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Prophecies and Seers

The Oracle of Delphi in Herodotus

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Herodotus

G. C. Macaulay (1890)

Credits

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About:

Delphi, on the slopes of Mount Parnassus in central Greece, was the most famous oracle of the ancient world. In the temple of Apollo a priestess, the Pythia, answered in the god's name the questions of kings, cities and ordinary people, frequently in hexameter verse and with words of double meaning; hence Apollo's epithet Loxias, "the oblique".

Before founding a colony, making war or changing the laws, it was to Delphi that people went to ask.

Herodotus of Halicarnassus (c. 484–c. 425 BC), the "father of History", wrote his Histories around 430 BC, telling of the wars between Greeks and Persians and of everything that led up to them.

He quotes dozens of the Pythia's answers, and it is through him that we know the most famous: the tortoise boiled in bronze with which Croesus tested the oracles, the "great empire" Croesus would destroy (his own), the mule of the Medes, the bones of Orestes, the "wooden wall" that would save Athens before Salamis, the king of Sparta who had to die at Thermopylae. He also tells of times when the Pythia was bribed.

This is a selection: 19 episodes with answers from Delphi, in the order of the book, each with the passage of Herodotus that tells the question, the answer and what followed. The title of each episode gives the book and sections.

In the episodes of Cypselus (V, 92) and Miltiades (VI, 34–35) only the part about the oracle is given, marked with ellipses. The English text is G. C.

Macaulay's translation (1890), without the notes; a word missing from the digital text in the Tegea episode is supplied in square brackets. The Portuguese and Spanish versions were translated from this English.

Many scholars think that some of these answers were composed or touched up after the events; the text is presented as a historical document.

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GYGES AND THE FIRST ANSWER (I, 13)

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13 He obtained the kingdom however and was strengthened in it by means of the Oracle at Delphi; for when the Lydians were angry because of the fate of Candaules, and had risen in arms, a treaty was made between the followers of Gyges and the other Lydians to this effect, that if the Oracle should give answer that he was to be king of the Lydians, he should be king, and if not, he should give back the power to the sons of Heracles.

13.2 So the Oracle gave answer, and Gyges accordingly became king: yet the Pythian prophetess said this also, that vengeance for the Heracleidai should come upon the descendants of Gyges in the fifth generation. Of this oracle the Lydians and their kings made no account until it was in fact fulfilled.

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CROESUS TESTS THE ORACLES (I, 46–49)

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46 For two years then Croesus remained quiet in his mourning, because he was deprived of his son: but after this period of time the overthrowing of the rule of Astyages the son of Kyaxares by Cyrus the son of Cambyses, and the growing greatness of the Persians caused Croesus to cease from his mourning, and led him to a care of cutting short the power of the Persians, if by any means he might, while yet it was in growth and before they should have become great.

46.2 So having formed this design he began forthwith to make trial of the Oracles, both those of the Hellenes and that in Libya, sending messengers some to one place and some to another, some to go to Delphi, others to Abai of the Phokians, and others to Dodona; and some were sent to the shrine of Amphiaraos and to that of Trophonios, others to Branchidai in the land of Miletos: these are the Oracles of the Hellenes to which Croesus sent messengers to seek divination; and others he sent to the shrine of Ammon in Libya to inquire there.

46.3 Now he was sending the messengers abroad to the end that he might try the Oracles and find out what knowledge they had, so that if they should be found to have knowledge of the truth, he might send and ask them secondly whether he should attempt to march against the Persians.

47 And to the Lydians whom he sent to make trial of the Oracles he gave charge as follows,—that from the day on which they set out from Sardis they should reckon up the number of the days following and on the hundredth day they should consult the Oracles, asking what Croesus the son of Alyattes king of the Lydians chanced then to be doing: and whatever the Oracles severally should prophesy, this they should cause to be written down and bear it back to him. Now what the other Oracles prophesied is not by any reported, but at Delphi, so soon as the Lydians entered the sanctuary of the temple to consult the god and asked that which they were commanded to ask, the Pythian prophetess spoke thus in hexameter measure: "But the number of sand I know, and the measure of drops in the ocean; The dumb man I understand, and I hear the speech of the speechless: And there hath come to my soul the smell of a strong-shelled tortoise Boiling in caldron of bronze, and the flesh of a lamb mingled with it; Under it bronze is laid, it hath bronze as a clothing upon it."

48 When the Pythian prophetess had uttered this oracle, the Lydians caused the prophecy to be written down, and went away at once to Sardis. And when the rest also who had been sent round were there arrived with the answers of the Oracles, then Croesus unfolded the writings one by one and looked upon them: and at first none of them pleased him, but when he heard that from Delphi, forthwith he did worship to the god and accepted the answer, judging that the Oracle at Delphi was the only true one, because it had found out what he himself had done.

48.2 For when he had sent to the several Oracles his messengers to consult the gods, keeping well in mind the appointed day he contrived the following device,—he thought of something which it would be impossi-

ble to discover or to conceive of, and cutting up a tortoise and a lamb he boiled them together himself in a caldron of bronze, laying a cover of bronze over them.

49 This then was the answer given to Croesus from Delphi; and as regards the answer of Amphiaraos, I cannot tell what he replied to the Lydians after they had done the things customary in his temple, for there is no record of this any more than of the others, except only that Croesus thought that he also possessed a true Oracle.

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A GREAT EMPIRE AND THE MULE OF THE MEDES (I, 53–55)

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53 To the Lydians who were to carry these gifts to the temples Croesus gave charge that they should ask the Oracles this question also,—whether Croesus should march against the Persians, and if so, whether he should join with himself any army of men as his friends.

53.2 And when the Lydians had arrived at the places to which they had been sent and had dedicated the votive offerings, they inquired of the Oracles and said: "Croesus, king of the Lydians and of other nations, considering that these are the only true Oracles among men, presents to you gifts such as your revelations deserve, and asks you again now whether he shall march against the Persians, and if so, whether he shall join with himself any army of men as allies."

53.3 They inquired thus, and the answers of both the Oracles agreed in one, declaring to Croesus that if he should march against the Persians he should destroy a great empire: and they counselled him to find out the most powerful of the Hellenes and join these with himself as friends.

54 So when the answers were brought back and Croesus heard them, he was delighted with the oracles, and expecting that he would certainly destroy the kingdom of Cyrus, he sent again to Pytho, and presented to the men of Delphi, having ascertained the number of them, two staters of gold for each man: and in for this the Delphians gave to Croesus and to the Lydians precedence in consulting the Oracle and freedom from all

payments, and the right to front seats at the games, with this privilege also for all time, that any one of them who wished should be allowed to become a citizen of Delphi.

55 And having made presents to the men of Delphi, Croesus consulted the Oracle the third time; for from the time when he learnt the truth of the Oracle, he made abundant use of it. And consulting the Oracle he inquired whether his monarchy would endure for a long time. And the Pythian prophetess answered him thus: "But when it cometh to pass that a mule of the Medes shall be monarch Then by the pebbly Hermos, O Lydian delicate-footed, Flee and stay not, and be not ashamed to be callèd a coward."

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THE DUMB SON OF CROESUS (I, 85)

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85 Meanwhile to Croesus himself it happened thus:—He had a son, of whom I made mention before, who was of good disposition enough but deprived of speech. Now in his former time of prosperity Croesus had done everything that was possible for him, and besides other things which he devised he had also sent messengers to Delphi to inquire concerning him.

85.2 And the Pythian prophetess spoke to him thus: "Lydian, master of many, much blind to destiny, Croesus, Do not desire to hear in thy halls that voice which is prayed for, Voice of thy son; much better if this from thee were removèd, Since he shall first utter speech in an evil day of misfortune."

85.3 Now when the fortress was being taken, one of the Persians was about to slay Croesus taking him for another; and Croesus for his part, seeing him coming on, cared nothing for it because of the misfortune which was upon him, and to him it was indifferent that he should be slain by the stroke; but this voiceless son, when he saw the Persian coming on, by reason of terror and affliction burst the bonds of his utterance and said: "Man, slay not Croesus."

85.4 This son, I say, uttered voice then first of all, but after this he continued to use speech for the whole time of his life.

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CROESUS CALLS THE GOD TO ACCOUNT (I, 90–91)

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90 Hearing this, Cyrus was above measure pleased, because he thought that Croesus advised well; and he commended him much and enjoined the spearmen of his guard to perform that which Croesus had advised: and after that he spoke to Croesus thus: "Croesus, since thou art prepared, like a king as thou art, to do good deeds and speak good words, therefore ask me for a gift, whatsoever thou desirest to be given thee forthwith."

90.2 And he said: "Master, thou wilt most do me a pleasure if thou wilt permit me to send to the god of the Hellenes, whom I honoured most of all gods, these fetters, and to ask him whether it is accounted by him right to deceive those who do well to him."

90.3 Then Cyrus asked him what accusation he made against the god, that he thus requested; and Croesus repeated to him all that had been in his mind, and the answers of the Oracles, and especially the votive offerings, and how he had been incited by the prophecy to march upon the Persians: and thus speaking he came back again to the request that it might be permitted to him to make this reproach against the god.

90.4 And Cyrus laughed and said: "Not this only shalt thou obtain from me, Croesus, but also whatsoever thou mayst desire of me at any time." Hearing this Croesus sent certain of the Lydians to Delphi, enjoining them to lay the fetters upon the threshold of the temple and to ask the god whether he felt no shame that he had incited Croesus by his prophe-

cies to march upon the Persians, persuading him that he should bring to an end the empire of Cyrus, seeing that these were the first-fruits of spoil which he had won from it,—at the same time displaying the fetters.

90.5 This they were to ask, and moreover also whether it was thought right by the gods of the Hellenes to practice ingratitude.

91 When the Lydians came and repeated that which they were enjoined to say, it is related that the Pythian prophetess spoke as follows: "The fated destiny it is impossible even for a god to escape.

91.2 And Croesus paid the debt due for the sin of his fifth ancestor, who being one of the spearmen of the Heracleidai followed the treacherous device of a woman, and having slain his master took possession of his royal dignity, which belonged not to him of right.

91.3 And although Loxias eagerly desired that the calamity of Sardis might come upon the sons of Croesus and not upon Croesus himself, it was not possible for him to draw the Destinies aside from their course; but so much as these granted he brought to pass, and gave it as a gift to Croesus: for he put off the taking of Sardis by three years; and let Croesus be assured that he was taken prisoner later by these years than the fated time: moreover secondly, he assisted him when he was about to be burnt.

91.4 And as to the oracle which was given, Croesus finds fault with good ground: for Loxias told him beforehand that if he should march upon the Persians he should destroy a great empire: and he upon hearing this, if he wished to take counsel well, ought to have sent and asked further whether the god meant his own empire or that of Cyrus: but as he did not comprehend that which was uttered and did not ask again, let him pronounce himself to be the cause of that which followed.

91.5 To him also when he consulted the Oracle for the last time Loxias said that which he said concerning a mule; but this also he failed to comprehend: for Cyrus was in fact this mule, seeing that he was born of parents who were of two different races, his mother being of nobler descent and his father of less noble: for she was a Median woman, daughter of Astyages and king of the Medes, but he was a Persian, one of a race subject to the Medes, and being inferior in all respects he was the husband of one who was his royal mistress."

91.6 Thus the Pythian prophetess replied to the Lydians, and they brought the answer back to Sardis and repeated it to Croesus; and he, when he heard it, acknowledged that the fault was his own and not that of the god. With regard then to the empire of Croesus and the first conquest of Ionia, it happened thus.

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LYCURGUS (I, 65)

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65 Such was the condition of things which Croesus heard was prevailing among the Athenians during this time; but as to the Lacedemonians he heard that they had escaped from great evils and had now got the better of the Tegeans in the war.

65.2 For when Leon and Hegesicles were kings of Sparta, the Lacedemonians, who had good success in all their other wars, suffered disaster in that alone which they waged against the men of Tegea. Moreover in the times before this they had the worst laws of almost all the Hellenes, both in matters which concerned themselves alone and also in that they had no dealings with strangers.

65.3 And they made their change to a good constitution of laws thus:— Lycurgos, a man of the Spartans who was held in high repute, came to the Oracle at Delphi, and as he entered the sanctuary of the temple, straightway the Pythian prophetess said as follows: "Lo, thou art come, O Lycurgos, to this rich shrine of my temple, Loved thou by Zeus and by all who possess the abodes of Olympos.

65.4 Whether to call thee a god, I doubt, in my voices prophetic, God or a man, but rather a god I think, O Lycurgos."

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TEGEA AND THE BONES OF ORESTES (I, 66–68)

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66 Some say in addition to this that the Pythian prophetess also set forth to him the order of things which is now established for the Spartans; but the Lacedemonians themselves say that Lycurgos having become guardian of Leobotes his brother's son, who was king of the Spartans, brought in these things from Crete.

66.2 For as soon as he became guardian, he changed all the prevailing laws, and took measures that they should not transgress his institutions: and after this Lycurgos established that which appertained to war, namely Enomoties and Triecads and Common Meals, and in addition to this the Ephors and the Senate.

66.3 Having changed thus, the Spartans had good laws; and to Lycurgos after he was dead they erected a temple, and they pay him great worship. So then, as might be supposed, with a fertile land and with no small number of men dwelling in it, they straightway shot up and became prosperous: and it was no longer sufficient for them to keep still; but presuming that they were superior in strength to the Arcadians, they consulted the Oracle at Delphi respecting conquest of the whole of Arcadia; and the Pythian prophetess gave answer thus: "The land of Arcadia thou askest; thou askest me much; I refuse it; Many there are in Arcadian land, stout men, eating acorns; These will prevent thee from this: but I am not grudging towards thee; Tegea beaten with sounding feet I will give thee to dance in, And a fair plain I will give thee to measure with line and divide it."

66.4 When the Lacedemonians heard report of this, they held off from the other Arcadians, and marched against the Tegeans with fetters in their hands, trusting to a deceitful oracle and expecting that they would make slaves of the men of Tegea.

66.5 But having been worsted in the encounter, those of them who were taken alive worked wearing the fetters which they themselves brought with them and having "measured with line and divided" the plain of the Tegeans. And these fetters with which they had been bound were preserved even to my own time at Tegea, hanging about the temple of Athene Alea.

67 In the former war then I say they struggled against the Tegeans continually with ill success; but in the time of Croesus and in the reign of Anaxandrides and Ariston at Lacedemon the Spartans had at length become victors in the war; and they became so in the following manner:—As they continued to be always worsted in the war by the men of Tegea, they sent messengers to consult the Oracle at Delphi and inquired what god they should propitiate in order to get the better of the men of Tegea in the war: and the Pythian prophetess made answer to them that they should bring into their land the bones of Orestes the son of Agamemnon.

67.2 Then as they were not able to find the grave of Orestes, they sent men again to go to the god and to inquire about the spot where Orestes was laid: and when the messengers who were sent asked this, the prophetess said as follows: "Tegea there is, in Arcadian land, in a smooth place founded; Where there do blow two blasts by strong compulsion together; Stroke too there is and stroke in [return], and trouble on trouble.

67.3 There Agamemnon's son in the life-giving earth is reposing; Him if thou bring with thee home, of Tegea thou shalt be master." When the Lacedemonians had heard this they were none the less far from finding it out, though they searched all places; until the time that Lichas, one of those Spartans who are called "Well-doers," discovered it.

67.4 Now the "Well-doers" are of the citizens the eldest who are passing from the ranks of the "Horsemen," in each year five; and these are bound during that year in which they pass out from the "Horsemen," to allow themselves to be sent without ceasing to various places by the Spartan State.

68 Lichas then, being one of these, discovered it in Tegea by means both of fortune and ability. For as there were at that time dealings under truce with the men of Tegea, he had come to a forge there and was looking at iron being wrought; and he was in wonder as he saw that which was being done.

68.2 The smith therefore, perceiving that he marvelled at it, ceased from his work and said: "Surely, thou stranger of Lacedemon, if thou hadst seen that which I once saw, thou wouldst have marvelled much, since now it falls out that thou dost marvel so greatly at the working of this iron; for I, desiring in this enclosure to make a well, lighted in my digging upon a coffin of seven cubits in length; and not believing that ever there had been men larger than those of the present day, I opened it, and I saw that the dead body was equal in length to the coffin: then after I had measured it, I filled in the earth over it again."

68.3 He then thus told him of that which he had seen; and the other, having thought upon that which was told, conjectured that this was Orestes according to the saying of the Oracle, forming his conjecture in the following manner:—whereas he saw that the smith had two pairs of bellows, he concluded that these were the winds spoken of, and that the anvil and the hammer were the stroke and the stroke in [return], and that the iron which was being wrought was the trouble laid upon trouble, making comparison by the thought that iron has been discovered for the evil of mankind.

68.4 Having thus conjectured he came back to Sparta and declared the whole matter to the Lacedemonians; and they brought a charge against him on a fictitious pretext and drove him out into exile.

68.5 So having come to Tegea, he told the smith of his evil fortune and endeavoured to hire from him the enclosure, but at first he would not allow him to have it: at length however Lichas persuaded him and he took up his abode there; and he dug up the grave and gathered together the bones and went with them away to Sparta.

68.6 From that time, whenever they made trial of one another, the Lacedemonians had much the advantage in the war; and by now they had subdued to themselves the greater part of Peloponnesus besides.

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THE CNIDIANS AND THE ISTHMUS (I, 174)

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174 Now the Carians were reduced to subjection by Harpagos without any brilliant deed displayed either by the Carians themselves or by those of the Hellenes who dwell in this land.

174.2 Of these last there are besides others the men of Cnidos, settlers from Lacedemon, whose land runs out into the sea, being in fact the region which is called Triopion, beginning from the peninsula of Bybassos: and since all the land of Cnidos except a small part is washed by the sea (for the part of it which looks towards the North is bounded by the Gulf of Keramos, and that which looks to the South by the sea off Syme and Rhodes), therefore the men of Cnidos began to dig through this small part, which is about five furlongs across, while Harpagos was subduing Ionia, desiring to make their land an island: and within the isthmus all was theirs, for where the territory of Cnidos ends in the direction of the mainland, here is the isthmus which they were digging across.

174.3 And while the Cnidians were working at it with a great number of men, it was perceived that the men who worked suffered injury much more than might have been expected and in a more supernatural manner, both in other parts of their bodies and especially in their eyes, when the rock was being broken up; so they sent men to ask the Oracle at Delphi what the cause of the difficulty was.

174.4 And the Pythian prophetess, as the men of Cnidos themselves report, gave them this reply in trimeter verse:— "Fence not the place with towers, nor dig the isthmus through; Zeus would have made your land an island, had he willed."

174.5 When the Pythian prophetess had given this oracle, the men of Cnidos not only ceased from their digging but delivered themselves to Harpagos without resistance, when he came against them with his army.

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THE TREASURE OF SIPHNOS (III, 57–58)

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57 Those of the Samians who had made the expedition against Polycrates themselves also sailed away, when the Lacedemonians were about to desert them, and came to Siphnos: for they were in want of money, and the people of Siphnos were then at their greatest height of prosperity and possessed wealth more than all the other islanders, since they had in their island mines of gold and silver, so that there is a treasury dedicated at Delphi with the tithe of the money which came in from these mines, and furnished in a manner equal to the wealthiest of these treasuries: and the people used to divide among themselves the money which came in from the mines every year.

57.2 So when they were establishing the treasury, they consulted the Oracle as to whether their present prosperity was capable of remaining with them for a long time, and the Pythian prophetess gave them this reply: "But when with white shall be shining the hall of the city in Siphnos, And when the market is white of brow, one wary is needed Then, to beware of an army of wood and a red-coloured herald."

57.3 Now just at that time the market-place and city hall of the Siphnians had been decorated with Parian marble.

58 This oracle they were not able to understand either then at first or when the Samians had arrived: for as soon as the Samians were putting in to Siphnos they sent one of their ships to bear envoys to the city: now in old times all ships were painted with red, and this was that which the Pythian

prophetess was declaring beforehand to the Siphnians, bidding them guard against the "army of wood" and the "red-coloured herald." The messengers accordingly came and asked the Siphnians to lend them ten talents; and as they refused to lend to them, the Samians began to lay waste their lands: so when they were informed of it, forthwith the Siphnians came to the rescue, and having engaged battle with them were defeated, and many of them were cut off by the Samians and shut out of the city; and the Samians after this imposed upon them a payment of a hundred talents.

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BATTUS AND THE FOUNDING OF CYRENE (IV, 150–151, 155–157)

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150 Up to this point of the story the Lacedemonians agree in their report with the men of Thera; but in what is to come it is those of Thera alone who report that it happened as follows.

150.2 Grinnos the son of Aisanios, a descendant of the Theras who has been mentioned, and king of the island of Thera, came to Delphi bringing the offering of a hecatomb from his State; and there were accompanying him, besides others of the citizens, also Battos the son of Polymnestos, who was by descent of the family of Euphemos of the race of the Minyai.

150.3 Now when Grinnos the king of the Theraians was consulting the Oracle about other matters, the Pythian prophetess gave answer bidding him found a city in Libya; and he made reply saying: "Lord, I am by this time somewhat old and heavy to stir, but do thou bid some one of these younger ones do this." As he thus said he pointed towards Battos.

150.4 So far at that time: but afterwards when he had come away they were in difficulty about the saying of the Oracle, neither having any knowledge of Libya, in what part of the earth it was, nor venturing to send a colony to the unknown.

151 Then after this for seven years there was no rain in Thera, and in these years all the trees in their island were withered up excepting one: and when the Theraians consulted the Oracle, the Pythian prophetess alleged this matter of colonising Libya to be the cause.

151.2 As then they had no remedy for their evil, they sent messengers to Crete, to find out whether any of the Cretans or of the sojourners in Crete had ever come to Libya.

151.3 These as they wandered round about the country came also the city of Itanos, and there they met with a fisher for purple named Corobios, who said that he had been carried away by winds and had come to Libya, and in Libya to the island of Platea.

151.4 This man they persuaded by payment of money and took him to Thera, and from Thera there set sail men to explore, at first not many in number; and Corobios having guided them to this same island of Platea, they left Corobios there, leaving behind with him provisions for a certain number of months, and sailed themselves as quickly as possible to make report about the island to the men of Thera.

155 After that, Polymnestos, a man of repute among the Theraians, received Phronime from him and kept her as his concubine; and in course of time there was born to him from her a son with an impediment in his voice and lisping, to whom, as both Theraians and Kyrenians say, was given the name Battos, but I think that some other name was then given, and he was named Battos instead of this after he came to Libya, taking for himself this surname from the oracle which was given to him at Delphi and from the rank which he had obtained; for the Libyans call a king battos: and for this reason, I think, the Pythian prophetess in her prophesying called him so, using the Libyan tongue, because she knew that he would be a king in Libya.

155.2 For when he had grown to be a man, he came to Delphi to inquire about his voice; and when he asked, the prophetess thus answered him: "For a voice thou camest, O Battos, but thee lord Phoebus Apollo Sendeth as settler forth to the Libyan land sheep-abounding," just as if she should say using the Hellenic tongue, "For a voice thou camest, O king."

155.3 He thus made answer: "Lord, I came to thee to inquire concerning my voice, but thou answerest me other things which are not possible, bidding me go as a settler to Libya; but with what power, or with what force of men should I go?"

155.4 Thus saying he did not at all persuade her to give him any other reply; and as she was prophesying to him again the same things as before, Battos departed while she was yet speaking, and went away to Thera.

156 After this there came evil fortune both to himself and to the other men of Thera; and the Theraians, not understanding that which befell them, sent to Delphi to inquire about the evils which they were suffering: and the Pythian prophetess gave them reply that if they joined with Battos in founding Kyrene in Libya, they would fare the better.

156.2 After this the Theraians sent Battos with two fifty-oared galleys; and these sailed to Libya, and then came away back to Thera, for they did not know what else to do: and the Theraians pelted them with missiles when they endeavoured to land, and would not allow them to put to shore, but bade them sail back again.

156.3 They accordingly being compelled sailed away back, and they made a settlement in an island lying near the coast of Libya, called, as was said before, Platea. This island is said to be of the same size as the now existing city of Kyrene.

157 In this they continued to dwell two years; but as they had no prosperity, they left one of their number behind and all the rest sailed away to Delphi, and having come to the Oracle they consulted it, saying that they were dwelling in Libya and that, though they were dwelling there, they fared none the better: and the Pythian prophetess made answer to them thus: "Better than I if thou knowest the Libyan land sheep-abounding, Not having been there than I who have been, at thy wisdom I wonder." Having heard this Battos and his companions sailed away back again; for in fact the god would not let them off from the task of settlement till they had come to Libya itself: and having arrived at the island and taken up him whom they had left, they made a settlement in Libya itself at a spot opposite the island, called Aziris, which is enclosed by most fair woods on both sides and a river flows by it on one side.

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THE ALCMAEONIDS BUY THE PYTHIA (V, 63)

✦

63 So then, as the Athenians say, these men being settled at Delphi persuaded the Pythian prophetess by gifts of money, that whenever men of the Spartans should come to inquire of the Oracle, either privately or publicly sent, she should propose to them to set Athens free.

63.2 The Lacedemonians therefore, since the same utterance was delivered to them on all occasions, sent Anchimolios the son of Aster, who was of repute among their citizens, with an army to drive out the sons of Peisistratos from Athens, although these were very closely connected with them by guest-friendship; for they held that the concerns of the god should be preferred to those of men: and this force they sent by sea in ships.

63.3 He therefore, having put in to shore at Phaleron, disembarked his army; but the sons of Peisistratos being informed of this beforehand called in to their aid an auxiliary force from Thessaly, for they had made an alliance with the Thessalians; and the Thessalians at their request sent by public resolution a body of a thousand horse and also their king Kineas, a man of Conion.

63.4 So having obtained these as allies, the sons of Peisistratos contrived as follows:--they cut down the trees in the plain of Phaleron and made this district fit for horsemen to ride over, and after that they sent the cavalry to

attack the enemy's camp, who falling upon it slew (besides many others of the Lacedemonians) Anchimolios himself also: and the survivors of them they shut up in their ships.

63.5 Such was the issue of the first expedition from Lacedemon: and the burial-place of Anchimolios is at Alopecai in Attica, near the temple of Heracles which is at Kynosarges.

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CYPSELUS OF CORINTH (V, 92)

✦

92 ... (b) For the established order of the Corinthian State was this:--the government was an oligarchy, and the oligarchs, who were called Bacchiadai, had control over the State and made marriages among themselves. Now one of these men, named Amphion, had a daughter born to him who was lame, and her name was Labda.

92.2 This daughter, since none of the Bacchiadai wished to marry her, was taken to wife by Aëtion the son of Echecrates, who was of the deme of Petra, but by original descent a Lapith and of the race of Caineus.

92.3 Neither from this wife nor from another were children born to him, therefore he set out to Delphi to inquire about offspring; and as he entered, forthwith the prophetess addressed him in these lines: "'Much to be honoured art thou, yet none doth render thee honour.

92.4 Labda conceives, and a rolling rock will she bear, which shall ruin Down on the heads of the kings, and with chastisement visit Corinthos.' This answer given to Aëtion was by some means reported to the Bacchiadai, to whom the oracle which had come to Corinth before this was not intelligible, an oracle which had reference to the same thing as that of Aëtion and said thus: "'An eagle conceives in the rocks and shall bear a ravening lion, Strong and fierce to devour, who the knees of many shall loosen.

92.5 Ponder this well in your minds, I bid you, Corinthians, whose dwelling Lies about fair Peirene's spring and in craggy Corinthos.' (c) This oracle, I say, having come before to the Bacchiadai was obscure; but after-

wards when they heard that which had come to Aëtion, forthwith they understood the former also, that it was in accord with that of Aëtion; and understanding this one also they kept quiet, desiring to destroy the offspring which should be born to Aëtion.

92.6 Then, so soon as his wife bore a child, they sent ten of their own number to the deme in which Aëtion had his dwelling, to slay the child; and when these had come to Petra and had passed into the court of Aëtion's house, they asked for the child; and Labda, not knowing anything of the purpose for which they had come, and supposing them to be asking for the child on account of friendly feeling towards its father, brought it and placed it in the hands of one of them.

92.7 Now they, it seems, had resolved by the way that the first of them who received the child should dash it upon the ground. However, when Labda brought and gave it, it happened by divine providence that the child smiled at the man who had received it; and when he perceived this, a feeling of compassion prevented him from killing it, and having this compassion he delivered it to the next man, and he to the third.

92.8 Thus it passed through the hands of all the ten, delivered from one to another, since none of them could bring himself to destroy its life. So they gave the child back to its mother and went out; and then standing by the doors they abused and found fault with one another, laying blame especially on the one who had first received the child, because he had not done according to that which had been resolved; until at last after some time they determined again to enter and all to take a share in the murder.

92.9 (d) From the offspring of Aëtion however it was destined that evils should spring up for Corinth: for Labda was listening to all this as she stood close by the door, and fearing lest they should change their mind

and take the child a second time and kill it, she carried it and concealed it in the place which seemed to her the least likely to be discovered, that is to say a corn-chest, feeling sure that if they should return and come to a search, they were likely to examine everything: and this in fact happened.

92.10 So when they had come, and searching had failed to find it, they thought it best to return and say to those who had sent them that they had done all that which they had been charged by them to do.

92.11 (e) They then having departed said this; and after this the son of Aëtion grew, and because he had escaped this danger, the name of Kypselos was given him as a surname derived from the corn-chest.

92.12 Then when Kypselos had grown to manhood and was seeking divination, a two-edged answer was given him at Delphi, placing trust in which he made an attempt upon Corinth and obtained possession of it.

92.13 Now the answer was as follows: "'Happy is this man's lot of a truth, who enters my dwelling, Offspring of Aëtion, he shall rule in famous Corinthos, Kypselos, he and his sons, but his children's children no longer.' Such was the oracle: and Kypselos when he became despot was a man of this character,--many of the Corinthians he drove into exile, many he deprived of their wealth, and very many more of their lives. ...

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MILTIADES AND THE DOLONCI (VI, 34–35)

✦

34 In the Chersonese then the Phenicians made themselves masters of all the other cities except the city of Cardia. Of these cities up to that time Miltiades the son of Kimon, the son of Stesagoras, had been despot, Miltiades the son of Kypselos having obtained this government in the manner which here follows:--The inhabitants of this Chersonese were Dolonkian Thracians; and these Dolonkians, being hard pressed in war by the Apsinthians, sent their kings to Delphi to consult the Oracle about the war.

34.2 And the Pythian prophetess answered them that they must bring into their land as founder of a settlement the man who should first offer them hospitality as they returned from the temple. The Dolonkians then passed along the Sacred Road through the land of the Phokians and of the Boeotians, and as no man invited them, they turned aside and came to Athens.

35 Now at that time in Athens the government was held by Peisistratos, but Miltiades also the son of Kypselos had some power, who belonged to a family which kept four-horse chariot teams, and who was descended originally from Aiacos and Egina, though in more recent times his family was Athenian, Philaios the son of Ajax having been the first of his house who became an Athenian.

35.2 This Miltiades was sitting in the entrance of his own dwelling, and seeing the Dolonkians going by with dress that was not of the native Athenian fashion and with spears, he shouted to them; and when they approached, he offered them lodging and hospitality.

35.3 They then having accepted and having been entertained by him, proceeded to declare all the utterances of the Oracle; and having declared it they asked him to do as the god had said: and Miltiades when he heard it was at once disposed to agree, because he was vexed by the rule of Peisistratos and desired to be removed out of the way.

35.4 He set out therefore forthwith to Delphi to inquire of the Oracle whether he should do that which the Dolonkians asked of him, and as the Pythian prophetess also bade him do so, Miltiades the son of Kypselos, who had before this been victor at Olympia with a four-horse chariot, now taking with him of the Athenians everyone who desired to share in the expedition, sailed with the Dolonkians and took possession of the land: and they who had invited him to come to them made him despot over them. ...

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CLEOMENES BRIBES THE PYTHIA (VI, 66)

✦

66 At last, as there was contention about those matters, the Spartans resolved to ask the Oracle at Delphi whether Demaratos was the son of Ariston. The question then having been referred by the arrangement of Cleomenes to the Pythian prophetess, thereupon Cleomenes gained over to his side Cobon the son of Aristophantos, who had most power among the Delphians, and Cobon persuaded Perialla the prophetess of the Oracle to say that which Cleomenes desired to have said.

66.2 Thus the Pythian prophetess, when those who were sent to consult the god asked her their question, gave decision that Demaratos was not the son of Ariston. Afterwards however these things became known, and both Cobon went into exile from Delphi and Perialla the prophetess of the Oracle was removed from her office.

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GLAUCUS AND THE DEPOSIT (VI, 86)

✦

86 When however Leotychides came to Athens and asked for the deposit back, the Athenians, not being willing to give up the hostages, produced pretexts for refusing, and alleged that two kings had deposited them and they did not think it right to give them back to the one without the other: so since the Athenians said that they would not give them back, Leotychides spoke to them as follows: (a) "Athenians, do whichever thing ye yourselves desire; for ye know that if ye give them up, ye do that which religion commands, and if ye refuse to give them up, ye do the opposite of this: but I desire to tell you what kind of a thing came to pass once in Sparta about a deposit.

86.2 We Spartans report that there was in Lacedemon about two generations before my time one Glaucos the son of Epikydes. This man we say attained the highest merit in all things besides, and especially he was well reported of by all who at that time dwelt in Lacedemon for his uprightness: and we relate that in due time it happened to him thus:--a man of Miletos came to Sparta and desired to have speech with him, alleging the reasons which follow: 'I am a Milesian,' he said, 'and I am come hither desiring to have benefit from thy uprightness, Glaucos; for as there was much report of thy uprightness throughout all the rest of Hellas and also in Ionia, I considered with myself that Ionia is ever in danger, whereas Peloponnesus is safely established, and also that we never see wealth continue in the possession of the same persons long;--reflecting, I say, on these things and tak-

ing counsel with myself, I resolved to turn into money the half of my possessions, and to place it with thee, being well assured that if it were placed with thee I should have it safe.

86.3 Do thou therefore, I pray thee, receive the money, and take and keep these tallies; and whosoever shall ask for the money back having the tokens answering to these, to him do thou restore it.' (b) The stranger who had come from Miletos said so much; and Glaucos accepted the deposit on the terms proposed.

86.4 Then after a long time had gone by, there came to Sparta the sons of him who had deposited the money with Glaucos; and they came to speech with Glaucos, and producing the tokens asked for the money to be given back: but he repulsed them answering them again thus: 'I do not remember the matter, nor does my mind bring back to me any knowledge of those things whereof ye speak; but I desire to recollect and do all that is just; for if I received it, I desire to restore it honestly; and if on the other hand I did not receive it at all, I will act towards you in accordance with the customs of the Hellenes: therefore I defer the settling of the matter with you for three months from now.' (c) The Milesians accordingly went away grieved, for they supposed that they had been robbed of the money; but Glaucos set forth to Delphi to consult the Oracle: and when he inquired of the Oracle whether he should rob them of the money by an oath, the Pythian prophetess rebuked him with these lines: "'Glaucos, thou, Epikydes' son, yea, this for the moment, This, to conquer their word by an oath and to rob, is more gainful.

86.5 Swear, since the lot of death waits also for him who swears truly. But know thou that Oath has a son, one nameless and handless and footless, Yet without feet he pursues, without hands he seizes, and wholly He

shall destroy the race and the house of the man who offendeth.

86.6 But for the man who swears truly his race is the better hereafter.' Having heard this Glaucos entreated that the god would pardon him for that which he had said, but the prophetess said that to make trial of the god and to do the deed were things equivalent.

86.7 (d) Glaucos then, having sent for the Milesians, gave back to them the money: but the reason for which, O Athenians, I set forth to relate to you this story, shall now be told. At the present time there is no descendant of Glaucos existing, nor any hearth which is esteemed to be that of Glaucos, but he has been utterly destroyed and rooted up out of Sparta.

86.8 Thus it is good not even to entertain a thought about a deposit other than that of restoring it, when they who made it ask for it again."

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THE WOODEN WALL (VII, 140–143)

✦

140 For the Athenians had sent men to Delphi to inquire and were preparing to consult the Oracle; and after these had performed the usual rites in the sacred precincts, when they had entered the sanctuary and were sitting down there, the Pythian prophetess, whose name was Aristonike, uttered to them this oracle: "Why do ye sit, O ye wretched?

140.2 Flee thou to the uttermost limits, Leaving thy home and the heights of the wheel-round city behind thee! Lo, there remaineth now nor the head nor the body in safety,--Neither the feet below nor the hands nor the middle are left thee,--All are destroyed together; for fire and the passionate War-god, Urging the Syrian car to speed, doth hurl them to ruin.

140.3 Not thine alone, he shall cause many more great strongholds to perish, Yes, many temples of gods to the ravening fire shall deliver,--Temples which stand now surely with sweat of their terror down-streaming, Quaking with dread; and lo! from the topmost roof to the pavement Dark blood trickles, forecasting the dire unavoidable evil. Forth with you, forth from the shrine, and steep your soul in the sorrow!"

141 Hearing this the men who had been sent by the Athenians to consult the Oracle were very greatly distressed; and as they were despairing by reason of the evil which had been prophesied to them, Timon the son of Androbulos, a man of the Delphians in reputation equal to the first, counselled them to take a suppliant's bough and to approach the second time and consult the Oracle as suppliants.

141.2 The Athenians did as he advised and said: "Lord, we pray thee utter to us some better oracle about our native land, having respect to these suppliant boughs which we have come to thee bearing; otherwise surely we will not depart away from the sanctuary, but will remain here where we are now, even until we bring our lives to an end."

141.3 When they spoke these words, the prophetess gave them a second oracle as follows: "Pallas cannot prevail to appease great Zeus in Olympos, Though she with words very many and wiles close-woven entreat him.

141.4 But I will tell thee this more, and will clench it with steel adamantine: Then when all else shall be taken, whatever the boundary of Kecrops Holdeth within, and the dark ravines of divinest Kithairon, A bulwark of wood at the last Zeus grants to the Trito-born goddess Sole to remain unwasted, which thee and thy children shall profit.

141.5 Stay thou not there for the horsemen to come and the footmen unnumbered; Stay thou not still for the host from the mainland to come, but retire thee, Turning thy back to the foe, for yet thou shalt face him hereafter. Salamis, thou the divine, thou shalt cause sons of women to perish, Or when the grain is scattered or when it is gathered together."

142 This seemed to them to be (as in truth it was) a milder utterance than the former one; therefore they had it written down and departed with it to Athens: and when the messengers after their return made report to the people, many various opinions were expressed by persons inquiring into the meaning of the oracle, and among them these, standing most in opposition to one another:--some of the elder men said they thought that the god had prophesied to them that the Acropolis should survive; for the Acropolis of the Athenians was in old time fenced with a thorn hedge; and

they conjectured accordingly that this saying about the "bulwark of wood" referred to the fence: others on the contrary said that the god meant by this their ships, and they advised to leave all else and get ready these.

142.2 Now they who said that the ships were the bulwark of wood were shaken in their interpretation by the two last verses which the prophetess uttered: "Salamis, thou the divine, thou shalt cause sons of women to perish, Or when the grain is scattered or when it is gathered together."

142.3 In reference to these verses the opinions of those who said that the ships were the bulwark of wood were disturbed; for the interpreters of oracles took these to mean that it was fated for them, having got ready for a sea-fight, to suffer defeat round about Salamis.

143 Now there was one man of the Athenians who had lately been coming forward to take a place among the first, whose name was Themistocles, called son of Neocles. This man said that the interpreters of oracles did not make right conjecture of the whole, and he spoke as follows, saying that if these words that had been uttered referred really to the Athenians, he did not think it would have been so mildly expressed in the oracle, but rather thus, "Salamis, thou the merciless," instead of "Salamis, thou the divine," at least if its settlers were destined to perish round about it: but in truth the oracle had been spoken by the god with reference to the enemy, if one understood it rightly, and not to the Athenians: therefore he counselled them to get ready to fight a battle by sea, for in this was their bulwark of wood.

143.2 When Themistocles declared his opinion thus, the Athenians judged that this was to be preferred by them rather than the advice of the interpreters of oracles, who bade them not make ready for a sea-fight, nor

in short raise their hands at all in opposition, but leave the land of Attica and settle in some other.

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THE DELPHIANS AND THE WINDS (VII, 178)

✦

178 The Hellenes, I say, were coming to the rescue with speed, having been appointed to their several places: and meanwhile the men of Delphi consulted the Oracle of the god on behalf of themselves and on behalf of Hellas, being struck with dread; and a reply was given them that they should pray to the Winds, for these would be powerful helpers of Hellas in fight. So the Delphians, having accepted the oracle, first reported the answer which had been given them to those of the Hellenes who desired to be free; and having reported this to them at a time when they were in great dread of the Barbarian, they laid up for themselves an immortal store of gratitude: then after this the men of Delphi established an altar for the Winds in Thuia, where is the sacred enclosure of Thuia the daughter of Kephisos, after whom moreover this place has its name; and also they approached them with sacrifices.

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LEONIDAS AND THE KING WHO MUST DIE (VII, 220)

✦

220 However it is reported also that Leonidas himself sent them away, having a care that they might not perish, but thinking that it was not seemly for himself and for the Spartans who were present to leave the post to which they had come at first to keep guard there.

220.2 I am inclined rather to be of this latter opinion, namely that because Leonidas perceived that the allies were out of heart and did not desire to face the danger with him to the end, he ordered them to depart, but held that for himself to go away was not honourable, whereas if he remained, a great fame of him would be left behind, and the prosperity of Sparta would not be blotted out: for an oracle had been given by the Pythian prophetess to the Spartans, when they consulted about this war at the time when it was being first set on foot, to the effect that either Lacedemon must be destroyed by the Barbarians, or their king must lose his life.

220.3 This reply the prophetess gave them in hexameter verses, and it ran thus: "But as for you, ye men who in wide-spaced Sparta inhabit, Either your glorious city is sacked by the children of Perses, Or, if it be not so, then a king of the stock Heracleian Dead shall be mourned for by all in the boundaries of broad Lacedemon.

220.4 Him nor the might of bulls nor the raging of lions shall hinder; For he hath might as of Zeus; and I say he shall not be restrained, Till one of the other of these he have utterly torn and divided."

220.5 I am of opinion that Leonidas considering these things and desiring to lay up for himself glory above all the other Spartans, dismissed the allies, rather than that those who departed did so in such disorderly fashion, because they were divided in opinion.

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THE PERSIANS BEFORE DELPHI (VIII, 36–39)

✦

36 Meanwhile the Delphians, having been informed of this, had been brought to extreme fear; and being in great terror they consulted the Oracle about the sacred things, whether they should bury them in the earth or carry them forth to another land; but the god forbade them to meddle with these, saying that he was able by himself to take care of his own.

36.2 Hearing this they began to take thought for themselves, and they sent their children and women over to Achaia on the other side of the sea, while most of the men themselves ascended up towards the summits of Parnassos and carried their property to the Corykian cave, while others departed for refuge to Amphissa of the Locrians. In short the Delphians had all left the town excepting sixty men and the prophet of the Oracle.

37 When the Barbarians had come near and could see the temple, then the prophet, whose name was Akeratos, saw before the cell arms lying laid out, having been brought forth out of the sanctuary, which were sacred and on which it was not permitted to any man to lay hands.

37.2 He then was going to announce the portent to those of the Delphians who were still there, but when the Barbarians pressing onwards came opposite the temple of Athene Pronaia, there happened to them in addition portents yet greater than that which had come to pass before: for

though that too was a marvel, that arms of war should appear of themselves laid forth outside the cell, yet this, which happened straightway after that, is worthy of marvel even beyond all other prodigies.

37.3 When the Barbarians in their approach were opposite the temple of Athene Pronaia, at this point of time from the heaven there fell thunderbolts upon them, and from Parnassos two crags were broken away and rushed down upon them with a great crashing noise falling upon many of them, while from the temple of Pronaia there was heard a shout, and a battle-cry was raised.

38 All these things having come together, there fell fear upon the Barbarians; and the Delphians having perceived that they were flying, came down after them and slew a great number of them; and those who survived fled straight to Boeotia. These who returned of the Barbarians reported, as I am informed, that in addition to this which we have said they saw also other miraculous things; for two men (they said) in full armour and of stature more than human followed them slaying and pursuing.

39 These two the Delphians say were the native heroes Phylacos and Autonoös, whose sacred enclosures are about the temple, that of Phylacos being close by the side of the road above the temple of Pronaia and that of Autonoös near Castalia under the peak called Hyampeia.

39.2 Moreover the rocks which fell from Parnassos were still preserved even to my time, lying in the sacred enclosure of Athene Pronaia, into which they fell when they rushed through the ranks of the Barbarians. Such departure had these men from the temple.

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