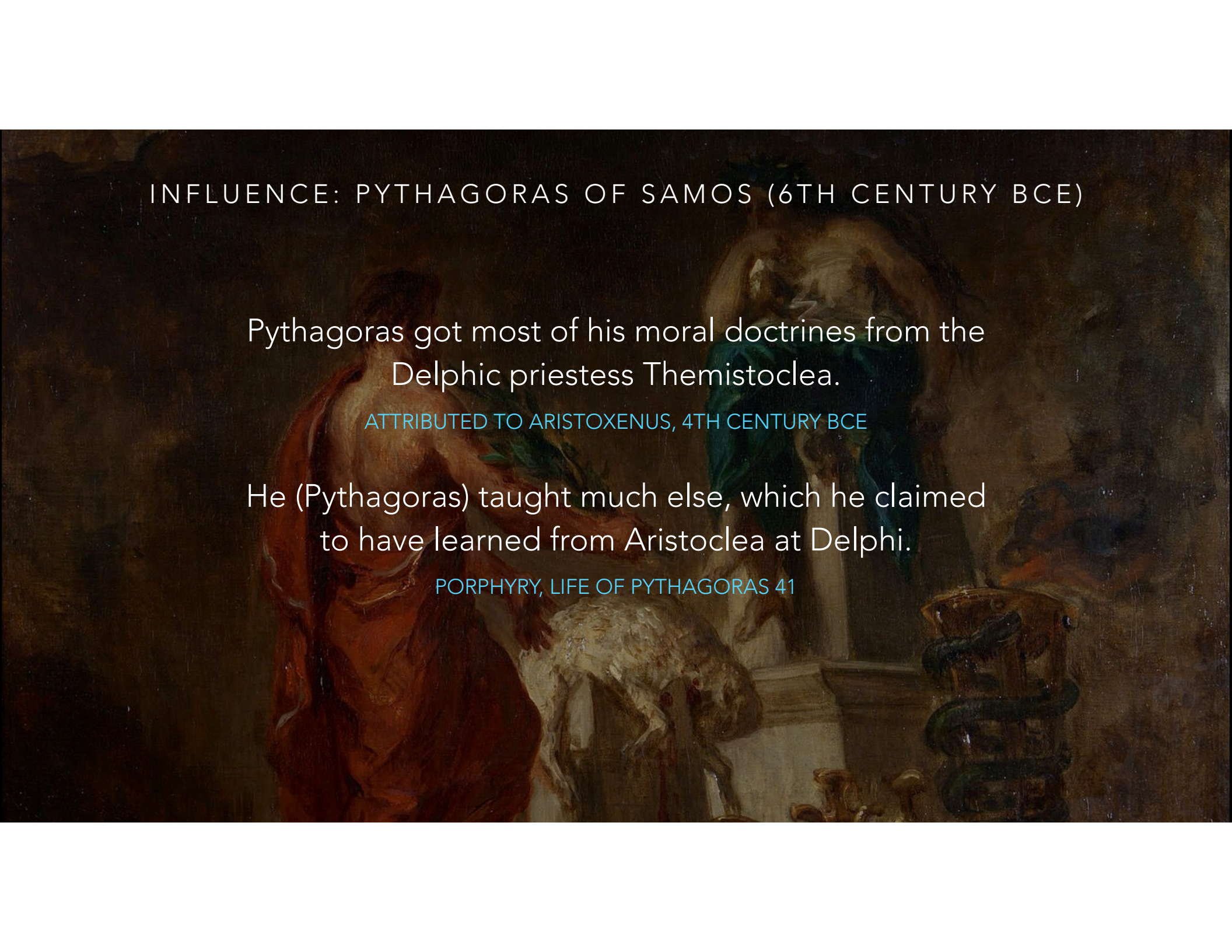
Make your own nature, not the opinion of others, your guide in life.

THE PYTHIA, TO CICERO, 83 BCE, PLUTARCH, *CICERO* 5

Is there anyone wiser than Socrates?

There is none wiser.

INTERPRETED BY SOCRATES AS A LIFE WORK  
AND GUIDE TO HIS OWN IGNORANCE  
PLATO, *APOLOGY* 21A



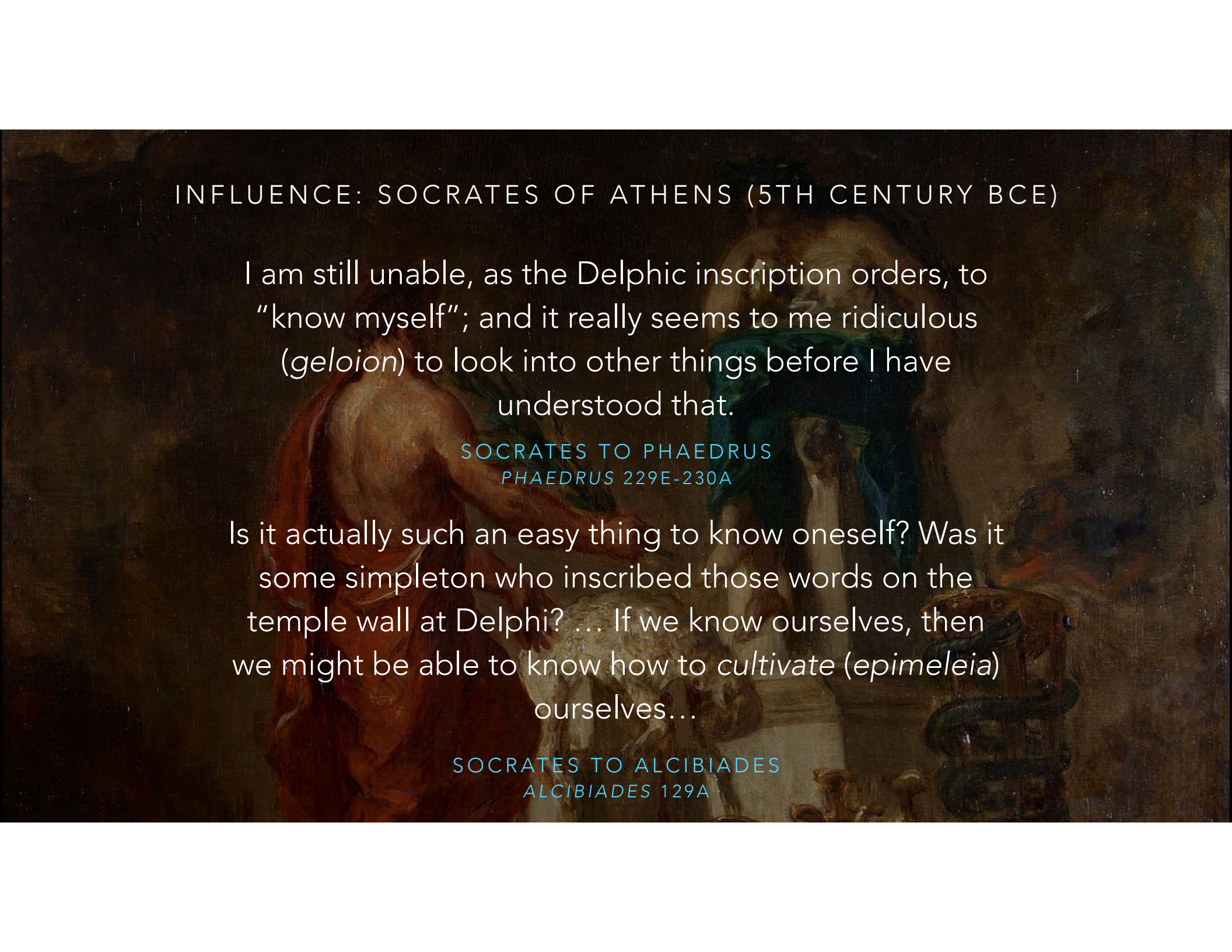
INFLUENCE: PYTHAGORAS OF SAMOS (6TH CENTURY BCE)

Pythagoras got most of his moral doctrines from the Delphic priestess Themistoclea.

ATTRIBUTED TO ARISTOXENUS, 4TH CENTURY BCE

He (Pythagoras) taught much else, which he claimed to have learned from Aristoclea at Delphi.

PORPHYRY, LIFE OF PYTHAGORAS 41



INFLUENCE: SOCRATES OF ATHENS (5TH CENTURY BCE)

I am still unable, as the Delphic inscription orders, to “know myself”; and it really seems to me ridiculous (*geloion*) to look into other things before I have understood that.

SOCRATES TO PHAEDRUS  
PHAEDRUS 229E-230A

Is it actually such an easy thing to know oneself? Was it some simpleton who inscribed those words on the temple wall at Delphi? ... If we know ourselves, then we might be able to know how to *cultivate* (*epimeleia*) ourselves...

SOCRATES TO ALCIBIADES  
ALCIBIADES 129A



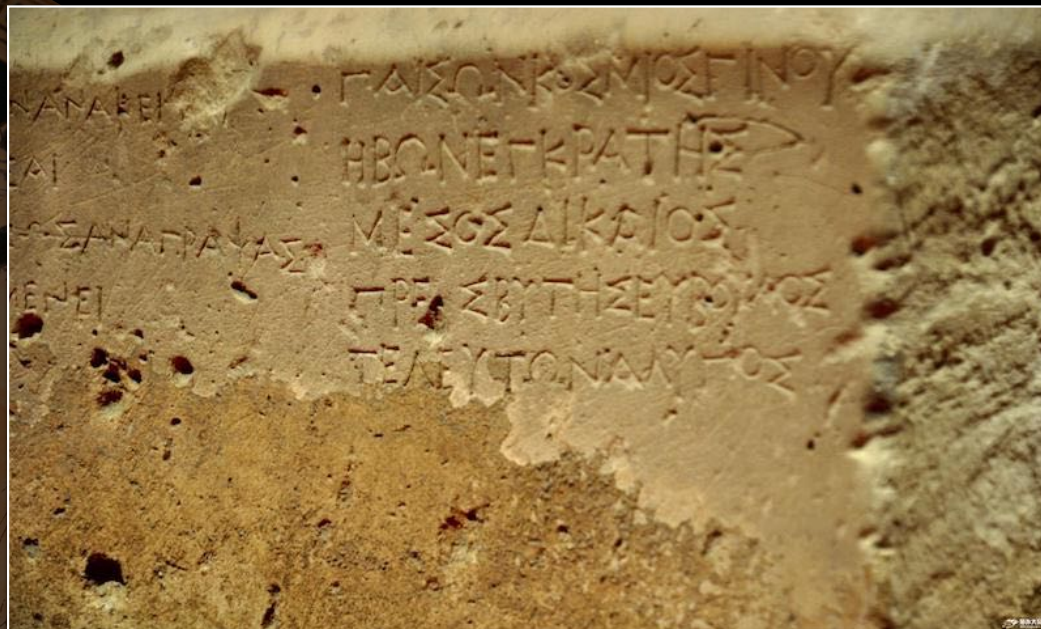
## Ai-Khanoum



The main sanctuary and temple of Ai-Khanoum, as viewed from the acropolis in the late 1970s.<sup>[1]</sup>



Shown within West and Central Asia



Delphic Precepts at Ai-Khanoum

“Delphic Maxims”  
Perhaps collected by Clearchus of Soli  
4th-3rd century BCE  
Surviving in Stobaeus (5th c. CE)  
and at Ai-Khanoum!

In the ruins of the Hellenistic city of Ai-Khanoum (former Greco-Bactrian kingdom, and modern Afghanistan), on a Herōn (funerary monument) identified in Greek as the tomb of Kineas (also described as the oikistes (founder) of the Greek settlement) and dated to 300-250 BCE, an inscription has been found describing part of the Delphic maxims (maxims 143 to 147)

# DELPHIC MAXIMS

- 147 sayings reportedly inscribed at Delphi and attributed to the Pythia, Seven Sages, and word of mouth.
- Ancient educators like Quintilian encouraged students to copy and reflect on these sayings often.
- A valuable source for the maxims is Stobaeus, *Anthology* 3.1.173. The concluding sayings (143-147) have also been found carved into the tomb of Kineas in Ai-Khanoum (modern Afghanistan), dated to the third century BCE.
- See *Delphic Philosophy* 1, Appendices.



**Know Thyself.**

When you know,  
do.

Help your  
friends

Honour home  
(Hestia)

Be for the  
common good

Think mortally.

Be grateful.

**Recognize the  
essential moment (kairos)**

Choose divinely.

Hate  
hubris.

Share the load  
of the unfortunate.

Where you're a guest,  
act that way

Fear power.

Listen to  
everyone

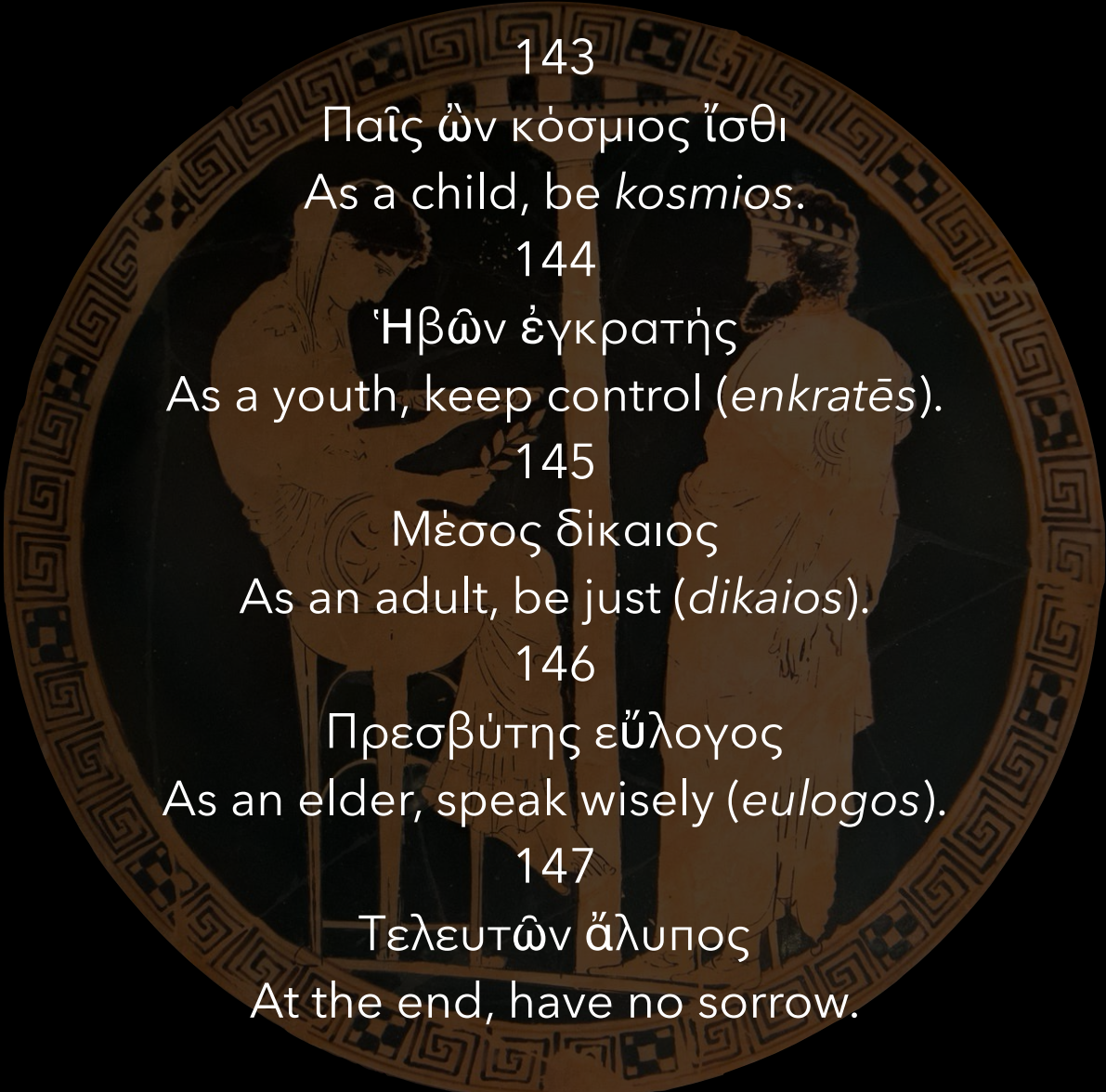
Be kind  
to all.

**Become a philosopher  
(wisdom-lover)**

**Nothing  
too much**

Do no  
violence.

MAXIMS LISTED IN *DELPHIC PHILOSOPHY 1*, APPENDICES



143

Παῖς ὧν κόσμιος ἴσθι  
As a child, be *kosmios*.

144

Ἡβῶν ἐγκρατής  
As a youth, keep control (*enkratēs*).

145

Μέσος δίκαιος  
As an adult, be just (*dikaios*).

146

Πρεσβύτης εὐλογος  
As an elder, speak wisely (*eulogos*).

147

Τελευτῶν ἄλυπος  
At the end, have no sorrow.

# TODAY

- Idea 1: The Oracle at Delphi
  - Lenses on Delphi: History, Archaeology, Politics
  - Delphi as an *Idea*
  - Memories of the Oracle
- Idea 2: Know Thyself and the Delphic Maxims
- **Bonus supplement: Delphi in Greek Myth**

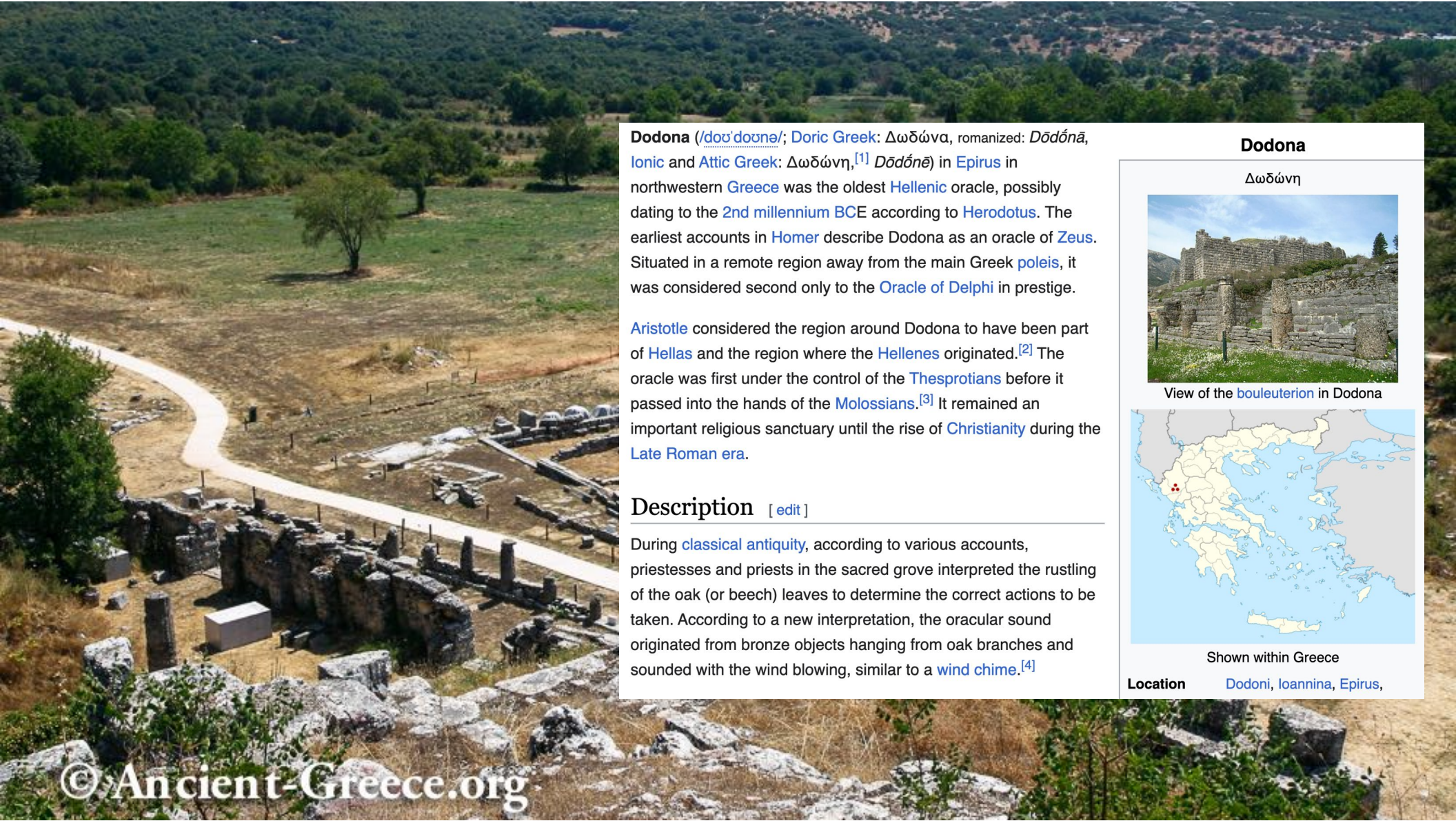
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The painting depicts the mythological scene of Apollo slaying the Python. In the lower-left foreground, Apollo is shown kneeling on a log, aiming a bow towards the right. He is nude, with a quiver of arrows on his back. The Python, a large, multi-headed serpent with a human-like face and horns, is coiled over a large log in the center-right. The scene is set in a dark, wooded landscape with a blue sky and a body of water in the distance. The text 'BONUS SUPPLEMENT DODONA' is overlaid on the left side of the painting.

BONUS SUPPLEMENT  
DODONA

TURNER, APOLLO AND PYTHON, EXHIBITED 1811



**Dodona** (/doʊˈdoʊnə/; **Doric Greek**: Δωδώνη, romanized: *Dōdōnā*, **Ionic and Attic Greek**: Δωδώνη,<sup>[1]</sup> *Dōdōnē*) in **Epirus** in northwestern **Greece** was the oldest **Hellenic** oracle, possibly dating to the **2nd millennium BCE** according to **Herodotus**. The earliest accounts in **Homer** describe Dodona as an oracle of **Zeus**. Situated in a remote region away from the main Greek **poleis**, it was considered second only to the **Oracle of Delphi** in prestige.

**Aristotle** considered the region around Dodona to have been part of **Hellas** and the region where the **Hellenes** originated.<sup>[2]</sup> The oracle was first under the control of the **Thesprotians** before it passed into the hands of the **Molossians**.<sup>[3]</sup> It remained an important religious sanctuary until the rise of **Christianity** during the **Late Roman era**.

## Description [[edit](#)]

During **classical antiquity**, according to various accounts, priestesses and priests in the sacred grove interpreted the rustling of the oak (or beech) leaves to determine the correct actions to be taken. According to a new interpretation, the oracular sound originated from bronze objects hanging from oak branches and sounded with the wind blowing, similar to a **wind chime**.<sup>[4]</sup>

## Dodona

Δωδώνη



View of the **bouleuterion** in Dodona



Shown within Greece

**Location** [Dodoni](#), [Ioannina](#), [Epirus](#),



## The Oracle of Dodona

The oracle at Dodona was considered the oldest in Greece, even if it was later replaced in importance by the oracle of **Apollo** at **Delphi**. According to **Herodotus** (*Histories* 2.57) the oracle was founded when two black doves flew from **Thebes in Egypt**; one dove settled in Libya to found the sanctuary of Zeus **Ammon**, and the other settled in an oak tree at Dodona, proclaiming a sanctuary to Zeus be built there.

In **Greek mythology** the oracle was visited by notable heroes, such as Jason, who was told by **Hera** to place a protective branch from the sacred oak tree on the prow of his ship the Argo before he set off on his search for the **Golden Fleece**. In **Homer's *Iliad*** **Achilles**, too, called on the help of Zeus D in in his fight against Hektor. It is also known that **emperor Julian** discovered if he should return to the known to have consulted the



# Dodona Online (DOL)

Towards a new edition of the lamellae of the oracle at Dodona

[About](#) [News](#) [DOL Lamellae](#) [CIOD](#)

## About the Project



Ephorate of Antiquities of Ioannina  
© Hellenic Ministry of Culture & Sports /Archaeological Receipts  
Fund

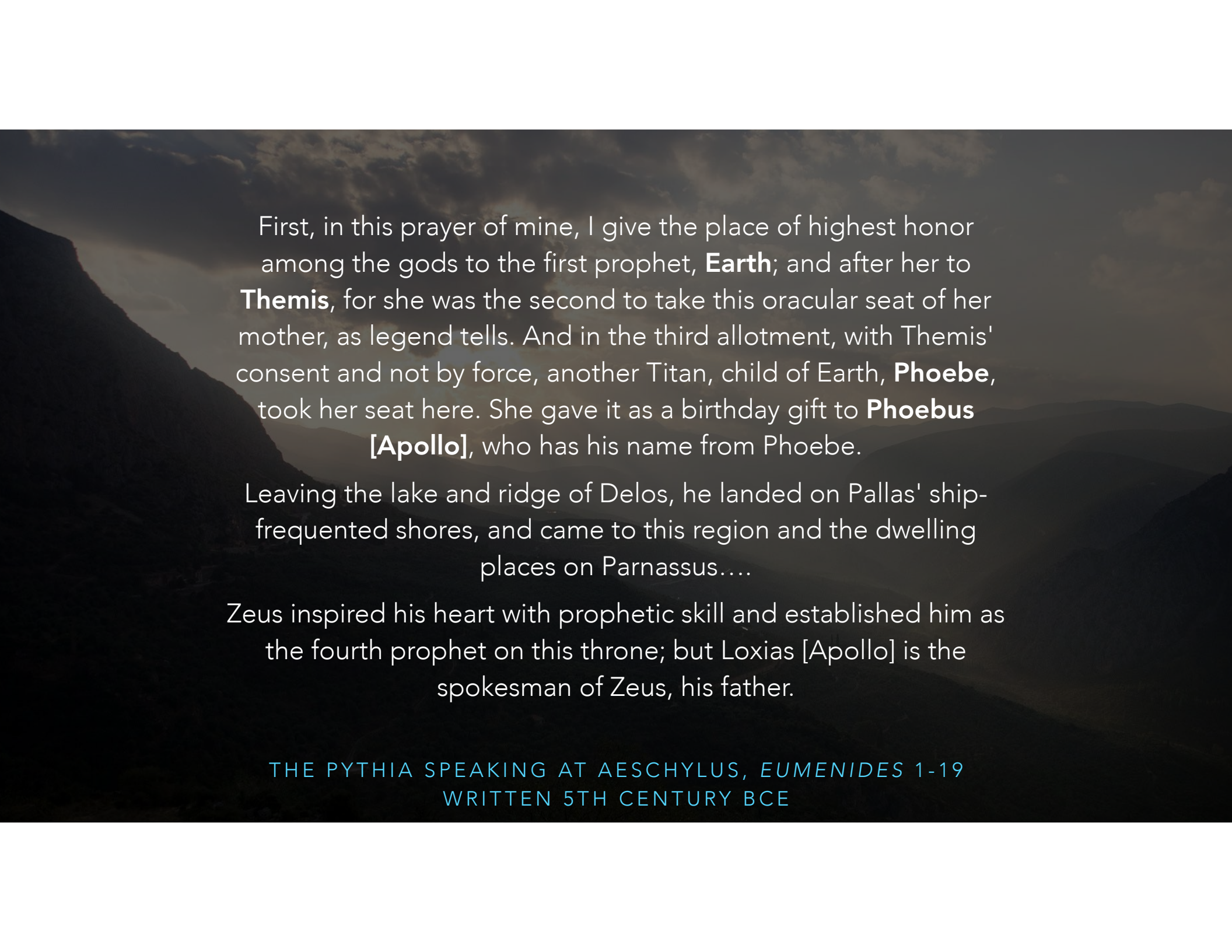
*Museum of Ioannina (MI 1724)*

<https://dodonaonline.com/>

The painting depicts the mythological scene of Apollo slaying the serpent Python. In the foreground, Apollo is shown kneeling on the ground, holding a bow and arrow, ready to strike. He is a young, muscular man with a laurel wreath. To his right, the massive, coiled body of the serpent Python dominates the scene. The serpent's head is raised, showing its mouth with sharp fangs and a forked tongue. The background features a dramatic landscape with trees and a cloudy sky. The overall style is characteristic of the Romantic era, with strong contrasts of light and shadow.

BONUS SUPPLEMENT  
DELPHI IN GREEK MYTH

TURNER, APOLLO AND PYTHON, EXHIBITED 1811



First, in this prayer of mine, I give the place of highest honor among the gods to the first prophet, **Earth**; and after her to **Themis**, for she was the second to take this oracular seat of her mother, as legend tells. And in the third allotment, with Themis' consent and not by force, another Titan, child of Earth, **Phoebe**, took her seat here. She gave it as a birthday gift to **Phoebus [Apollo]**, who has his name from Phoebe.

Leaving the lake and ridge of Delos, he landed on Pallas' ship-frequented shores, and came to this region and the dwelling places on Parnassus....

Zeus inspired his heart with prophetic skill and established him as the fourth prophet on this throne; but Loxias [Apollo] is the spokesman of Zeus, his father.

THE PYTHIA SPEAKING AT AESCHYLUS, *EUMENIDES* 1-19  
WRITTEN 5TH CENTURY BCE

# GODS OF THE ORACLE

## AESCHYLUS' ACCOUNT

- **Earth** (Gaia), a primordial Goddess
- **Themis** (Justice), a Titan
- **Phoebē** (the Shining One), a Titan
- **Apollōn**, an Olympian (9 months of the year)
  - Tradition of peaceful transition to Apollo's presence as grandson of Phoebē (Aeschylus, *Eumenides*; Pausanias) cooperating with **Themis** (Ephorus).
  - Tradition of slaying of the serpent or warrior **Python** (Euripides, *Iphigeia at Tauris*) followed by Apollo's purification (Plutarch).
- **Dionysos**, an Olympian (3 months of the year)
  - Inspiration of the Maenads who dance on the mountain, in the Corycian Cave
  - The "Grave" of Dionysos or Pytho at the Temple of Apollo, beneath the Pythia: a "dying and rising god"?



Gaea, by Anselm Feuerbach (1875)



Statue of Themis, Brisbane, Australia



White ground, Attic, c. 460, Apollo pours a libation, detail



Dionysos, flanked by silenoi (or satyrs); c. 480 BCE, Cabinet des Médailles, Paris

# APOLLO

- Deity of archery, music and dance, truth and prophecy, healing and diseases, the Sun and light, poetry
- Leader of the Nine Muses: Music and cultural memory
- Portrayed as a young, beardless man (*kouros*)
- Cooperates with twin sister, **Artemis**
- Protector of young men and shepherds in the wild, as his twin sister Artemis protects young women and people and animals in the wild



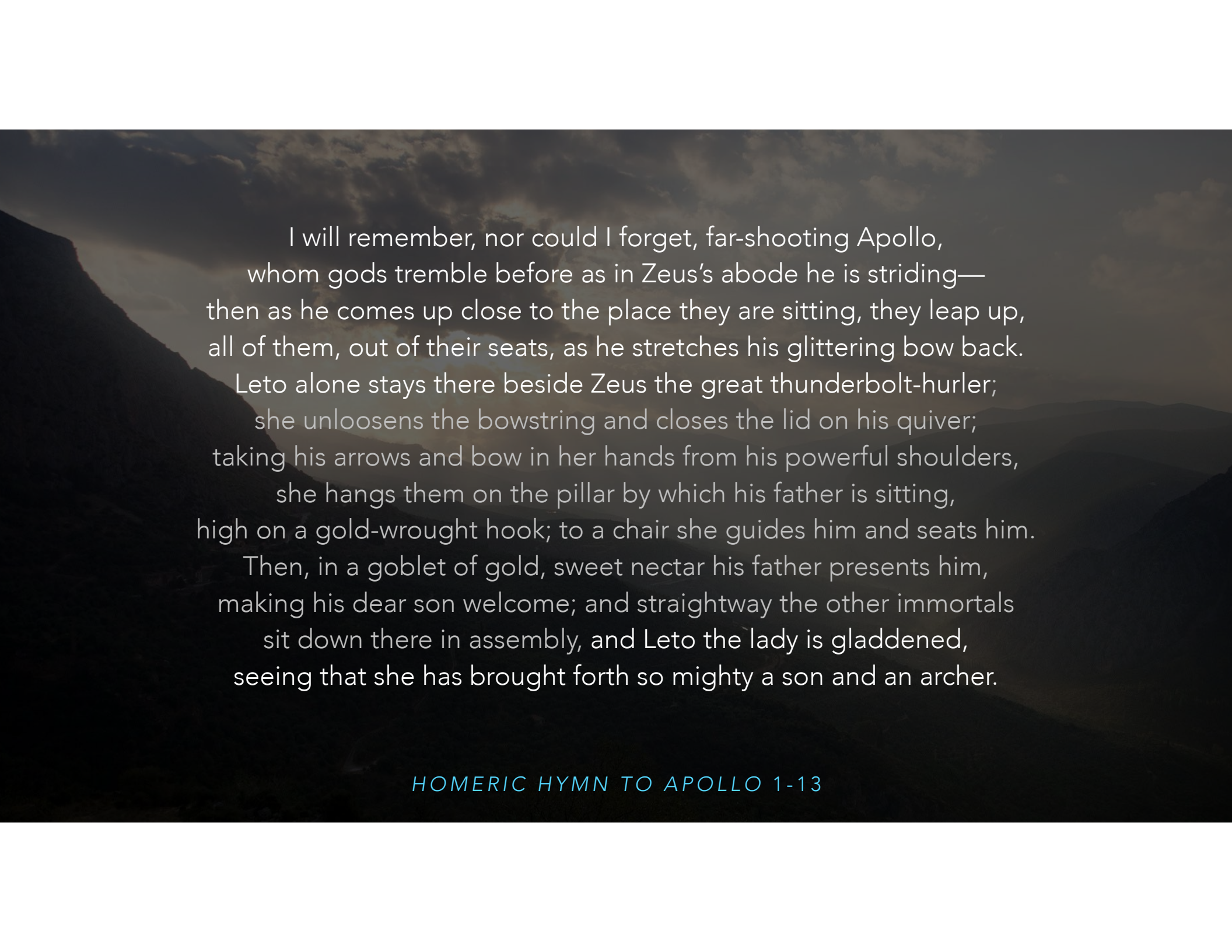
APOLLO BELVEDERE, C. 120-140 CE

# HOMERIC HYMN TO APOLLO

- Narrates the birth of Apollo and Artemis
- Apollo's quest in Greece for a site to found his oracle
- Discovers Crisa (future site of Delphi) under Mount Parnassos
- Victory over the serpent Pytho, whence the name **Pytho** (site) and **Pythia** (Oracle)
- In the form of a dolphin (*Delphis*), brings priests from "Minoan Crete" by ship to the site, whence the name **Delphoi** (Dolphins)



APOLLO, ATHENIAN RED-FIGURE AMPHORA 6TH B.C., BRITISH MUSEUM



I will remember, nor could I forget, far-shooting Apollo,  
whom gods tremble before as in Zeus's abode he is striding—  
then as he comes up close to the place they are sitting, they leap up,  
all of them, out of their seats, as he stretches his glittering bow back.  
Leto alone stays there beside Zeus the great thunderbolt-hurler;  
she unloosens the bowstring and closes the lid on his quiver;  
taking his arrows and bow in her hands from his powerful shoulders,  
she hangs them on the pillar by which his father is sitting,  
high on a gold-wrought hook; to a chair she guides him and seats him.  
Then, in a goblet of gold, sweet nectar his father presents him,  
making his dear son welcome; and straightway the other immortals  
sit down there in assembly, and Leto the lady is gladdened,  
seeing that she has brought forth so mighty a son and an archer.

*HOMERIC HYMN TO APOLLO 1-13*






TURNER, APOLLO AND PYTHON, EXHIBITED 1811



APOLLO, WHITE GROUND, ATTIC, C. 460, APOLLO POURS A LIBATION, DETAIL




And thence you [Apollo] went speeding swiftly to the mountain ridge, and came to Crisa beneath snowy Parnassus, a foothill turned towards the west: a cliff hangs over it from above, and a hollow, rugged glade runs under.

There the lord Phoebus Apollo resolved to make his lovely temple, and thus he said:

“In this place I am minded to build a glorious temple to be an oracle for men, and here they will always bring perfect hecatombs, both they who dwell in rich Peloponnesus and the people of Europe and from all the wave-washed isles, coming to question me. And I will deliver to them all counsel that cannot fail, answering them in my rich temple.”

APOLLO PLANS THE ORACLE  
APOLLO AT *HOMERIC HYMN* 280-294



... Phoibos **Apollo** considered in his heart  
which people he might bring in as priests  
who would be his servants in rocky **Pytho** [Delphi].  
While pondering this, he noticed a swift ship  
on the wine-dark sea. Many good men were aboard:  
**Cretans from Minoan Knossos**, who perform sacrifices  
For the Gold-bladed Lord and announce prophecies  
From Phoibos Apollo, whenever he delivers an oracle  
From the laurel tree in the hollow under Mount Parnassus....

“Make an altar at the sea-shore,  
kindle a fire on it and offer up white barley.  
Then stand close around the altar and pray—  
because I first leapt onto your swift ship as a dolphin  
out of the misty sea, pray to me as Delphinios...”

The Cretans followed him to Pytho, keeping the beat  
And singing a paeon to the healer god  
Like the paeon singers in Crete, and those whom  
The divine Muse fills with honey-voiced song.  
They danced...

APOLLO BRINGS THE CRETANS TO DELPHI AS PRIESTS  
*HOMERIC HYMN TO APOLLO 388-397, 490-500*



**The Minoan "Harvester Vase"**

Found at Hagia Triada, Crete, c. 1500-1450 BCE; Heraklion Archaeological Museum

# DIONYSUS

- Spheres of influence: the harvest; wine; ritual and mystic madness; fertility; and theatre
- “Release” through music, dance, ecstasy; compare the Cretan singers to Paeon
- Possession of followers, including the Maenads
- Also has a share of the Oracle (Euripides, *Bacch.* 300); like Apollo, sometimes called Healer (Eustathius *ad Hom.* 1624).
- Symbols: the thyrsus (fennel staff with a pinecone crown); the grape and grapevine; animals, especially great cats
- Birth: from Zeus and Semele, by way of Zeus’ thigh



Michelangelo's Bacchus




Dionysus, flanked by sileni (or satyrs). Interior of an Attic red-figure cup, attributed to the Brygos Painter; ca. 480 BCE. Now in the Cabinet des Médailles, Paris.



Maenad with thyrsus, leopard, and snake over head; associated with cave and mountain dances. Tondo of an ancient Greek Attic white-ground kylix 490-480 BC from Vulci. Staatliche Antikensammlungen, Munich, Germany





It is by those two art sponsoring deities, **Apollo** and **Dionysus**, that we are made to recognize the tremendous split... between the plastic, Apollinian arts and the nonvisual art of music inspired by Dionysus. The two creative tendencies developed alongside one another, usually in fierce opposition, each by its taunts forcing the other to more energetic production, both perpetuating in a discordant concord that *agōn* which the term art but feebly denominates: until at last, by the thaumaturgy of an Hellenic act of will, the pair accepted the yoke of marriage and, in this condition, begot Attic tragedy...

To reach a closer understanding of both these tendencies, let us begin by viewing them as the separate art realms of dream and intoxication, two physiological phenomena standing toward one another in much the same relationship as the Apollinian and Dionysian....

FRIEDRICH NIETZSCHE,  
*THE BIRTH OF TRAGEDY*, P. 1 (GOLFING TR.)

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