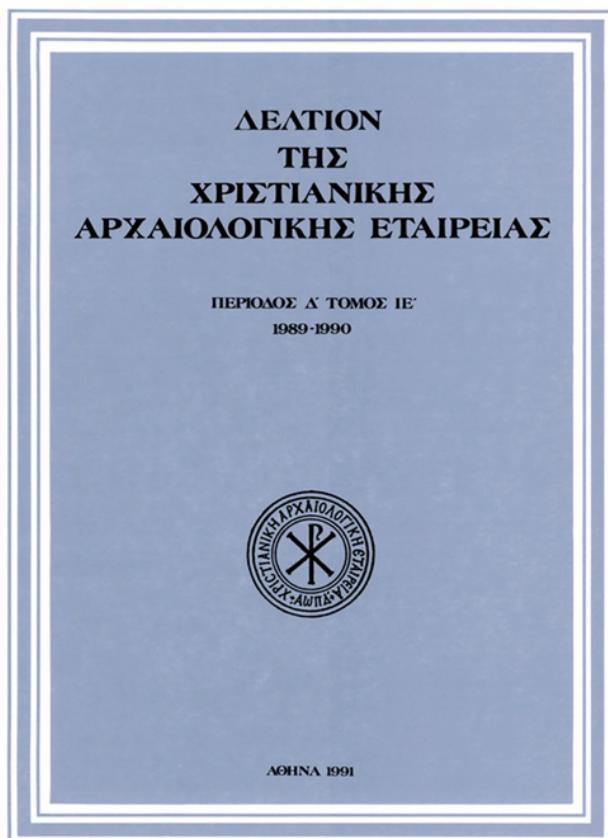


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Polymnia ATHANASSIADI

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THE FATE OF ORACLES IN LATE ANTIQUITY: DIDYMA AND DELPHI*

In an essay written in the early years of Hadrian's reign, the aged Plutarch, priest of Apollo at Delphi for about a quarter of a century, argued that the changed form of the oracles, now rendered in prose rather than verse, was proof that the sanctuary moved with the times: in accordance with the spirit of a peaceful age, people asked pedestrian questions and received straightforward answers¹. This lowering of tone, Plutarch explained, brought swarms of pilgrims to Delphi from lands both Greek and barbarian, while the oracle's renewed international appeal caused the Amphictyonic League to undertake an extensive programme of restoration: dilapidated buildings had been restored, new monuments had been erected and the sanctuary was filled as of old with dedicatory offerings². On the whole "affluence, splendour and honour" had succeeded the prophetic drought, of which Plutarch had complained when he had assumed his priestly duties, probably under Domitian³.

This optimistic picture has been fully corroborated by independent evidence. Not only Delphi, but many other ancient oracles of the Greek East, revived in Hadrianic times. Yet, though the extraordinary flowering of oracular activity under the Antonines has received due emphasis in modern scholarship, the same cannot be said of subsequent development. The purpose of this paper is to investigate what exactly happened in the third and fourth centuries to Delphi and Didyma, the two sites which, along with Claros, loom largest in Christian polemical literature. The reason why Claros must be omitted from this discussion is that the literary evidence concerning the functioning of the oracle in the late third and up to the mid-fourth century has not been confirmed by material finds⁴. Conversely, we possess a wealth of archaeological, epigraphic and literary information from and about Didyma and Delphi, which has not yet been examined as a whole.

THE CASE OF DIDYMA

From the time of its revival under Alexander the Great, the oracle of the Hellenised Carian god Apollo Didy-

maeus⁵ was run by upper-class Greek provincials, whose natural conservatism increased with the passing of time⁶. Like many other oracles, Didyma experienced a revival in the Antonine period and, though during the troubles of the third century the Milesian aristocracy's enthusiasm for filling religious posts diminished somewhat, nothing in our evidence suggests any discontinuity in the functioning of the oracle between Severan and Diocletianic times⁷. Not far from the temple, in the

* I would like to thank Dr M. Hatzopoulos and M. V. Déroche for discussing with me parts of this paper and offering advice on specific points.

1. Mor. 408 b-f; for Plutarch's struggles against traditionalists, who favoured the delivery of oracles in obscure poetic language, *ibid.* 408de; 409cd ("such an attitude is infantile, nay absolutely idiotic", 409c); for a discussion of the form of oracles, see P. Amandry, *A propos des oracles delphiques de l'Archilocheion de Paros*, ΣΤΗΛΗ: εἰς μνήμην Νικολάου Κοντολέοντος, 1980, pp. 242-248. For the dating of the De Pyth. or. c. A.D. 125, see R. Flacelière, Hadrien et Delphes, CRAI 1971, pp. 177-181, and id., Plutarque, *Oeuvres Morales* VI (1974), p. 40.

2. Mor. 408f-409a.

3. Mor. 409b: ὥσπερ ἐξ αὐχμοῦ τῆς πρόσθεν ἐρημίας καὶ πενίας εὐπορίαν καὶ λαμπρότητα καὶ τιμήν, and 434bc. For the composition of the De def. orac. between 85 and 90, see R. Flacelière, Plutarque et la Pythie, REG 46 (1945), p. 73, and id. Plutarque, *Oeuvres Morales* VI (1974), p. 86.

4. Latest inscriptions from the mid-third century, H. W. Parke, *The oracles of Apollo in Asia Minor*, 1985 (henceforth *Oracles* (1985), pp. 169-170, basing himself on L. Robert, *Les fouilles de Claros*, 1954, p. 23; last coins of Ionian cities showing delegations at Claros, also from the 250s, BMC (Ionia), p. 45, No 59.

5. For the Carian origins of Apollo Didymaeus, see A. Laumonier, *Les cultes indigènes en Carie*, 1958, pp. 560-561 (on linguistic grounds) and Parke, *Oracles* (1985), p. 27 (on iconographical grounds).

6. H. W. Parke, *The Massacre of the Branchidae*, JHS 105 (1985), pp. 59-68.

7. On Antonine prosperity, Parke, *Oracles* (1985), pp. 72-81; on subsequent difficulties, *ibid.* pp. 84-88. Cf. the case of Aelian Poplas, a prominent member of the Milesian aristocracy, active in the early third century, L. Robert, *Trois oracles de la Théosophie et un prophète d'Apollon*, CRAI 1968, pp. 568-586; as prophet, he sponsored games, Did. II, No 363A; on hecatombs offered by a female relative in the following generation, Did. II, No 363A and 375; on his financial problems, Theos. Tub. No 22 together with L. Robert, CRAI 1981, pp. 534-535.

small temenos, baths were built around 200, and the area to the west of the Sacred Way was remodelled in a fashion that K. Tuchelt connects with the games that are so richly attested in the inscriptions⁸. Indeed, there are strong indications that in the middle of the third century new Pythian games were instituted at Didyma, in tune with more general practice⁹. At the same time, consultations, copious sacrifices, dedications of altars, and other personal acts of piety are reported at the oracle, while not a single “prophetless year” —ἀπροφήτευτος ἐνιαυτός — is attested from that period¹⁰. Moreover the continuing popularity of the Didymaean Apollo is reflected in contemporary coinage¹¹, jewelry¹², and statuary¹³, which helped to enhance and spread the god’s fame abroad. Here it must be stressed that by the third century the clergy of Apollo had succeeded in striking an admirable balance between continuity and change as regards the image and functions of the god. On the one hand, Apollo, whose iconographical type had remained astonishingly faithful to the Archaic cult statue by Canachos, continued to regulate matters of cult and ritual¹⁴; on the other hand the god not only espoused all the latest trends in paganism, but even pronounced verdicts on Jewish and Christian theology¹⁵.

Despite their wealth and sentiments of civic pride, however, the few families that ran the affairs of Miletos and the sanctuary at Didyma in the third century regarded imperial support as increasingly important to the maintenance of tradition. No sooner had Caracalla been murdered than ambassadors were dispatched to Macrinus to present him with a copy of the cult statue, which the emperor duly worshipped¹⁶. In the following decades, embassies continued to travel to Rome begging for grants and immunities¹⁷, while back at home new generations were raised according to custom, participating from childhood in literary and sportive contests at the shrine of the god.

This combination of piety and booming cultural life was gravely compromised in the 260s, when the Goths were reported to be advancing towards Didyma. As soon as they received the news, the authorities acted with the utmost efficiency. Deciding to use the huge open-air adyton of the temple (an area of some thousand square metres) as a refuge for the surrounding population, they set about transforming the building into a fortress¹⁸. Since construction work on the temple was still in progress, experienced masons will have been available when the emergency occurred to be called upon to make the place impregnable by walling up its eastern front. Though provisional, the wall was expertly and carefully built, and its central gate was so constructed as to allow the continuation of the cult as normal¹⁹.

However, before transferring the population to the temple, the authorities had to solve two important problems. The first involved access to the adyton, which was at a considerably lower level than the prodomos. Till then, communication between the two parts of the temple had been effected by two narrow sloping passages, on either side of the threshold of the adyton’s central portal which was as high as a wall²⁰. The masons who built the defence wall also connected the prodomos and this threshold by means of steps, so that the refugees could circulate freely. It was presumably this practical need, rather than any sudden change in the ritual of consultation, that obliged the builders of the fortification-works to interfere with the traditional architecture of the temple in the mid-third century²¹. The second problem involved water. Once the temple was transformed into a fortress, the population settled in the adyton needed water and, as H. W. Parke has argued, rather than allowing them to profane the sacred spring in the adyton, the authorities looked urgently for an alternative source, whose discovery was ascribed to Apollo’s miraculous power²².

The Goths were repelled, but their threat loomed on the horizon for a few more years. And when, by the late 260s, the area seemed safe again, not all the squatters returned to their pillaged settlement²³. Ensconced in their tents and sheds among the scattered trees of the adyton, the remnant savoured the cosy intimacy of slums inside the walls of a numinous building. They had been bound to the place and each other by emergency and danger, and had acquired new habits, like so many people from the area in the bidonvilles of contemporary Izmir, Ankara and Istanbul. Who could eject them? Meanwhile the oracle continued to function, the prophets using the traditional passages in the performance of their duties, and oscillating between pity and indignation at the spectacle of the squatters. In view of the legacy of the war, the maintenance of the place must have become increasingly difficult, though it is important to stress that the occupation of the temple by the paupers of the area must have been seen by the authorities as a nuisance rather than a profanation²⁴. Efforts were still being made by the great Milesian families to sustain and even revive the sanctuary. Indeed, it is overwhelmingly likely that Aelius Granianus Macer, the son and relative of prophets, who even as a child had won a prize in a rhetorical contest at Didyma, became prophet in this period; and while his wife, Agatho, saw to the repair of the prophet’s house, he himself launched a restoration programme, ἔθη (...) πάτρια ἀνενεώσατο²⁵.

The squatters led their lives in gradually deteriorating

conditions²⁶, until in the early 290s the proconsul Festus had the neglected spring cleared and a fountain built for the sake of the people²⁷. This event was much advertised, if we judge from three epigrams which, in different words, praise the proconsul for the erection of the fountain. Perhaps the poems, which are carefully inscribed on the same stele, are the winning entries in a literary competition which formed part of games²⁸. What dictates the hypothesis of three separate poets, rather than a single author exhibiting his ingenuity, is the fact that two of the poems are composed in the same metre²⁹. But we are already in Diocletianic times. The oracle, which, thanks to the obstinacy and cultural patriotism of its prophets had survived through difficult years, could at last look forward to better days³⁰.

The uneasy *modus vivendi* between the Milesian clergy and the temple inhabitants must have broken down, when the former saw a unique opportunity to rid the adyton of its squalid tenants at last. A good number among them were Christians, or so the prophet surmised; as such, they must be expelled. Whether the di-

cation made at Didyma κατὰ ὄντα. Cf. Did. II, No 496 and Robert, Hellenica XI-XII, pp. 543-546.

15. On the identification of Apollo with Helios in the third century, see LIMC II 1, 332a and Robert, CRAI 1968, p. 583, n. 5. On “theological oracles” issued by Didyma, Robert, CRAI 1968, pp. 589-599 and Parke, Oracles (1985), pp. 104-105.
16. Milet I, 7, No 274 together with Robert, CRAI 1981, pp. 534-535. Also Milet I, 6, No 191, which need not be Julianic.
17. Did. II, No 332; Robert, Hellenica XI-XII, pp. 469-470, and, above, n. 7.
18. By that date, Didyma had reached a certain degree of urbanisation, cf. K. Tuchelt, Tempel-Heiligtum-Siedlung: Probleme zur Topographie von Didyma, U. Jantzen (ed.), Neue Forschungen in griechischen Heiligtümern, 1976, p. 215.
19. H. Knackfuss, Did. I, p. 42, *pace* Tuchelt, *op.cit.*, p. 216, who, following Rehm, sees the erection of the wall as setting off a process of profanation; see also below, n. 24. The careful building of the wall suggests, among other things, the availability of funds.
20. An ingenious explanation of this architectural oddity based on historical analogy is provided by H. W. Parke, The Temple of Apollo at Didyma: The Building and its Function, JHS 106 (1986), pp. 121-131.
21. For a description of the temple and the manner of consultation, see the vivid pages of R. Lane Fox, Pagans and Christians, 1986, pp. 182-183. For an interpretation of the passages’ meaning, cf. J. C. Montegu, Note on the *labyrinths* of Didyma, AJA 80 (1976), pp. 304-305. On the steps, K. Tuchelt, Vorarbeiten zu einer Topographie von Didyma, 1973, pp. 112-114. On the similarity of techniques between the two undertakings, *ibid.*, p. 114 and pl. 38.4. Knackfuss, Did. I, p. 43, connected the steps with the Adyton basilica and, consequently, dated them to the late fourth or early fifth century (both his chronologies have been proved incorrect); Tuchelt, *ibid.*, attempts to explain the mid-third century date of the steps by assuming a revival of some unknown Archaic cultic procedure.
22. Parke, Oracles (1985), pp. 94-96. Likewise, St. Thecla solves the crisis resulting from a cattle epidemic when she reveals a miraculous spring near the shrine in Seleuceia (Mir. 36). It is difficult to understand why Rehm, who published so many inscriptions attesting the vitality of the shrine in the third century, thought that by the 260s the prophetic spring was extinct and the cult neglected (Did. II, p. 323). This hypothesis led him to argue that the spring of the refugees was identical with the revived oracular one (cf. commentary to Did. II, No 159), a point on which he was followed by Tuchelt, Vorarbeiten, p. 114.
23. Tuchelt, IstMitt 30 (1980), p. 119.
24. The profanation theory was first expressed by Rehm (commentary to Did. II, No 159) and is widely accepted, cf. H. Hommell, Juden und Christen im Kaiserzeitlichen Milet, IstMitt 25 (1975), pp. 194-195. Yet, it is easy to suppose that, just as the squatters were not allowed to use the prophetic spring, so too a certain area of the adyton must have remained taboo; for an exact parallel, cf. Thucydides II. 17.
25. For Granianus Macer’s victory ἐν κωμῳ[μίῳ], see Did. II, No 182, l. 20 with Robert’s restitution, Hellenica XI-XII, pp. 446-449. As prophet: Robert, *op.cit.*, pp. 460-463 and Tuchelt, Vorarbeiten, p. 62.
26. Did. II, No 159 III, ll. 9, 14.
27. Did. II, No 159 I, l. 9; II, ll. 3-4.
28. Did. II, No 159 and Parke, Oracles (1985), p. 94, on whose suggestion I elaborate. For a similar case, Milet I, 9, No 339.
29. A single poet treating the same theme in several compositions usually chose different metres as well, cf. Alan Cameron, Iamblichus at Athens, Athenaeum 45 (1967), p. 145.
30. Did. II, Nos 89, 90 (imperial dedications).

stressingly fragmentary inscription *Didyma* 306 is actually the oracle which unleashed the Diocletianic persecution, we cannot know, but it certainly contains allusions to an encounter of the prophet with the squatters (l. 2: ἐν τῇ καταβάσει) which, far from settling matters, degenerated into a riot. Driven by despair, the crowd may well have set fire to parts of the temple³¹, thus provoking the god's wrath. What happened subsequently is well-known. After peace was established for the Church, the intransigent prophet, who characteristically was also a philosopher, was sought out in Miletos, tortured and put to death³².

Meanwhile, a second generation of adyton-dwellers had come of age. And, while Eusebius was telling the world that Apollo Didymaeus had fallen silent³³, the oracle continued to function as always, and Christians and pagans went on rubbing shoulders in its holy of holies. In order both to satisfy their cultic needs and to irritate Apollo, the Christians had begun to build chapels in honour of martyrs in the area. How many martyria there were and when exactly they were put up are questions which cannot be answered. All we know is that, by the early 360s, at least two chapels were functioning close enough to the temple for their presence to be considered ritually offensive³⁴. As institutional Christianity began to encroach on Didyma, Apollo vacillated between discretion and resentment, according to the temperament of his annual prophet. His oracles continued to be registered at the χρησμογράφιον, including those that threatened bitter revenge against anyone who dared attack his priests or compromise their privileges³⁵. Whether these oracles, which in due course gained wide publicity, were specifically inspired by the fate of the unlucky philosopher-priest or by general imperial policy in the 340s and 350s it is not possible to tell.

A last fine moment for Didyma came in 362, when the lot chose as prophet no less a person than the emperor himself, something which had not happened since Hadrian's day³⁶. Julian took his duties seriously. A milestone marking the fourth mile of the Sacred Way seems to indicate that he undertook its repair³⁷; moreover, in a series of letters to his clergy, the *pontifex maximus* publicised Apollo's wrath against those who had shown disrespect to his servants³⁸ and, more importantly, gave orders to pull down all Christian chapels in the area³⁹. Two circumstances seem to have played a decisive role in the adoption of this last measure. The emperor, who was resident at Antioch, had witnessed the burning of the temple of Apollo at Daphne just after the relics of the martyr Babylas, which were tormenting the god and preventing him from rendering oracles, had been moved

out of the sacred grove; at the same time, he had received a letter from the high-priest of Caria denouncing the governor of the province for maintaining secret relations with bishops and for having ordered the public beating of a pagan priest. Julian was angry. He responded with a letter in which, as well as ordering the destruction of all Christian buildings at Didyma, he condemned the governor's dealings with bishops and inflicted on him a spiritual punishment, forbidding him to enter the temples of the gods for three lunar months⁴⁰.

To what extent Julian's orders were carried out is unknown and scarcely relevant⁴¹. After his reign, other churches were put up in the area, the sacred spring became an *ayiasma* and, eventually, the settlement was moved back to its original place, while a basilica was built out of spoils in the very adyton of the temple⁴². The village, which had started as a community of squatters in the cella of the temple, was soon legalised under the telling name Hieron, as medieval Didyma was baptised, and the age-old holiness of the place was more widely recognised by the elevation of the modest settlement into a bishopric⁴³.

LATE ANTIQUE DELPHI

In the less privileged province of Achaia, Delphi too had its Antonine revival, which was prolonged into the Severan age⁴⁴. From then on, inscriptions are a valuable guide, as their record between the early third and the mid-fourth century forms a relatively continuous body of evidence, its salient features being parochial traditionalism and adulation of the imperial power. The first tendency becomes evident in the sudden revival of long-forgotten titles and the belated assumption by the city of the epithet "holy"⁴⁵; enthusiasm for the powers-that-be on the other hand is expressed through the incessant dedication of statues, not least to those emperors who, from the point of view of pagan Delphi, were utter Philistines⁴⁶. But the benefits gained through this policy, which was consistently followed probably even into the fifth century, were considerable: while the third century opens with a restoration of the temple of Apollo by the proconsul Leonticus⁴⁷, in the third quarter of the fourth century the Delphians can still afford to dedicate an expensive monument to their "benefactors", Valens and Valentinian⁴⁸. In the meantime, the place lived out its Indian summer as an international centre of games and Greek culture. Apollo was seen once more as the arbiter of Hellenism⁴⁹, and cities from Macedonia, Thrace and Asia Minor sought the god's sanction for the foundation of local games, while famous athletes came repeat-

edly to Delphi to seek Pythian victory⁵⁰. Next to them, philosophers and men of letters took to visiting the sanctuary, thus rendering the city “a real temple of the Muses, inspired by the god who presides over them”⁵¹. For, as Plutarch had proclaimed, “the god was no less a philosopher than a prophet”⁵². In this double capacity, Apollo gave his opinion on several third and fourth century philosophers, the most famous instances being the long oracle on the fate of Plotinus’ soul and the verdict on the respective merits of Porphyry and Iamblichus⁵³. As these texts show, the priests of Apollo were fully aware of all latest developments in philosophy and, in the quarrel between noetic and theurgic Neoplatonism, usually pronounced themselves in favour of the latter trend.

Inscriptional evidence suggests that from the end of the third century onwards, the centre of gravity began to move away from the oracle towards the city. It is indeed indicative of this shift that the inscription accompanying the statues of Valens and Valentinian is the first in which the city abandons her claim to holiness, though not to prosperity.

A few decades earlier, statues had been dedicated by “the holy city of Delphi” to Constantine and to his immediate family⁵⁴. Indeed, the connection of the sanctuary with the imperial house in the second quarter of the fourth century may have been closer than has been

31. I. 5, my reconstruction: [ἐνέ]πρ[η]σάν τε [κ]αὶ τῶν θεοῦ, and cf. Rehm’s: [τείχι] πρόσαν τε[ς], αἰτῶν θεοῦ. For a more imaginative reconstruction, see H. Grégoire, *Les chrétiens et l’oracle de Didymes*, Mélanges Holleaux, 1913, pp. 81-91.

32. Eusebius PE IV. 2.11.

33. Eusebius PE IV. 2.8.

34. Sozomen HE V. 20.7: the martyria were πλησίον τοῦ ναοῦ τοῦ Διδυμαίου Ἀπόλλωνος.

35. See below, n. 38.

36. For imperial prophets, see Did. II, Nos 318, 407 (Trajan); No 494 (Hadrian); Julian ep. 88.451b (Julian).

37. Did. II, No 60. Did. II, No 57 marks the eleventh mile of the Sacred Way and specifically mentions the building of the road by Trajan, who also became prophet of Apollo; C. P. Jones, *An oracle given to Trajan*, Chiron 5 (1975), p. 405, suggests a connection between the two acitivities.

38. Ep. 89b.298a; ep. 88.451a (oracle repeated in ep. 89b.297c).

39. Sozomen HE V. 20.7. SIG³, No 906A is an inscription in Julian’s honour, in which the city of Miletos styles herself, significantly, τρόφος τοῦ Διδυμαίου Ἀπόλλωνος.

40. Ep. 88; J. Bidez had already suggested that the letter was sent to the governor of Caria (L’Empereur Julien, Oeuvres complètes I 2, 1960², p. 101). I find it more than probable that the essentials of the missing start of the letter are supplied by Sozomen HE V. 20.7.

41. Yet it was a theme that caught the imagination in the following centuries, cf. K. Weitzmann, *Byzantium* 16 (1942-43), pp. 129-134 and pl. I.

42. On churches, U. Peschlow, *Byzantinische Plastik in Didyma*,

IstMitt 25 (1975), pp. 254-257. On transformation of sacred spring, Did. I, 43. The basilica is dated by Peschlow, *art.cit.*, p. 211, to the late fifth or early sixth century, the latter date being preferable in view of the fact that the rebuilding of the settlement is dated by Tuchelt to the early sixth century, IstMitt 11 (1961), p. 40.

43. On the identification of medieval Didyma with Hieron, see Robert, *Hellenica* XI-XII, pp. 496-502.

44. R. Lane Fox, *Pagans and Christians*, 1986, pp. 187, 576.

45. Revival of ancient titles: Th. Homolle, BCH 20 (1896), p. 719. For ἡ ἱερὰ Δελφῶν πόλις: *ibid.* and G. Daux, BCH 63 (1939), p. 181.

46. Begging of privileges: FD III, No 328 (Commodus); No 329 (Sept. Severus and Caracalla); No 332 (Elagabalus and Severus Alexander); E. Bourguet, *De rebus delphicis imperatoriae aetatis*, 1905, p. 92 (Gallienus). Dedications of statues: B. Haussoulier, BCH 6 (1882), p. 453 (Sept. Severus); FD III, No 274 together with R. Flacelière, BCH 73 (1949), p. 475 (Gordian III); Th. Homolle, BCH 20 (1896), p. 728 (Valerian); J. Jannoray, BCH 70 (1946), p. 260 (Carus); FD III, No 275 together with C. Vatin, BCH 86 (1962), pp. 229-230 and P. Amandry, BCH 105 (1981), p. 733 (three dedications to Constantine I); G. Daux, BCH 63 (1939), p. 179 (Dalmatius); FD III, No 75 and J. Jannoray, BCH 70 (1946), p. 260 (two dedications to Constantine).

47. FD III, Nos 269 and 331 (last recorded restoration).

48. C. Vatin, BCH 86 (1962), p. 238.

49. For the Delphic Apollo as the arbiter of Greek culture infinitely reproduced in the Hellenistic world, see J. Defradas, *Les thèmes de la propagande delphique*, 1954, pp. 268-283; L. Robert, *Les inscriptions*, P. Bernard (ed.), *Fouilles d’Aï Khanoum* I, 1973, pp. 207-237 (and CRAI 1968, pp. 416-457); A. N. Oikonomides, *The Lost Delphic Inscription with the Commandments of the Seven* and P. Univ. Athen. 2782, ZPE 37 (1980), pp. 179-183. For a resumption of this role in the mid-third century, cf. L. Robert, *Bull.* (1982), No 450, pp. 420, 422.

50. See above, n. 9. Famous athletes in the third century: FD III, Nos 476, 551, 556, 557. In an unpublished inscription from Delphi, dated by C. Vatin in 251 (*Delphes à l’époque impériale* (thèse de 3ème cycle, 1965, pp. 254-255)), the herald Valerius Eclectus proclaims his third Pythian victory. For agonistic inscriptions of imperial period not yet studied, see BCH 110 (1986), p. 782.

51. Heliodorus, Eth. II.27.2 and J. Pouilloux, *Les Ethiopiques d’Héliodore et la réalité delphique*, REG 97 (1984), pp. XXIV-XXV (archaeology corroborating the image painted by Heliodorus). For men of culture receiving Delphian citizenship in the imperial period (possibly in the second century, FD III 1, p. 113); FD III, Nos 206, 207, 210, 216, and 199, 203 for philosophers from Antioch and Smyrna respectively; for a third-century portrait of a philosopher, see F. Poulsen, *Portrait d’un philosophe néoplatonicien trouvé à Delphes*, BCH 52 (1928), pp. 245-255.

52. Mor. 385b; cf. Julian or. IX. 188a.

53. Syncellus, Chron. (Moshammer), 442: Themistocles (possibly the Stoic mentioned in Porphyry, Plot. 20.33-34), Porphyry, Plot. 22; in attributing the oracle on Plotinus’ soul to Delphi, I follow, among others, M. Nilsson, GGR II², 1961, p. 469. J. Igal, *El enigma del oraculo de Apolo sobre Plotino*, Emerita 52 (1984), pp. 83-115 suggests that the oracle was composed by Amelius and issued with the approval of the Delphic priesthood. R. Goulet, *L’oracle d’Apollon dans la Vie de Plotin*, L. Brisson et al. (eds), *Porphyre, La vie de Plotin* I, 1982, pp. 369-412, arguing that the oracle’s *Sitz-im-Leben* is to be found in theurgic circles in Syria, is unconvincing. David, In Porph. Isag. 4 (CAG XVIII.2, p. 92): Porphyry and Iamblichus. For Themistocles, see below, n. 63.

54. Cf. above, n. 46.

suspected; for it is overwhelmingly likely that Count Felicianus, priest of Apollo in the early 340s, was a disgraced member of the Second Flavian dynasty. This claim is based on an as yet unpublished inscription from Delphi, of which the following is a translation⁵⁵:

Letters sealed by decree of the *damiourgoi* and engraved in the public archives.

Flavius Domitius Leontius, Fabius Titianus, Furius Placidus to Count Flavius Felicianus, greetings.

We find it unbecoming that you, who have deserved the priesthood of the Pythian Apollo, who have been raised to every single honour by our deified (ἐν Θεοῖς) emperor, and have been applauded by our own masters and by the whole city of Delphi, should be disturbed by someone in the very exercise of the priesthood. Since we personally respect you, and so that you stay in peace in future, we decree that, if from now on anybody should annoy you... we shall condemn him to be exiled from Delphi and pay a fine. We wish you health and prosperity.

Fl. Dom. Leontius, Fa. Titianus, Fur. Placidus to Count Fl. Felicianus, greetings.

... to be priest of the Pythian Apollo and... accomplish the rites, because of your... on account of your acts... since no...

Before asking the obvious question, “who was Flavius Felicianus?”, it might be useful to recall a few facts. During the years of Constantine’s consolidation of absolute power, male members of his family had to keep a low profile. His half-brother Julius Constantius, for instance, lived in self-imposed exile in (among other places) Corinth, whence he was summoned in the early 330s to share in the administration of the empire⁵⁶. His case was typical of his other brothers and nephews, for whom honours, however, lasted only a little longer than their ambivalent patron’s life. When Constantine died on 22 May 337, the struggle for power began; for almost four months the emperor’s death was kept secret while his sons and relatives strove to solve the problem of succession. Finally, during the night of 9 September all these men, with the exception of Constantine’s three sons, perished in the coup-d’état staged by the army in Constantinople⁵⁷. Flavius Felicianus, consul prior for 337, seems to have had more political acumen than the rest: for, foreseeing the outcome, he must have fled. What Felicianus’ exact relationship to Constantine was—if indeed he was a relative—we do not know, but it seems that the emperor created for him the office of Count of the East⁵⁸; and, as a cultured pagan, Felicianus chose to reside in the Museum of Antioch. Malalas, who reports these facts in slightly distorted form, at-

tributes to Constantine’s initiative the conversion of the museum into a praetorium and also, understandably, makes Felicianus a Christian⁵⁹. What indeed reinforces the hypothesis that Flavius Felicianus was a blood relation of Constantine is the fact that he suffered *damnatio memoriae* after his patron’s death. Thus, on three inscriptions, the name of the senior consul for 337 is erased, while in two of them the order is reversed and Titianus appears first, the same Titianus to whom a few years later his former colleague appears to have addressed at least two letters⁶⁰.

Fleeing for safety, Felicianus must then have retired to Delphi, the care of whose oracle and monuments was a cause obscure enough for a disgraced member of the imperial family, yet sufficiently dignified to inspire in him some enthusiasm and usefully fill the declining years of a once important administrator. Count Felicianus brought to the priesthood of Apollo a renewed importance; when at some point he felt he was being disturbed in the exercise of his duties, possibly by Christians, he found it intolerable. Being unable, for obvious reasons, to have recourse to the emperors, he addressed himself to their immediate subordinates.

On the strength of three inscriptions, including ours, Ch. Vogler has argued that, after Constantine’s death, “summit meetings” among the praetorian prefects became a rule. What these periodical meetings aimed at was the standardisation of policy throughout the empire, especially in religious matters⁶¹. If this is so, Felicianus, who was well informed about these procedures, will have written to his old friend and fellow-consul for 337, Fabius Titianus, now Praetorian Prefect for Gaul, pressing for a ruling that would guarantee the cult of Apollo and the functioning of the oracle at Delphi. During the next conference, Titianus submitted the request to his colleagues, Flavius Leontius, Praetorian Prefect of the East and Furius Placidus, Praetorian Prefect in Italy, who then agreed to appease Felicianus by personalising the issue. In a joint document, the three praetorian prefects struck the right tone between cordiality and respect and assured their aristocratic recipient of their full support: whoever dared annoy him in the exercise of his priestly duties, would instantly be sent into exile and pay a fine.

However, Felicianus was not discouraged by this polite letter. As a man used to seeing his wishes fulfilled on the spot, he appealed again, repeating his request and causing a second joint communication to reach Delphi. Hopelessly fragmentary, this second document does not leave much scope for reconstruction. All we may assume is that it was written along the lines of the first letter. Count Felicianus must have understood; the

council of the *damiourgoi* passed a decree whereby both the official letters were inscribed in the public archives⁶²; and the affair was closed.

No more is heard of Felicianus and we may safely assume that, when some twenty years later, a younger relative, who like himself escaped the massacre of 337, became emperor, the count-priest was no longer around; otherwise, Julian would have acknowledged his presence and capitalised on his story. On the other hand, it is possible that the two men felt a certain coolness towards each other, as adherents of diametrically opposite philosophical schools. The cultured Felicianus may very well be the priest who pronounced Themistius the wisest living man, in order to arrest the tide of Iamblichian Neoplatonism, that was beginning to flood Greece⁶³. Early in his reign, Julian sent his personal doctor and close associate, Oribasius, to inspect the sanctuary⁶⁴. Faithful to a long tradition of dignified beggary, the Delphians then asked for imperial aid by means of an oracle which overdramatised the situation⁶⁵. Julian seems to have provided some help and, in gratitude, an oracle predicting victory over the Persians was in due course issued⁶⁶.

Whether that was the last oracle delivered by Delphi is of no importance. Under Julian's successors, the city abdicated her sanctity; archaeological evidence suggests for all that period a slight somnolence, which was only dispelled in the fifth century, when the city expanded and its fortification wall was restored and extended⁶⁷. Though some of Delphi's public buildings were occupied and others robbed for building materials, the general tendency was one of respect towards the city's past. Thus expansion rather than destruction of the centre was the seemingly conscious choice of the inhabitants. It is significant that the main street of the town, which was paved in the early fifth century and follows more or less the course of the Sacred Way, respected the temple of Apollo⁶⁸. Indeed, it has even been suggested that the roof of the temple was restored for a last time at about this period⁶⁹. All round the *peribolos* there have been excavated wealthy houses and a number of baths, some of which are now thought to have belonged to private mansions⁷⁰. In at least one of these urban villas, continuity since Antonine times has been established; and it was in a late house in the centre of the town that the well-known statue of Antinous was found⁷¹.

At Delphi, then, civic munificence seems to have followed a reverse course to the fate of the oracle, which relied for maintenance on a league of Greek cities and the central government. Already in 319, a member of an important Delphic family with Athenian affiliations offered a considerable amount so that the citizens could

enjoy free bathing⁷². A little more than a century later, there was enough wealth at Delphi for its councillors to be constrained to spend money on giving spectacles at Rome; while local patriotism was sufficiently pugnacious for the city council to denounce the situation to the Praetorian Prefect of Illyricum and demand the taking of measures to prevent the squandering of municipal revenues⁷³.

55. This translation is largely based on the reconstruction of the text made by C. Vatin, *Delphes à l'époque impériale*, pp. 258-259, which I found on the whole plausible after a reading of the inscriptions Nos 1647 and 4077 in the Museum at Delphi. In his commentary on the inscription, Vatin (*op.cit.*, pp. 260-264) identifies the praetorian prefects, but does not deal with the identity of Flavius Felicianus.

56. Julian, *ap.*, Lib. or. XIV.30.

57. My interpretation of the events between 22 May and 9 September 337 is based on Julian or. VII.228 ab; cf also E. Stein, *Histoire du Bas-Empire I*, 1959, p. 130.

58. Malalas 319 together with T. D. Barnes, *The New Empire of Diocletian and Constantine*, 1982, p. 142.

59. Malalas 318-9.

60. Felicianus' name erased: Dessaü, ILS 6112 (Paestum). In the two Roman inscriptions ICUR n.S. IV. 11088 and ILCV 2805 the order of the consuls is reversed and after Titianus there is a lacuna.

61. Ch. Vogler, *Constance II et l'administration impériale*, 1979, pp. 131-132.

62. On the office of the *damiourgoi*, see C. Vatin, *Damiurges et épidiurges à Delphes*, BCH 85 (1961), pp. 236-255.

63. See Themistius or. 23. 295b-296a. For two equally plausible views on the identity of the consultant, see G. Fowden, *The Pagan Holy Man in Late Antique Society*, JHS 102 (1982), p. 44 n. 92, and E. Vanderspoel, *Themistios and a Philosopher at Sikyon*, Historia 36 (1987), pp. 383-384.

64. As argued by T. Gregory, *Julian and the Last Oracle at Delphi* GRBS 24 (1983), pp. 355-366. For the transmission of the oracle in Byzantine literature, see A. Markopoulos, *Kedrenos, Pseudo-Symeon, and the Last Oracle at Delphi*, GRBS 26 (1985), pp. 207-210.

65. This is the famous "last oracle", reported by Philostorgius (HE (Bidez) 7, p. 77), and generally assumed to be a fake. Recently the balance seems to be shifting, cf. M. Henry, *Le témoignage de Libanius et les phénomènes sismiques du IVe siècle de notre ère: essai d'interprétation*, Phoenix 39 (1985), pp. 50-52, arguing that the oracle was delivered after the temple of Apollo had been damaged by the earthquake of the autumn 362.

66. Theodoret HE III.21.

67. V. Deroche, *Etudes sur Delphes paléochrétienne*, unpubl. mémoire, Ecole Française d'Athènes, 1986, p. 137 (Sacred Way); P. Amandry, BCH 105 (1981), pp. 742-746, for the rebuilding of the wall some time between the fourth and the sixth century. V. Deroche has mentioned to me in conversation that he thinks the wall was repaired in the fifth century.

68. Deroche, *op.cit.*, pp. 129-130, 137, 139-140 and Amandry, BCH 105 (1981), p. 746.

69. E. Hansen, letter 31.iii.88, invoking architectural arguments.

70. Deroche, *op.cit.*, 8-14 and BCH 109 (1985), p. 863.

71. BCH 109 (1985), p. 863; Deroche, *op.cit.*, p. 141 and Atlas, p. 431.

72. J. Bousquet, *La donation de L. Gellius Menogece à Delphes et les thermes de l'Est*, BCH 76 (1952), pp. 653-660 together with L. Robert, Bull. (1954), No 146.

73. Cod. Theod. XV.5.4.

Eventually, the city became a bishopric⁷⁴, and an important basilica was built near the temple of Apollo⁷⁵. Despite the damage wrought by *la grande fouille* (1896-99), enough evidence survives from fifth- and sixth-century Delphi to allow us to reconstruct a community with a flourishing economic life, a lively interest in contemporary culture, an evident taste for life's luxuries and, above all, a strong sense of civic identity and tradition⁷⁶. When the oracle to which the place owed its international fame declined, the Delphians met the challenge by taking their city's fate into their hands⁷⁷: where prophecy died, city pride was born, and this is a circumstance which may well account for the mildness of the transition from paganism to Christianity. Delphi, like late antique Athens, could afford to display a sane awareness of the glories of its past. Indeed, by the sixth century tradition had been so much re-interpreted and re-worked that it is not unlikely that the Nymph Castalia was given the place of honour in the narthex of the town's cemetery basilica⁷⁸.

Didyma and Delphi, two of the most famous oracles in late antiquity, could not be more dissimilar in terms of cultural and economic history. The first was supported by a rich city which benefited to the full from the Antonine revival and in turn lavished its wealth on its oracle. Inversely, Delphi was situated in one of the most unprivileged provinces of the Roman empire and was run by a league of unprosperous cities. Yet their oracular fortunes were remarkably similar: in a period in which divination was a burning issue for both Church and State, prophecy was definitively stamped out in both these oracular shrines, leaving just a vague memory of holiness which was adroitly exploited by the Church. Yet in their lazy cunning the Christian polemicists, led by Eusebius, went on using as late as the fifth century the same old anti-oracular rhetoric, whose specific allusions to such shrines as Didyma and Delphi had been relevant in Antonine times, but now simply confused the issue. For divination in late antiquity was very much a living business, but its locus had been significantly

shifted. In the course of the fourth and fifth centuries informal dream and healing oracles acquired a renewed importance⁷⁹; and at the same time as the traditional channels became blocked, prophecy took refuge in the privacy of men's sleep⁸⁰ and in the rites of the theurgist or the magician⁸¹.

University of Athens

ABBREVIATIONS

The following abbreviations have been used in this article:

BMC: B. V. Head, *British Museum Catalogues of the Greek Coins (Ionia)*, 1892.

CAG: *Commentaria in Aristotelem Graeca*.

Dessau, ILS: H. Dessau, *Inscriptiones Latinae Selectae, I-III*, Berlin 1954-62².

Did I: Th. Wiegand, *Didyma I*: H. Knackfuss, *Die Baubeschreibung*, Berlin 1941.

Did II: A. Rehm-R. Harder, *Didyma II: Die Inschriften*, Berlin 1958.

Eusebius, PE: Eusébe, *La préparation évangélique*, Paris 1974.

74. See J. Laurent, *Delphes chrétien*, BCH 23 (1899), pp. 273-277.

75. The so-called "peribolos basilica", pillaged for the construction of Hosios Loukas; architectural members found during *la grande fouille* were minutely described by J. Laurent, *art. cit.*, pp. 207ff., who believed in a conversion of the temple of Apollo between 425 and 450 (*art. cit.*, p. 271). Déroche, who dates the basilica to the second half of the fifth century (*op. cit.*, p. 87), proposes as its location the area to the NE of the temple of Apollo, inside the peribolos (p. 89).

76. Déroche, *op. cit.*, *passim*.

77. For evidence indicating a more general revival in the province of Achaia at that time, see G. Fowden, *City and Mountain in Late Roman Attica*, JHS 108 (1988), pp. 48-59.

78. CRAI 1969, pp. 275-279 and J.-P. Sodini, BCH 94 (1970), p. 711; the identification by M. Hatzidakis is made on tenuous grounds, as all that has been preserved from the representation is a hand holding an overflowing water jug.

79. For the oracle of Apollo Sarpedonius at Seleucia in Cilicia, see G. Dagron, *Vie et miracles de Sainte Thècle*, 1978, *passim*. For the oracle of Isis at Menuthis, R. Herzog, *Der Kampf um den Kult von Menuthis, Pisciculi: Studien zur Religion und Kultur des Altertums* Franz Dölger.... dargeboten, 1939, pp. 117-127. For the oracle of Bes at Abydos, P. Perdrizet - G. Lefebvre, *Le graffites grecs du Memnonion d'Abydos*, 1919, pp. XXI-XXIII.

80. See, among others, Synesius, *De insomniis*, *passim*.

81. Cf. my *Parallel Divination in Late Antiquity and the Testimony of Iamblichus*, *Byzantion* 61 (1991).