



Curriculum Units by Fellows of the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute
1984 Volume II: Greek Civilization

Twentieth-Century Oracles

Curriculum Unit 84.02.02
by Anthony F. Franco

A fascinating area of study is the ancient Greek practice of consulting oracles for advice. The early Greeks would readily consult these oracles who were considered the human mouthpieces of the gods in an effort to receive divine guidance concerning religious questions, the institution of a new religious cult, or the interpretation of a strange or foreboding portent. The oracles, at times, would direct these consultants to institute new festivals and offer new sacrifices to the gods in order to rectify these problems. Oracles would also issue statements of divine approval sought by the Greeks in such matters as the cultivation of sacred land, the naming of a new priest, or the establishment of a new altar on which to worship.

Scholars agree that oracles existed and even flourished in ancient times; they do tend to disagree on some of the customs associated with these oracles as well as the substance of some of the oracular responses that have survived the ages. Of these oracles, one of the most prolific and time-honored is the oracle that practiced at the temple of Apollo at Delphi. Scholars know more about the Delphic Oracle than any of the other oracles that existed; yet, scholars naturally are more apt to disagree in regard to this institution.

This unit will not attempt to take sides in any academic debate concerning the complexities involved in the institution known as the Delphic Oracle. Rather, it will be presented as a simple overview of that element in ancient Greek society. This unit is for those who would like to take a crumb from the pie of ancient Greece and turn it into a slice of everyday life. This unit will present a glimpse of the Delphic Oracle of ancient Greece and show the modern student that oracles still exist in the twentieth century.

Apollo's oracle at Delphi prevailed for over one thousand years. The presence of the oracle is generally credited with beginning at approximately 800 B.C. It is interesting to note that the oracle played an important part in the institution of the new pan-Hellenic consciousness which developed at this time. The oracle not only caused interaction among the Greeks who came to consult from a wide variety of towns and villages but also influenced many of these consultants to colonize new lands. By the latter portion of the third century A.D., however, the institution had effectively vanished.

The evidence which constitutes our knowledge of the Delphic Oracle reveals only a minute fragment of what must have occurred at the temple. The oracle opened for business early in the morning on the seventh day of each month with the exception of the three winter months. If we gauge that the average number of consultations during each session was two to three dozen (a very modest figure) just for those nine days and multiply this figure by over one thousand years, we can easily ascertain that the total number of consultations

meted out by this service was in the hundreds of thousands. Parke and Wormell (1956) and Joseph Fontenrose (1978) have catalogued 615 and 535 responses of the oracle respectively. This figure becomes even more diminutive when we take into account that many of the oracular responses which have survived the ages are not really verifiable as actually having happened. Such is the case when we rely on a variety of contemporary sources rather than an indexed text of original responses by members of the temple. We can certainly appreciate the sharp knife antiquity wields.

A few words must be said here to explain this institution known as the Delphic Oracle. Basically a temple, or some structure, arose at Delphi. This temple was manned by an order of priests whose actual role is still held to be doubtful by historians. Suffice it to say that these priests were the caretakers of the temple and supervised the procedures necessary for a consultation. Central to all that happened in the temple was the Pythia. The Pythia was a woman who existed as the human vehicle that passed on the will of Apollo to whomever sought consultation. All responses emanated from the mouth of the Pythia, who sat in the inner sanctum of the temple on a tripod throne as vapors rose from a cleft in the rock below her. It is thought that the Pythia was originally a young maiden, but after a scandal the office was held by a woman of more mature years.

Consultations did not occur in public. This was not Greek theater. If one wanted to view the Pythia, it was as one making a consultation and not as a spectator. Those people wishing to make consultation also had to make sacrifices as well as go through various rites of purification before they would be admitted to the temple. Much of the mystery surrounding the details of actual consultations can be attributed to the fact that classical Greek writers saw no need to expound upon procedures that were well-known to the Greek populace. Thus, we have very little information regarding preparations both within and without the temple prior to consultations.

Early in the morning on the seventh day of each month the Delphic priests would present a goat to Apollo and sprinkle this goat with drops of cold water. Inevitably, the goat would tremble (the goat was continually sprinkled by the priests until it did tremble), thus signalling that the day would be auspicious for consultations. After the sign had been given, the goat would be offered on an altar outside the temple as a signal to all would-be consultants that the temple would be open for business for the day.

A consultation with the Pythia could only occur after the prospective enquirer purified himself with holy water and made the sacrifice of a sacred cake, which was expensive, on the main altar. Aside from this cake, the consultant had to pay a fee which generally was dependent upon whether the consultation was one of a personal nature or one having to do with affairs of state. Also, sheep or goats had to be given as duty, of which a portion was claimed by the Delphians themselves. It is pertinent to note here that only male citizens were allowed to make consultations; the Pythia was the only woman ever allowed within the temple.

After all the sacrifices and tariffs had been offered, the Delphic priests cautioned the consultant to think only pure thoughts upon being admitted into the inner sanctuary of the temple where the Pythia was waiting. She would already be under the influence of Apollo and may even have been in a state of trance. The chief priest would then ask the enquirer's question and might even interpret the Pythia's response depending upon the coherency of her answer. Generally these responses were spoken in dactylic hexameters.

We might note here some examples of supposed oracular responses in order to make clear to the reader the veil of obscurity under which the responses were sometimes spoken. Herodotos (*History*, Book V.92) details the origins of the Kypselid dynasty at Corinth in a speech given by the Corinthian Sosikles, who spoke against the Spartan proposal that the Peisistratids be restored to Athens. A'tion, the childless son of Echecrates,

consulted the oracle at Delphi concerning his childless state. The response he received from the Pythia:

No one honours thee now, A'tion, worthy of honour;—
Labda shall soon be a mother—her offspring a rock, that will one day
Fall on the kingly race, and right the city of Corinth.
(Trans. Rawlinson)

Later in the same speech, Sosikles recounts an oracular response once given to the Bacchiadae who, upon hearing the response given to A'tion, connect the two responses as pointing to the same prophecy. The Bacchiadae are thus able to see more clearly this earlier response which follows below that had heretofore been not understood:

When mid the rocks an eagle shall bear a carnivorous lion,
Mighty and fierce, he shall loosen the limbs of many beneath them—
Brood ye well upon this, all ye Corinthian people,
Ye who dwell by fair PeirFné, and beetling Corinth.
(Trans. Rawlinson)

Sosikles continues in his speech by relating how the Bacchiadae kept this apparent connection to themselves and, upon hearing that A'tion and his wife Labda were expecting their first child, sought to put that child to death. When ten of the Bacchiadae came to A'tion's house with the express purpose of killing the child, none could perform the deed and they all left. Labda learned of the plot as they left and hid the child in a grain-bin in case the death squad returned. The group did return and, when they did not find the child, thought it best to report back to their people that their quest had been carried out. When Cypselus, as A'tion's son was named after the grain-bin that spared his life, consulted the oracle at Delphi upon reaching adulthood, he received the following response:

See there comes to my dwelling a man much favour'd of fortune,
Cypselus, son of Aétion, and king of the glorious Corinth,—
He and his children too, but not his children's children.
(Trans. Rawlinson)

Such were the type of responses often given by oracles in ancient Greece. Responses were very often prophecies and, because they were shrouded by a veil of obscurity, were subject to misinterpretation and a source of calamity.

The Pythia was probably appointed for life after having been on probation for an extended period of time. She performed her duties as Apollo's instrument of wisdom. It has been mentioned above that she was of mature years, and it is likely that there was a select group of potential Pythias that acted as understudies to the one who held office. Since ritual purity was of prime importance, the Pythia was completely denied any sexual activity. She remained the bride of Apollo.

It will probably never be known whether Apollo's oracle at Delphi was a sincere undertaking or just a spectacular deception. It is quite possible that it was both, depending on circumstances, who was the consultant, and what question was asked. There are even allegations in Herodotos that the oracle was bribed by Alcmaeonidae in order to gain a particular response. Whatever the oracle was, it remained a flourishing business for one thousand years. Although there might have been impostors on occasion feigning the duties of the Pythia, scholars do agree that a woman might be able to work herself to the point where self-hypnosis might occur. Fontenrose goes further, arguing that the Pythia always spoke coherently and directly to the consultant. He believes there was no frenzy involved and no secret vapors wafting through the temple, as his predecessors believed.

The question remains as to why the Greeks consulted the oracle at Delphi. Fontenrose takes great pains to investigate not only the type of question the Greeks asked the Pythia, but also the topics of the responses made by the Pythia, as well as the modes in which the responses were given. I refer the reader to Fontenrose for this detailed summary as it would be too lengthy to include here. Generally, however, we see that most of those consulting the oracle either asked for advice, made simple requests, inquired about the prospects of settling new lands, wanted guidance in making a choice between two alternatives, or inquired in order to establish the truth in various matters. The reader is cautioned that the sample of oracular occasions and responses which serves as the basis of our knowledge are the 535 instances cited in Fontenrose's catalogue. Although the sample is small, it remains the sum total of what time has allowed us to perceive.

More important to the primary focus of this unit are the factors which caused the Greeks to consult the oracle at Delphi in the first place. The fifth and fourth centuries B.C. saw a much more complicated religious situation than the preceding centuries. Although Zeus and the other Olympian gods still reigned supreme and were revered in the more rural areas, as they had been by the ancients, this cult was hardly able to assist the average Greek with his basic everyday needs. The Greek of the fifth and fourth century was looking to improve his experience in life by trying to discover his destiny. If a Greek could see into his future, he would be better prepared for it. Furthermore, the ability to make the correct decision would enable him to have a better life. Religion and politics were very closely entwined, since the same devout Greeks sat in the popular assemblies and, as in the case of the Athenian assembly, would ritualistically sacrifice a pig at the onset of such meetings. The oracle became a convenient vehicle to which the city and the individual Greek gravitated for guidance.

The Delphic Oracle remains in sum a successful business which for over one thousand years provided a service for a people interested in knowing the future or making the right decision. Many Greeks believed that the oracle was the dispenser of reliable and credible information and so its success was inevitable. Of course, bad advice was also given at times as was the case in the Persian's defeat and capture of Croesus. The oracle generally was quick to defend any poor advice by blaming the consultant for misinterpreting the advice.

As in anything that becomes successful, there will be various adjuncts which will capitalize on this success. Several other professions arose in the Greek populace that owed their prominence to the phenomenal esteem enjoyed by oracles. One such class of people were the exegetes. An exegete was the official interpreter of sacred law. Exegetes were chosen by the people and the oracle at Delphi to collect the various oracular wisdom and both pronounce and interpret them for the people. The exegete was the expert in any discussion of sacred law or ritual.

There were two other somewhat overlapping types of professional soothsayers which flourished at the time of the oracle. These were the chresmologue and the mantis. Both these groups were unofficial collectors of oracles who would interpret oracular responses for whatever purpose deemed necessary by a client. The chresmologue would sing his oracles for a fee and would sometimes reevaluate an interpretation of a particular oracle if he felt it was what a client wanted.

The mantis had some technical knowledge of divination and combined this knowledge with divine inspiration from a god to actually prophesize for a client. A mantis would also delve into the significance of dreams or omens. Unfortunately, for both the chresmologues and the manteis, they often found themselves to be slandered by various citizens who did not, even in a complex state of religious belief, credit their authenticity. Turning from Olympus to Delphi was one thing, but to have religious pronouncements peddled in the street was a bit much for some Greeks. Regardless, the chresmologues and the manteis did flourish, although the former met their downfall after a few ill-spoken pronouncements that lessened their credibility. Most of the manteis did survive, however, being blessed with a clientele that yearned for information and oracular guidance.

The extent of our knowledge of the oracle at Delphi, the exegetes, the chresmologues, and the manteis is just a minute fragment of what was actually involved some two thousand years ago. Yet, what knowledge we do possess makes one fact perfectly clear. The Greeks were very much interested in decision making and trying to discover the future. They were so attuned to prophecy that it was a part of their religious experience. We, too, are interested in decision making and learning of our futures. Our modern day fortune tellers do not, however, enjoy the good repute of their Greek predecessors. Educated people today scoff at horoscopes, palm readers, and the like as methods with which to foretell the future. There are influences, however, that do reflect heavily upon our decision making processes and that often help shape our future. It will be the purpose of the remainder of this unit to shed some light on these twentieth century oracles.

The task of making decisions faces our middle and high school students daily. Career decisions including choices of future academic institutions rank foremost in the minds of the parents and teachers of these students. These choices, however, are frequently no more important to the student than the minor daily complexities involved in deciding what jeans to buy, whom to date, where to spend leisure hours, and whether to experience the vices of smoking, drinking, or drugs. Once an individual reaches adulthood the questions do tend to become more complex, as we all know, but this is not our primary concern here. Voting in a Presidential election may be a right and responsibility that is, one hopes, exercised after careful deliberation of the alternatives by an adult; however, it is no more important a decision in the mind of a fourteen year old as the dilemma such a teenager confronts in deciding what jeans to buy or sneakers to wear.

Decision making is clearly a process that exists throughout a lifetime, and many people take a lifetime to develop this technique; others never do master it. For some, experience becomes the best teacher as situations are assimilated and rational thought takes hold. For others, each decision is in reality a move in a guessing game: one hopes learning will take place through mistakes. Sometimes decisions are made on

impulse alone, and this may be appropriate when the person faces some sort of danger. Other times impulse can create havoc within a person's life when it becomes the sole criterion for a decision that really needed more concentrated thinking. A small child may have decisions to make and may make the wrong ones for the wrong reasons many times because the experience in their young lives is lacking. Teenagers and adults have this experience. Unfortunately, many do not know how to apply it. The old adage that we all make mistakes is indeed very true, and the promise that we will continue to make mistakes is a fact. Anyone can make a decision and have it backfire; the message here is to make that decision based on rational thought processes that consider all the alternatives. Impulsive, judgmental, and rash actions definitely do not constitute decision making. In short, decisions are made that are either right or wrong; they are good if they are made for the right reasons.

The ancient Greeks, when faced with a perplexing decision to be made, consulted oracles including the one at Delphi described above. These consultations with the oracle were of prime importance to the Greeks, and the event was so meaningful and serious that it was treated in a ritualistic manner as has been explained. On many occasions a Greek or foreign pilgrim sought a choice to be made for them by the oracle. At other times a simple confirmation of an impending decision was the reason to seek divine guidance. Our students have decisions of prime importance for them to make, but they have no temple at Delphi to visit. No Pythia in a vapor-filled room exists for our students to consult. Or maybe there is! A variety of influences do exist for these students—for all decision makers. I feel that these influences have taken the place of the ancient oracles in modern times. Some are very subtle and almost commonplace; others are more blatantly structured and similar to the oracles. Many of these twentieth-century oracles are free of charge or sacrifice and may not even be solicited by the decision maker. Others do not come cheaply and will be solicited. Many of the oracles I mention are characterized in sincerity and deliver their advice in good faith. Others, however, are shrouded by a veil of charlatanry which may or may not be deserved. I have divided these modern day oracles into a series of five groups based upon similar characteristics. The reader is welcome to disagree but must be forewarned that I am very comfortable with this decision.

The first such group of twentieth-century oracles is an institution that has been existent since the dawn of time—the family. The family is the first influence that every child meets upon entering this world. The family generally becomes the first oracle for a very young child, but it may not be the first to be sought by a teenager. I do feel there is very little difference between the Greek at Apollo's temple in Delphi asking the Pythia for advice and a teenager asking the question: "Mom, should I do X?" Parents, siblings, and other relatives are approached by these young decision makers. Oftentimes, however, well meaning advice is given when no solicitation has been made. Depending on the inherent family structure and the bonds developed through the years, such unsolicited oracles may tend to break down avenues of communication. Life then may become one continuous series of "Do as I say and not as I do" oracles which dissipate basic trusts and cause the decision maker never to visit the temple again.

Teachers, guidance counselors, and clergymen form the second division of modern day oracles. Generally, any solicitation on the part of the student of any school personnel involves the academic world or a career choice. Students spend a great deal of time in school, so this consultant oracle relationship is inevitable. In fact, most middle and high schools are so large that the student really has a choice of oracles with whom to consult. Guidance personnel play a major role in helping the student decide upon future endeavors. Clergymen are usually asked advice concerning moral matters. The one major difference between this group of oracles and other oracles is that the school and church generally try to have their consultants identify their own strengths and weaknesses before making a decision. Reality takes a firm grip upon a teenager in a school or church setting, however, the scope of such consultations is fairly limited and the oracular responses are more of a

diagnostic sort designed to have the consultant pursue the anatomy of the decision rather than providing direct advice.

The peer group represents the third and most often consulted collection of oracles to which a teenager turns. Peer pressure may be a somewhat negative term used to describe these oracular responses, but they do emanate from peers and the teenager certainly feels the pressure. The peer oracle exercises a vast influence over the consultant in just about every area of potential decision making. The link between Pythia and peer as pronouncers of oracles is the strongest among modern day oracles in terms of the seriousness with which the consultant will listen. A major drawback to this oracle is, of course, the inescapable reality that the advisor may not know or understand more than the one seeking advice. Interestingly enough, however, this oracle functions equally well as an individual or a group. Needless to say, when the latter is in effect, it is very difficult for the teenager to ignore or dismiss the advice.

A fourth major source of oracular guidance occurs as a result of the widespread impetus of the media. I am including here newspapers, magazines, radio, and television. Each component of the media group issues oracular guidance on a daily basis. All areas of the media are apt to issue editorials. These issuances may not necessarily be in response to a specific question; however, they do deal with specific topics and are prone to influence public opinion so as to become fuel for a future oracular response. Two other influences apparent in the media and effective in a way similar to editorials are advertisements and polls. Both are unsolicited although the latter is a consensus of responses that very often influence decision making. In this case polls are very much akin to the peer oracle.

One component of the media contains an oracle which really needs no disclaimer. I refer the reader to the advice columns that are syndicated daily in our nation's newspapers. Here the similarity between the Pythia at Delphi and the modern day authors of "Ann Landers", "Dear Abby", and "Dr. Joyce Brothers" is astounding. A question dealing with family or peer relationships or of some other social content is submitted by an individual consultant to a woman who directs a response to not only the consultant but for all those who anxiously await the column. Oftentimes, memorable responses are recirculated just as the chresmologues did in ancient times. Seekers of advice have a distinct financial advantage over their ancient Greek predecessors when consulting one of these oracles—the price of postage and possibly the price of a newspaper are the only sacrifices a consultant must make.

The fifth and last grouping of twentieth-century oracles includes astrologers, palm readers, gypsies, psychics, and fortune tellers. This group deals primarily with questions of import concerning the future of the consultant. The seriousness of purpose of the consultant is evidenced by the fee he is willing to pay for these services. Just as was the case in ancient times, there are those who suspect the members of this group to be charlatans preying upon a naive public. Charlatans or not, however, it is clear from the great number of these modern day Pythias that seeing into the future is a successful business venture which segments of the population readily support.

My intentions for the use of this unit with my classes will connect with previous units I have written in the Institute that deal with questions of the future and career awareness. I will use this present effort as a starting point for my students in their attempt to know themselves better and prepare for future endeavors. I refer the reader to the teacher bibliography included below for information regarding the previous units applicable to this study.

The time framework for the use of this unit requires that I begin actual usage no later than the beginning of October in an academic year. My feeling is that the essence of this unit and the lessons planned are more

suited to the above average English class at the eighth grade level. do believe, however, that with a slight modification of the topics for writing the unit will survive if presented to a less able class. Use of the unit will be restricted to a period of six to eight weeks with a limitation of one to two days per week. Since the unit will be taught early in the year, an above average class will be better suited to handle the increased grammar assignments that will share each of these weeks the unit is in progress.

The requirements for both teacher and student resulting from the use of the unit are flexible and relatively simple. Teachers should plan to give a brief overview of the institution known as the Delphic Oracle as outlined earlier in the unit and should consult the sources from the teacher bibliography that go into greater detail concerning Apollo's temple at Delphi and all that happened there. This general overview will necessarily lead into weekly discussions concerning the five major groups of modern day oracles identified. Following each discussion the student will be responsible for writing a composition either from the suggested list of weekly composition topics below or a more appropriate related topic devised by the teacher of the unit. In addition, the teacher will conduct lessons on the art of argumentation and persuasive writing and an overview of the various techniques used by commercial advertisers to influence the public.

Students being instructed have as an additional responsibility the task of researching one of the topics from the list of suggested reports that follows. These choices will be made available to the students at the earliest convenient moment after the inception of the unit so as to provide students with enough time to examine their particular areas of interest as the unit is being taught. These reports should be due no later than two weeks following the formal conclusion of the unit itself. I have purposely not planned for any objective criteria of measurement with the use of the unit; however, any teacher may elect to devise some formal test if deemed necessary. I prefer to use the subjective method of evaluating students through their writing as these papers will be my first introduction to their writing skills during the year.

* * * * *

List of Suggested Topics for Reports

Read and report on the book entitled *The Sybil* by PŠr Lagerkvist. (See bibliography)

Read and report on the writings and prognostications of Nostradamus.

Read and report on Lucian's "Alexander The False Prophet".

Read daily and report on the types of questions submitted to and responses given by an advice columnist.

Report on the prognostications of a prominent psychic or on any element of parapsychology including telepathy and extra sensory perception.

Read and report on a book categorized as "self help" or "positive thinking".

Construct a model of Apollo's temple at Delphi and include a written description of the site.

Report on the successes and/or failures of public opinion polls.

List of Suggested Topics for Compositions (Weekly)

I. Family

Write about a time when a family member gave you advice in making a decision.

Which family member do you most often consult? Why?

Were you ever consulted by a family member? Explain the circumstances and the outcome of your advice.

II. School and Religion

Comment about a time you sought advice from a teacher, counselor, or clergyman.

What advice would you seek from school or church personnel?

Name the school person or clergyman you would seek advice from and explain your reasons why.

III. Peers

Describe how a friend your age influenced a decision you had to make.

Relate any experience you might have had where your friends caused you to change your mind.

Which person your age do you most respect and would not hesitate to seek advice from?

Explain.

IV. Media

Write about a commercial from any media source that influenced you to try a particular product.

Write your own commercial advertisement for a product that you use and enjoy.

Construct a question that might be sent to an advice columnist and then create an appropriate response.

Write your own editorial where you either show your support or your contempt for something.

V. Professional Advisors

Relate any experience you might have had in dealing with a fortune teller, astrologer, palm reader, or psychic.

At the present time do you feel you would ever consult a professional advisor? Explain why or why not.

Research and report on the characteristics of your astrological sign. Do you agree or disagree?

Bibliography: For Further Reading

Andrewes, Antony. *The Greeks* . New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1978.

A description of Greek life to about 350 B.C. Chapter 11. "Gods and Oracles" is of particular usefulness for background information to this unit.

Fontenrose, Joseph. *The Delphic Oracle* . Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1978.

Fontenrose's work remains the leading source of information for any study of the Delphic Oracle. Anyone using this unit must consult Fontenrose first, for both his technical data and his insights. The book also contains his "Catalogue" of oracular responses and is very thoroughly indexed and cross-referenced.

Franco, Anthony F. "Search for Tomorrow: Science Fiction Literature and Today's Student", Vol. I, New Haven, Ct.: Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute, 1979.

A unit that introduces various scientific novels to students in an attempt to motivate students to think seriously about their futures as well as the future of society.

Franco, Anthony F. "Skill Building for Educational and Vocational Advancement", Vol. I, New Haven, Ct.: Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute, 1978.

A career orientation unit that stresses job application language, business letter form, and résumé writing.

Herodotus. *Histories* . Translated by A.D. Godley. London:. William Heinemann Ltd., 1931. (Loeb Classical Library)

Herodotus continually refers to the Delphic Oracle and its importance in the formation of Greece.

Lagerkvist, Pšr. *The Sybil* . Translated by Naomi Walford. New York: Vintage Books, 1958.

An entertaining and intriguing story of a retired Pythia and her consultation with a man beset by a major problem. Note: This book contains some sexual matter in several scenes and should only be read by more mature students in the upper grades unless modified first by the instructor.

Lucian. Volume IV. "Alexander The False Prophet". Translated by A.M. Harmon. London: William Heinemann, 1925. (Loeb Classical Library)

A seething account of Lucian's contempt for Alexander of Abonoteichus, whom the author labels as an outright charlatan.

Mikalson, Jon D. *Athenian Popular Religion* . Chapel Hill, N.C.: The University of North Carolina Press, 1983.

An excellent overview of the religious practices and beliefs of average Athenian citizens. Chapter 6. "Divination" is especially helpful.

Nilsson, Martin P. *Greek Folk Religion*. Gloucester, Mass.: Peter Smith, 1971.

Very useful background information concerning seers and oracle mongers. Book takes viewpoint of the

religious beliefs and practices of the rural Greeks.

Parke, H.W. and Wormell, D.E.W. *The Delphic Oracle* . Volume I. The History. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1956.

An extensive review of the Delphic Oracle including its origin and practices. At its time the leading source of information concerning this institution.

Parke, H.W. and Wormell, D.E.W. *The Delphic Oracle* . Volume II. The Oracular Responses. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1956.

Parke and Wormell's catalogue of oracular responses that are credited to the Delphic Oracle. An invaluable source for anyone using this unit.

Pausanias. *Description of Greece* . Translated by W.H.S. Jones. London: William Heinemann, 1931. (Loeb Classical Library)

This famous travelogue has many references to the Delphic Oracle, as well as descriptions of the entire country.

Plutarch. *Moralia* . Volume V. 351c-438e. Translated by Frank Cole Babbitt. London: William Heinemann Ltd., 1969. (Loeb Classical Library)

Contains two very pertinent writings dealing with the Delphic Oracle:

"The Oracles at Delphi No Longer Given In Verse" details how responses have returned back to prose form since simplicity was needed with directness rather than obscure verse and language.

"The Obsolescence of Oracles" details how there was a lesser need for oracles since the population had decreased. The treatise discusses astronomy, geometry, whether the year is growing shorter, and the *daimones* —beings lower than gods but higher than mortals who were thought to be in charge of the oracles.

Xenophon. Volume III. *Anabasis* . Translated by Carleton C. Brownson. London: William Heinemann Ltd., 1968.

Anabasis is Xenophon's account of his travels on an expedition which Cyrus the Younger led against his brother, Artaxerxes II. The work is praised as a military textbook as well as a tale of travel and adventure. Xenophon puts great emphasis on the importance of oracles.

<https://teachersinstitute.yale.edu>

©2019 by the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute, Yale University

For terms of use visit <https://teachersinstitute.yale.edu/terms>