

Oracles

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Word List

Acropolis (eh-KRAH-peh-les) The upper, fortified part of Athens in Greece.

Adytum (A-deh-tem) The innermost room in an ancient temple, open only to priests.

Apollo (eh-PAH-loh) The Greek god of the Sun.

archeologist (ahr-kee-AHL-uh-jist) A scientist who tries to find the truth of things that happened in the past.

Artemis (AHR-teh-mes) The Greek goddess of the hunt.

Carthage (KAR-thij) A wealthy and powerful city-state in North Africa that was destroyed by Rome.

chariot (CHAIR-iyut) A roofless carriage with two wheels pulled by one or more horses.

Chairephone (KY-reh-FA-nee) An Athenian who asked the Oracle a question

about Socrates.

chiton (KY-tn) A tunic worn by people of ancient Greece.

conquer (KON-ker) To take over something by force.

Corinth, Gulf of (KOR-enth) An inlet of the Mediterranean Sea.

Croesus (KREE-ses) A Greek king who was famous for being very rich.

Darius (deh-RIH-es) A Persian emperor who attacked Greece and lost.

de Boer, Jelle (deh BOR, jel) A geologist from Wesleyan University in Connecticut.

Eleusis (ih-LOO-sehs) An ancient Greek city with many temples.

ethylene (EH-theh-leen) A colorless gas that can make people unconscious.

Gaia (GAY-eh) An earth goddess who was the mother of Python; sometimes spelled Ge.

gymnasiums (jim-NAY-zee-ems) Places where people could exercise or compete in athletic contests.

Hannibal (HAN-eh-behl) A very skilled Carthaginian general who almost conquered Rome.

Hephaestus (hih-FES-tes) The Greek god of blacksmiths.

Herodotus (hih-RAHD-eh-tes) A Greek historian, often called "The Father of History."

Kassotis (KAS-oh-tis) One of the two holy springs at Delphi.

Kastelia (KAS-te-LEE-eh) One of the two holy springs at Delphi.

methane (MEH-thane) A kind of gas that is poisonous to humans.

myths (miths) Stories or legends made up to explain beliefs or events.

Nero (NEE-roh) A Roman emperor who many think was one of the worst emper-

ors.

Olympus, Mount (oh-LIM-pehs) A mountain in Greece that was thought to be the home of the gods.

omphalos (AHM-feh-lahs) A Greek word meaning bellybutton. In this case, it refers to religious sculptures in Delphi.

oracle (OR-eh-kel) A person through whom the gods spoke to humans. An oracle could also be a shrine or the answer of a god.

Parnassus, Mount (pahr-NA-sehs) The mountain on which Delphi was located.

Peisistratus (pie-SISS-truh-tiss) A tyrant who ruled Athens for a while.

Peloponnesian War (peh-leh-peh-NEEZ-yehn) A war fought between Sparta and Athens in 430 B.C.

Piccardi, Luigi (pih-CAR-dee, loo-EE-jee) An Italian geologist.

Plutarch (PLOO-tark) A Greek biogra-

pher who wrote about the lives of famous Greeks and Romans.

prophecy (PRAH-feh-see) A telling of what may happen in the future.

Pythia (PITH-ee-uh) The priestess at Delphi through whom the gods spoke.

Python (PY-thahn) A giant snake that lived in Parnassus. It was killed by Apollo.

Renaissance (reh-neh-SAHNTS) The period from the 15th-16th centuries when Europe began to create new ideas and move away from the Middle Ages.

sacrifices (SA-kreh-fy-sez) Offerings made to a thing or god.

Salamis (SA-leh-mehs) An island where a great battle between Greeks and Persians was fought.

Socrates (SAHK-reh-teez) Perhaps the most famous Greek philosopher, he was a teacher to Plato.

Sulla (SEHL-eh) A Roman general.

Themistocles (theh-MIS-teh-kleez) An Athenian leader during the Persian Wars.

Theodosius (thee-eh-DOH-shee-ehs) A Christian Roman emperor who said that making sacrifices and worshipping the old Greek gods was against the law.

tyrant (TY-rent) A leader who holds all of the power over a state.

vaporize (VAY-peh-rize) Where something is turned into a gas or vapor through extreme heat.

Xenophon (ZEN-eh-fehn) A Greek general who fought wars in the Middle East.

Xerxes (ZERK-seez) Another Persian emperor who tried and failed to conquer Greece. He was also the son of Darius.

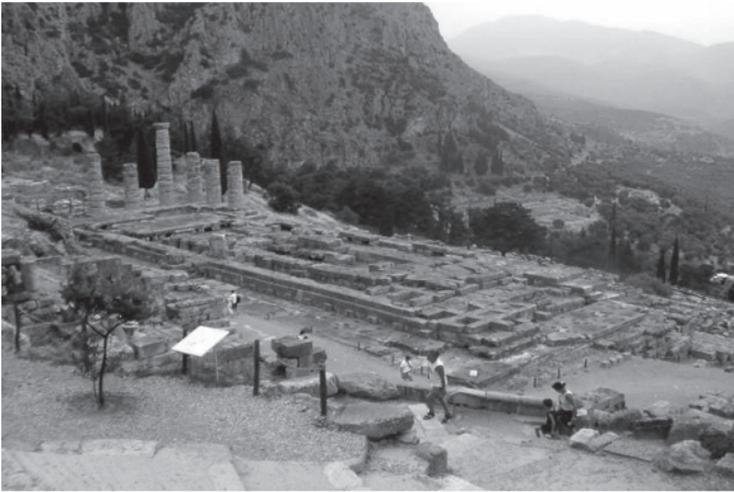
Zeus (zoos) The king of the Greek gods.

Chapter 1

Seeing the Future

Have you ever read your fortune in a Chinese fortune cookie? Or seen a fortuneteller's sign with a picture of a woman staring into a crystal ball? Fortune cookies and fortunetellers are fun, but we know they really can't tell the future. However, 2,500 years ago in ancient Greece, the Greeks believed that oracles (OR-eh-kelz) had the power to tell the future.

What are oracles? The word *oracle* could mean three things in ancient Greece. First, an oracle was the name of the temple or shrine of a god or goddess. For example, the most famous temple was the Oracle at Delphi, which was built for a god named Apollo (eh-PAH-loh). The temple was at Mount Parnassus (pahr-NA-sehs) in Greece.



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These are the ruins of Apollo's Temple at Delphi.

Second, an oracle was a person through whom the ancient gods spoke to humans. Third, an oracle was the answer given by the god.

The ancient Greeks felt a great need for help in the problems of life. Unlike believers in our modern world, the ancient Greeks didn't have sacred writings or holy books, like the Bible. They had the oracles. In the Greek world, there were a number of these oracles, where a person could ask a question and get an answer. The answer was supposed to show the will of the gods.

The oracles played a big part in

Greek history. Many important choices made by Greek leaders and others came from the advice of the oracles. Herodotus (hah-RAHD-eh-tes), a Greek historian, wrote about the oracles. He wrote that many military leaders and rulers made decisions based on what an oracle said. More examples of how the oracles affected the Greek people can be found in Homer's books *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey*.

The oracles weren't only for kings, statesmen, and wealthy Greeks. Any male Greek could ask the oracle for advice. A farmer might ask the oracle about the best time to plant his fields. A young man might ask the oracle if he should marry a certain girl. Asking a question to the oracle cost a lot of money. At the Oracle of Delphi in the fifth and fourth centuries B.C., the smallest charge for asking the oracle a question was an amount of money equal to two or more days' pay. Plus, the person

would also have to make offerings and pay for his travel expenses. State and government people were charged ten times more than a person who had no important job.

The oracle was not always available to answer questions. Greeks could visit the oracle only on the seventh day after the new moon. This seventh day was believed to be Apollo's birthday. The oracle was closed for three months during the winter when weather made it hard to travel to the temple by sea or mountain roads.

The oracles of ancient Greece were thought to be the spoken word of the gods. Many of the oracle's answers were given in the form of riddles or verses. Often the oracle's answers were hard to understand. Many times, the answers were so puzzling that the person made a mistake when trying to figure it out. The most famous oracle stories in history are all about how the

answer to a question is misunderstood by the hero. Most of what the oracle said seemed easy to understand, but there was usually some hidden answer in the oracle's words.

Even today, mysteries surround the oracle like unsolved puzzles. The Oracle at Delphi is the most mysterious to modern scientists. To solve the mystery, we must look at the oracles and find clues as to what happened there. Why was the oracle in Delphi? How was someone chosen to become an oracle? Did the oracle's answers always turn out to be true? What happened when the questioner got the wrong idea about the answer?

Chapter 2

Festivals and Faith

The ancient Greeks believed in a large group of gods. They believed their gods and goddesses lived in the world, just as they themselves did. Each god and goddess ruled over a certain part of life. For example, some of them ruled over parts of nature, like the sun, or the sky, or the ocean. Other gods and goddesses helped people with certain jobs, like fishing, hunting, or farming. For example, if you were a hunter and you wanted to have a good hunt, you would pray to the goddess Artemis (AHR-teh-mes). Artemis ruled over forests and wild places where deer and other animals could be found.

The Greek people believed they lived on the Earth with their gods and goddesses, but there were major differ-

ences between the gods. The famous Greek poet Homer wrote in his book *The Iliad* that the gods and goddesses usually stayed on top of a mountain in northern Greece. This mountain is called Mount Olympus (oh-LIM-pehs). The gods and goddesses lived together on Mount Olympus as one big family. And like any big family, they had good days and bad days. They played and laughed and they fought. Sometimes, they got jealous of each other and angry when something didn't go their way. They acted very much like humans.

The Greek gods and goddesses were like humans, but they also had special qualities and powers. One big difference between gods and humans was that most of the time the gods and goddesses were invisible to human eyes. This was an advantage for the gods and goddesses, but it made life difficult for the Greek people. The Greeks never knew if the gods or goddesses were

around. So they had to be careful not to do anything that would upset them or make them unhappy, because gods and goddesses had the power to punish as well as reward.

How did the ancient Greeks honor their gods and goddesses? They offered animal sacrifices (SA-kreh-fy-sez). They took an animal they had raised or one they had bought and gave it to the priest. The priest killed the animal on a round stone altar by cutting its throat. Then the dead animal was thrown into a fire. Sometimes, the roasted animal was eaten; sometimes it was left to burn until there was nothing left but ash. The person offering the sacrifice wanted to show that he or she had given up something precious for the god or goddess. Cities often had large festivals where they sacrificed a great number of animals. Single persons usually offered smaller sacrifices, such as goats or sheep.

Every Greek citizen took part in the major festivals of his or her city. Besides the sacrifices, there were parades with musicians, men riding horses, and soldiers with spears. People lined the streets to watch. It was a very exciting time. The festivals for the gods and goddesses were also held to make people loyal to their city-states.

In most of the big cities of ancient Greece, there was a festival for Apollo. Apollo was a popular god, because he was the god of light. He was the god who made the crops grow. He was the god of wisdom and prophecy (PRAH-feh-see), both important things to the ancient Greeks.

To solve more of the mystery surrounding the Oracle of Delphi, we need to know more about Apollo. Who was this youthful god? And why was he so popular? What did the myths (miths) say about his reasons for making the oracle?