

# Kassandra: Mantic, Maenadic or Manic? Gender and the Nature of Prophetic Experience in Ancient Greece

Matthew Dillon

University of New England, Armidale

---

## Abstract

Cassandra was a virgin prophetess who, unlike the other prophets (virgin or otherwise) of ancient Greece, was destined never to be believed or to have her prophecies given credence. Cassandra's role was very much a gendered one, as in ancient Greece, inspired prophecy, in which a prophet gave an oral answer to a question being asked or spontaneously provided advice, was the province of women, while the art of interpreting divine signs was the sphere of men. Cassandra received her gift of prophecy from the god Apollo in return for promised favours. But while the women followers – maenads – of Bacchus were manic, victims of the mania of possession sent by this god, in what sense was Cassandra's prophetic ability maenadic or manic? Why was it that to predict the future women became 'possessed' by a god and spoke direct oral prophecies, while men never spoke the words of a god directly, but learned divination as an art (*techne*) and had to interpret signs sent by the gods but were never in direct communication with them

---

Kassandra is a familiar figure in Greek mythology, but some background material is perhaps appropriate concerning who she was and what her prophetic powers were in the context of Greek literature and popular belief.<sup>1</sup> As a literary, mythical figure she was well known to the ancient Greeks as the daughter of Priam, King of Troy, at the time of the Trojan War, the mythical conflict between Troy and the Greeks. In most versions of the myth, but not in Aeschylus', the god Apollo pursued her and gave her in advance the gift of prophecy in return for sexual favours. But she did not keep her end of the bargain, so he arranged that while she retained the gift of prophecy, no-one would ever believe her predictions. The other main aspect of her story is that when Troy was being sacked she took refuge at the altar and statue of Athena but was dragged away by the Greek warrior Ajax.<sup>2</sup> Iconographically, it is the Ajax episode which is represented rather than Kassandra's prophesying, but the myth of her unbelieving prophecies attracted the attention of major poets who reveal much about ancient Greek attitudes to inspired prophecy, and particularly the role of women in foretelling the future.

---

<sup>1</sup> Ancient sources for Kassandra's prophetic abilities: Aeschylus *Agamemnon* 1035-1330; Pindar *Pythian Ode* 11.33; Euripides *Andromache* 296-98, *Hekabe* 827, *Trojan Women* 253-54, 500; Apollodorus *The Library of Greek Mythology* 3.12.5, (*Epitome*) 5.16-18, 22, 23, 6.23; Lykophron *Alexandra*, *passim*, but esp. lines 1-30; an unassigned fragment of a (fifth-century?) play; Plutarch *Moralia* [vol. 10] 821b. She was possibly mentioned in Sophokles' lost play the *Lokrian Ajax*.

<sup>2</sup> Kassandra's refuge and rape at the statue of Athena is a theme that attracted the attention of ancient Greek writers and vase painters, and is also represented in other media. Literary references: Homer *Odyssey* 3.134-35, 4.499-511; *Iliou Persis* (Evelyn-White 1936: 521); *LIMC* vii.i 956; Apollodoros *Library of Greek Mythology: Epitome* 5.22; Strabo 13.1.40. Iconography for Kassandra (the theme of prophecy is not portrayed): *LIMC* i Aias ii, *LIMC* vii Kassandra i.

The main ancient literary treatments of Cassandra are well known, consisting largely of Homer, Aeschylus, Euripides, Lykophron, and Apollodoros (in chronological order).<sup>3</sup> Various artistic depictions on ancient Greek vases do not yield further information concerning her prophetic powers. It is important to note that of the numerous iconographic representations of Cassandra nearly every single one deals with the myth of how the Greek warrior Ajax impiously dragged her away from the statue of Athena at which she had taken refuge during the sack of Troy. Artists did not find that the theme of Cassandra's prophetic skills provided enough scope for pictorial rendition: Cassandra prophesying before a crowd of non-believers was not a feature of Greek iconography, notwithstanding the interest which ancient writers had for this aspect of the Cassandra myth.

Despite the importance of prophecy and other forms of divination in ancient Greece,<sup>4</sup> modern scholarship is strangely neglectful of Cassandra. The only full length academic monograph treatment is Davreux's 1942, *La légende de la prophétesse Cassandre* which is mainly a discussion of the iconographic representations of Cassandra. His material is built upon by the *Lexicon Iconographicum Mythologiae Classicae*, which briefly discusses each artistic depiction of Cassandra. As for journals, Mason's 1959 article on Cassandra remains a standard English reference, while recently a 1998 article in Italian by Braccesi briefly looks at 'la Maledizione di Cassandra'.<sup>5</sup> In addition there are the standard works of Greek mythology, of which Gantz's *Early Greek Myth* is the most sophisticated.<sup>6</sup> What is original and new about this present discussion is that Cassandra is placed within the context of Greek divination; that is, how Cassandra relates to other ancient Greek diviners, both men and women, has not to date been discussed.

Homer in the mid-eighth century BC, in fact, does not mention Cassandra's prophetic powers and so does not concern himself with her place in Greek prophecy. To him, she is not a seer or prophet. On four occasions he mentions Cassandra: as a virgin daughter of Priam, as bewailing Hektor's death, as chosen by Agamemnon as his slave mistress after the sack of Troy, and as killed by Klytaimestra over Agamemnon's corpse after Klytaimestra murders him on his return home.<sup>7</sup> In Aeschylus' *Agamemnon* written in the fifth century Cassandra actually predicts these events herself, but in Homer there is only the bare narrative reported without reference to any prophetic powers which Cassandra might have.

Since the time of the Alexandrian commentators of the third century BC, such as the ancient anonymous commentator on the *Iliad*, the lack of any inspired prophecy in Homer has been noted;<sup>8</sup> his interest in divination, rather, lies in omens and

<sup>3</sup> Aeschylus *Agamemnon*; Euripides *Hekabe*, *Trojan Women*; discussed esp. by Davreux 1942: 25-48.

<sup>4</sup> The standard English treatment of ancient Greek divination is still Halliday 1913; the current author is preparing a monograph on the subject.

<sup>5</sup> Davreux 1942: esp. 5-55 for the literary sources; Mason 1959; Braccesi 1998. The work of Mazzoldi (Mazzoldi 2001, 2001a, 2002) can be cited but largely to indicate the problems associated with a lack of source methodology and a careful scrutiny of what sources such as Aeschylus reveal.

<sup>6</sup> Gantz 1993: 92-93, 561-63, 651-52, 669-76. For Cassandra's prophetic powers, see also: Bouché-Leclercq 1880: 50; Halliday 1913: 70, 82, 83, 90; Fraenkel 1950: 487-627; Dodds 1951: 70-71; Graves 1955: vol. 2, nos 112[k], 158[p], 166[i], 167[e], 168[f]; Prag 1985: 58-60; Lefkowitz 1986: 44, 54; Parke 1988: 56-58; Forbes 1997: 115-16; Dillon 2002: 259-60, with 362 n.135; Hovenden 2002: 9-13; Flower 2008: 89, 214-15, 224.

<sup>7</sup> Orthyoneus: Homer *Iliad* 13.363-69, bewailing Hektor: *Iliad* 24.699-706; killed by Klytaimestra: *Odyssey* 11.421-26. There also seems to be an indication that Homer knew the story of how Ajax dragged Cassandra away from Athena's statue: *Odyssey* 4.502.

<sup>8</sup> Scholiast to Homer *Iliad* 24.699.

*oionoskopia* (divination from the study of the flight and behaviour of birds).<sup>9</sup> Helenos, Kassandra's brother and later in Greek literature given the art of prophecy, does not have the gift of foresight in Homer, who rather describes him as 'the best of *oionopoloî*' (the best of the bird diviners), a seer interpreting the future from the flights and behaviour of birds.<sup>10</sup> Helenos twice gives advice in the *Iliad* but on neither occasion is it in fact of a prophetic kind: Homer describes him as a traditional seer but does not present him in an actual mantic (i.e. divinatory) context.<sup>11</sup> He is an authoritative figure but as an *oionopolos* (singular of *oionopoloî*) his mantic abilities would have been limited to interpreting signs from bird behaviour. In fact, the gods in Homer speak either directly to mortals or do so through signs, but do not employ or make use of mortals as vehicles of direct, spoken prophecy.

It is, however, unlikely that there were not inspired prophets in Greece when Homer wrote in the eighth century BC, for Kassandra's prophecies are mentioned by the work called the *Kypria* written shortly after Homer, sometime in the seventh century. A prejudice on Homer's part against inspired divination, which involved divine possession of some kind, could perhaps be assumed here, perhaps indeed a prejudice against ecstatic women seers or ecstatic divination generally and generically.<sup>12</sup> The *Kypria* is in fact the first source to mention Kassandra's prophecies. When Alexander (Paris) chooses Aphrodite as the most beautiful goddess he is rewarded with Helen. As he is setting out from Troy for Greece, the prophetic brother and sister Helenos and Kassandra each prophesy: 'Helenos [Kassandra's brother not Helen] foretells [prothespizeî] what will happen to them. ... And Kassandra foretells beforehand [prodelou] what will happen'.<sup>13</sup> So in the *Kypria*, both Kassandra and her brother Helenos know of future events: Helenos 'foretells what will happen', and Kassandra 'foretells beforehand'.

Unfortunately it is not the complete *Kypria* which survives, of which there were originally eleven books, but simply a bald summary by a later *epitomator* (summariser). The exact nature of Kassandra's prophecies and how they were received by her listeners, as reported in the *Kypria*, is therefore simply guesswork. There is a distinction in the Greek words for the prophetic abilities of the two siblings, and Helenos foretells the future but Kassandra seems the more capable prophet, revealing the future to a greater extent than her brother, whose prophecies, judging from the Greek, are much more limited and immediate: it is she who is credited with authentic, far-reaching future sight. But that Paris went ahead with his plans to bring Helen to Troy, and by so doing doomed Troy, indicates that Kassandra was clearly not heeded, whereas her brother Helenos who seems to predict the immediate future and whose prophecies were therefore perhaps not unpropitious may well have been believed. In fact, Helenos' prophecies may well have stopped far short of Kassandra's, who probably revealed the full nature of the tragedy that would unfold, while Helenos in describing what will happen may well have foretold the outcome of Paris' adventure: that his mission would be a success and that he would bring Helen back from Troy.

<sup>9</sup> For ancient Greek bird divination, see Dillon 1996: 99–121; Collins 2002: 17–41.

<sup>10</sup> Homer *Iliad* 6.76; Suidas sv *Polles*.

<sup>11</sup> Homer *Iliad* 6.75–101 (the best *oionopolos*), 7.44–91 (described as the son of Priam).

<sup>12</sup> Helenos is clearly a prophet in the *Kypria* and also in Sophokles *Philoktetes* 604–13 (discussed below), and interprets dreams (Euripides' *Hekabe*). But it is Kassandra who clearly captures the imagination and interest of later writers. Helenos: Parke 1967: 14–15, Parke 1988: 56.

<sup>13</sup> Text of *Kypria*: *Kypria* Argument 1; Bernabé 1988: 39.11; Davies 1988: 31.5–16; West 2003: 69; discussion: Davreux 1942: 9–11.

The only detailed account of any prophesying of Helenos comes from the fifth century BC: he prophesies to the Greeks in Sophokles *Philoktetes* and in particular predicts that the Greeks' capture of Troy would be conditional on bringing Philoktetes to Troy, and they act on this advice, and do in fact conquer the city.<sup>14</sup> The dichotomy between Helenos (credible, believable) and Cassandra (not credible, unbelievable) is one, however, which the ancient Greeks did not pursue, and their attention was always drawn towards Cassandra, with Helenos receiving little attention. His mantic ability is more limited, and of the conditional type so commonly found in Greek divination: if one does one thing, another different thing will result. Cassandra, however, has actual visions which are not predicated on what individuals do now but rather she has actual insight into the future and (as shall be seen) into the past. She experiences clear and precise visions which she relates directly to her listeners.

Exploring Cassandra's role in the plays of Aeschylus and Euripides leads to an understanding of her role as a seer, how this role compares with that of other women seers, and the relationship of women seers to their male divinatory counterparts. Her role in the divinatory experience of ancient Greece is a mythical one. But she also acts as a foil for the other, historical diviners: while she is discredited in that her prophecies are never believed, the general Greek reception of those who gave or interpreted oracles, such as the woman prophet known as the Pythia at Delphi, was as creditable persons whose words and prophecies were heeded, often copied down, and scrutinised as to their intent. Cassandra's experiences and those of the Pythia indicate the circumstances under which women's prophetic powers were accepted and believed – or rejected – by men.

In Aeschylus' play *Agamemnon*, the eponymous hero returns from the ten year Trojan War with the prophetic Cassandra as his mistress, and his wife Klytaimnestra plans to kill both of them. It is Aeschylus in fact who drew what would become the classical portrait of Cassandra. That she is not to be believed is articulated firstly in the *Agamemnon* when the chorus states its incomprehension of what she is prophesying [line 1105]. The first words which Cassandra speaks are a cry of woe calling upon Apollo [1072-73, repeated at 1076-77]; she addresses the god in the context of foretelling her own death [1072-3, 1080]. The chorus declares that even though she is now a slave, the divine is still in her mind [1084: *menei to theon douliai per en freni*]. So her prophetic power is here described as a divine element being resident in her mind: there must be a source of her prophetic power, and it is Apollo. When she foresees her death at the hands of Klytaimnestra she describes herself as 'twice destroyed' by Apollo [1080-82],<sup>15</sup> the second time is her impending death – the first can only be a reference to the fact that while the gift of prophecy was from him, no-one believed her.

Cassandra's relationship to this god is clear and explicit in all of the ancient sources. The chorus in the *Agamemnon* recognises that she is possessed [*theophoretos*] by some god [1140], and ask her where the inspiration comes from [1150]: it receives the answer that, 'It was the seer [*mantis*] Apollo who appointed me to the office' [1202]. Apollo is moreover the (divine) seer – *mantis* – who is destroying her, a (mortal) *mantis* [1203].<sup>16</sup> As she goes to her death at the hands of

<sup>14</sup> Sophokles *Philoktetes* 604-13.

<sup>15</sup> There is a play on words at Aeschylus *Agamemnon* 1085-86: Cassandra calls upon Apollo: 'Apollo, Apollo, ... my destroyer.' The actual Greek spelling of the god's name is *Apollon*, and the verb Cassandra uses to describe her destruction is *apollon*, the same, of course, as the god's name.

<sup>16</sup> For Apollo as her inspiration, cf. Euripides *Trojan Women* 366, *entheos*, 408, 500; Lykophron *Alexandra* 348; Apollodoros *Library* 3.12.5 [151]; Cassandra as *mantis*: Pindar *Pythian Ode* 11.33.

Klytaimnestra, she informs the chorus of the Agamemnon that Apollo in allowing her to die is taking away her prophetic power and stripping her of her ‘prophetic clothing’ [1270]. Just prior to this, she asks herself why she is holding a sceptre and wearing around her neck a *manteia stephe* – a divinatory garland [1265]. These are clearly her accoutrements as Apollo’s prophet. In addition, in Euripides’ *Trojan Women*, her mother, on hearing the news that Agamemnon is smitten with love for her daughter Kassandra, commands her, ‘to cast away, my child, your holy laurel branches and from your body strip the sacred garlands you wear!’<sup>17</sup> These are the laurel branches of prophetic service to Apollo, such as the Pythian priestess held as she sat upon the tripod at Delphi, prophesying to enquirers. So it is clear that Kassandra is seen as serving Apollo in his temple as priestess-prophet, and in this sense is partly assimilated to the Greek priestesses who prophesy in Apollo’s temple at Delphi. But there are significant differences which will become clear.

A further point is that Apollo’s sexual advances to her, which she rejects, are possibly an indication of a sacred-marriage ritual between Apollo and his prophetic priestess: but in Kassandra’s case any such sacred marriage is aborted through her refusal of his favours and his gift of prophecy, while it could not be revoked, could in fact be twisted and distorted.<sup>18</sup> The chorus asks explicitly whether a marriage between Kassandra and Apollo has taken place, but she informs the chorus that she had rejected the god’s love. Her virginity, consequent upon rejecting Apollo, is clear from her own description in the *Agamemnon*, when she reveals that because of her impending death her prophecy will no longer, ‘peer forth from behind a veil like a new-wedded bride’. Here too she relates her rejection of Apollo’s advances and his punishment: that she could not persuade anyone of the truth of her prophecy [1178-79, 1206-07].<sup>19</sup> Hekabe in Euripides’ *Trojan Women* [253-54] describes Kassandra’s virginity as something given to her by Apollo for life, but which Agamemnon will now take from her in claiming her as a slave-concubine as part of his share of the loot plundered from Troy.

As a virgin Kassandra was both the typical and atypical woman prophet of ancient Greece.<sup>20</sup> Priestesses serving Apollo at his temple in Delphi were not virgins: they were older women who could be married, but who for their time of service to the god remained apart from their husbands and observed sexual chastity, underscoring the point by dressing as virgins.<sup>21</sup> Kassandra was liminal in several ways other than her virginity, so unusual in a society where virginity was nearly without exception not a prerequisite for tenure of religious office.<sup>22</sup> Her royal status as a daughter of Priam is never lost sight of in the sources, and this sets her apart from the rest of society; she is of course also a woman, perhaps the most liminal status of all in Greek patriarchy. There must be a source of her prophetic power, and it is Apollo. But why would he grant her this gift? She is described in Homer as beautiful, and he refers to her as the

<sup>17</sup> Euripides *Trojan Women* 256-58. For Kassandra’s clothing, cf. Flower 2008: 214-15.

<sup>18</sup> Aeschylus *Agamemnon* 1206-08. Any actual sacred marriage between Apollo and his prophetic priestesses at Delphi had lapsed by the classical period, but could be implied by their living separately from their husbands and in a state of sexual chastity during their time of service.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. Apollodoros *Library* 3.12.5.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. Gantz 1993: 93.

<sup>21</sup> Virginity of the Pythian priestess: Plutarch *Moralia* [vol. 5] 435d, 438c; Dillon 2002: 77.

<sup>22</sup> The lack of a useful work in English on Greek virginity is underscored by the translation into this language of the general and under-referenced Sissa 1987 (= Sissa 1990), which lacks a methodology and is too general for academic purposes; here and in Sissa 2008 she provides inaccurate treatments of Greek sexuality with little understanding of either the iconographic or literary evidence. (Her 2000 work on the Greek gods was unfavourably reviewed by this author: Dillon 2003.)

‘peer of golden Aphrodite’,<sup>23</sup> and this reveals the motive for the god’s sexual interest. But she must remain virgin to fulfil the criteria of prophetess. Why she would choose virginity and the power of impotent prophecy – her predictions will not be believed – over the god’s love and having her prophecies accepted is itself unclear. This is her tragedy. In addition to her virginity, an abnormal state for a Greek woman, particularly a beautiful one, Cassandra is also a foreigner, as Aeschylus makes a point of reminding his audience,<sup>24</sup> from a defeated and destroyed enemy city, and enslaved by Agamemnon. All of these factors and that her predictions are not believed set her apart from other, normal, generally male, diviners. Returning briefly to the earlier discussion of Cassandra in Homer, it is his betrothing of Cassandra to Orthryoneus<sup>25</sup> that indicates further his lack of interest in or his ignorance of Cassandra as a virginal, inspired prophet.

But in Aeschylus there is a major difference from the later sources in the diachronic setting for the grant of the gift of prophecy. Apollodoros in the third century BC has a bald summary of their relationship: ‘Wishing to gain Cassandra’s favours, Apollo promised to teach her the art of prophecy; she learned the art but refused her favours; hence Apollo deprived her prophecy of power to persuade.’<sup>26</sup>

In the *Agamemnon*, however, in an interesting difference with the later versions and probably representing the original mythical version, Cassandra was already in possession of the prophetic art when Apollo became sexually interested in her: her skill was previously inspired by the god. Prior to him becoming sexually interested in her, she had already in fact been prophesying various disasters to her countrymen [1209-10]. Cassandra then consented to marriage to the god, but proved false to her promise. The chorus asks how she escaped this unscathed: but she is quick with her answer: from then on she could not persuade ‘anyone of anything’ [1203-1212]. Apollo had given her the gift of ‘insight’ and it was only afterwards that he grew passionate about her. Clearly in Aeschylus’ version Cassandra already had the art of prophecy from Apollo as a disinterested gift: it was his consequent sexual interest in her and her breaking of her promised commitment to marry which led him to deprive her of the quality intrinsic to prophetic ability, to persuade one’s listeners.<sup>27</sup>

This disbelief is made explicit in several ways. As Cassandra prophesies to the chorus of old men in the *Agamemnon* about how Klytimestra is about to slay her husband Agamemnon, she speaks of a floor flowing with blood: for the spectator at the theatre where the play was performed and for the modern reader, who both know how the plot will unfold and to whom the story line is familiar, the predictions are easily transparent. But not so for the chorus on stage with Cassandra, which only sees the triumphant return of Agamemnon after ten years and his resumption of the kingship of his native Mycenae. The chorus of the *Agamemnon* sings that it is ‘ignorant’ of her prophesying [1105], it says she speaks in riddles and obscure oracles [1113]; the old men are not a sharp judge of oracles but they do sense the latent evil of what she is attempting to communicate to them [1130-31]. Yet they do not

<sup>23</sup> Homer *Iliad* 13.365, 24.699.

<sup>24</sup> Aeschylus *Agamemnon* 1061 (*karbanos* = *barbaros*: *LSJ*<sup>9</sup> 877, col. 2, s.v. *karbanos*). This is not the place to go into Greek constructs of the otherness of the barbaroi; the concept of Greekness is sufficiently conveyed by Herodotos 8.144.

<sup>25</sup> Homer *Iliad* 13.363-69.

<sup>26</sup> Apollodoros *Library* 3.12.5.

<sup>27</sup> Kovacs 1987 unsuccessfully argues that there was in fact sexual union between Apollo and Cassandra, which may have led to the birth of a child and its subsequent death at Cassandra’s hands. It is better, always, to adhere to the strict meaning of the text, where Cassandra’s virginity (see above) is stressed. Fraenkel 1950: 3.555 (as usual) was correct on this point.

comprehend her meaning until in fact Agamemnon screams out that he is being slain [1343-45]. The rejection of her prophecies by the Greeks is summed up neatly by the chorus: 'We have heard of your divinatory fame but we do not seek for prophets (*prophetai*)' [1098-99]. The chorus do not understand her but it is not the manner or style of her speaking that confounds them: it is in fact because the god Apollo will not allow any of her listeners to understand what she is saying.<sup>28</sup>

Homer and Greek tragedy have examples of *manteis* (diviners) scoffed at, derided, and ignored. But all such scoffers come to a routinely and dare it be said predictably 'bad end', and the mantis is always vindicated.<sup>29</sup> This situation in tragedy of the mantis who is not believed and the disbeliever who suffers, underlines the reality of the historical situation. For the ancient Greek prophet of historical times - be they Pythia or mantis - not to be believed was extraordinary. A cursory glance at Greek history makes this apparently clear. When the Athenian and allied *manteis* famously advised after the lunar eclipse of 27th August in 413 BC that the army not move for 'thrice nine days', the Athenian commander Nikias accepted this without doubt, as did the entire army without demur. This led to the defeat and almost complete destruction and enslavement of an army numbering in the thousands.<sup>30</sup>

The Athenians in 415 BC were enthusiastic about what their oracle interpreters (*chresmologoi*), *manteis*, and other practitioners of divination (*theiasantes*) promised about the success of the expedition to conquer Sicily, and trusted to oracles and the like, and it was only when the force was defeated that the Athenians were angry at these prophets. But then the Athenians remembered various bad omens which *manteis* interpreted for them to show in fact that the expedition had after all been a mistake, and that the signs had been misread. Divination and diviners were not at all discredited in the medium to long range.<sup>31</sup>

When the Greek *manteis* at Plataea in 479 BC made the pre-battle sacrifice (*sphagia*) each day but kept receiving bad omens, they delayed battle. When the Persians attacked, the Greek forces were under fire and many were being wounded and killed, but Greek *manteis* would not give the go-ahead for attack until the *sphagia* were propitious. The army suffered the Persian attack and did not counter-attack, putting total 'faith' in their mantis.<sup>32</sup>

Even an intellectual 'giant' such as Thucydides was for a long time misread by modern scholars as being a-religious and even an atheist or at best not interested in religion and its influence on historical events,<sup>33</sup> but Marinatos showed over a quarter of a century ago that Thucydides did in fact believe in oracles and their prophecies: his attitude was that one just had to have the correct intellectual approach and to understand how the wording of oracles might be fulfilled.<sup>34</sup>

<sup>28</sup> Forbes 1997: 115-16 misunderstands this point.

<sup>29</sup> For example, Homer *Od.* 2.146-183.

<sup>30</sup> Thucydides 7.7.50.3-4, Plutarch *Nikias* 4.1-2, 23.1-24.1; Diodoros 13.12.6; Pliny *Natural History* 2.54; Powell 1979: 25-28; Pritchett 1979: 109-110; Dillon 1996: 117. Compare too Plutarch *Dion* 24.2, *Pelopidas* 31.3; Diodoros 20.5.5. Note Popp 1957: 18-29; Pritchett 1979: 108-113; Shelley 2000:1-2.

<sup>31</sup> Thucydides 8.1; Plutarch *Alkibiades* 13.

<sup>32</sup> Herodotos 9.61.2-3. For this *sphagia* incident: Richer 1999: 142-44; Pritchett 1979: 83; Jameson 1991: 207; Dillon 2008: 245-46. The most detailed treatment of the *sphagia* is Dillon 2008, with relevant iconography discussed and shown; cf. Stengel 1896: 478-80; Pritchett 1979: 83-90 (iconography neglected); Jameson 1991: 205-09 (misunderstands purpose of: see Dillon 2008: 247-48).

<sup>33</sup> Hornblower 1992 is the most notable exponent of the last view (briefly on oracles at 193-94; citing previous scholarship at 169-70).

<sup>34</sup> Marinatos 1981: 138-40, correctly interpreting Thucydides' approach to the oracles he discusses; cf. Jordan 1986: 126 (on oracles), *passim* for Thucydides' precise interest in religion. Thucydides 5.103 is

The force of ten thousand Greek mercenaries trying to escape from Persia in the fourth century BC put complete and utter trust in their *manteis*. On one notable occasion, the thousands of Greek soldiers in the force and their commanders went without any food for several days because the *manteis* pronounced the sacrificial omens unfavourable for launching an expedition by which they would procure food and wine.<sup>35</sup> Moreover, the Spartan king, officials and entire army so implicitly trusted their *manteis* that they more than once turned back at their own borders if the *manteis* interpreted the sacrifices conducted just before crossing the frontier as unfavourable, and so showing that the gods did not approve of the military mission. If the Spartans were engaged in military activity and an omen occurred which the *manteis* pronounced was unfavourable, the army would head for home, forgoing considerable military advantage in doing so.<sup>36</sup>

The list of examples could go on and on to indicate that the male diviners of Greece – the *manteis* – were held in high repute amongst the ancient Greeks. One might be tempted to think of Aristophanes *Birds*, but significantly it is *chresmologoi*, ‘oracle interpreters’, who are mocked for inventing oracles to suit their purposes and the current (comic) circumstances. The mantis is not derided here.<sup>37</sup> Any student of Greek history will be immediately aware that it is the case that the *manteis* were highly respected; only ignorance of the ancient and modern literature could possibly inspire claims to the contrary. In fact, Cassandra’s inability to persuade anyone of her prophecies while clearly in possession of prophetic powers is so strange against this background of the normative, male experience of the mantis that it had to be explained by the Greeks as due to a special intervention by the god Apollo.

The oracles of the Pythia at Delphi were sometimes difficult to understand, as the chorus of the Agamemnon note [1255], but they were generally at worst misinterpreted rather than ignored.<sup>38</sup> Andromache in Euripides’ play *Andromache* eloquently describes Cassandra’s dilemma: ‘Would that the mother who bore Paris had cast him over her head to an evil end! Beside the prophetic laurel Cassandra called out, bidding the mother kill the child, great destroyer of Priam’s city. Whom did she not approach, which of the city’s elders did she not beg to kill the child?’ No-

---

an indication of the philosophic discussion surrounding divination: but it would be naïve not to note that such discussion did not affect popular belief. Even Thucydides who at 5.103 has the Athenian ambassadors criticise divination (not *manteis*) for raising false hopes, does after all himself, as just noted, have a firm belief in oracles (if interpreted correctly).

<sup>35</sup> Xenophon *Anabasis* 6.4.12-6.5.8; Eitrem 1938: 11; Burkert 2005: 42; Flower 2008: 200-201; Dillon 2008: 239; complete acceptance of verdict of the *manteis* elsewhere in the *Anabasis*, e.g. 5.3.9, 5.4.22, 5.5.2, 5.6.16, 5.6.27, 34-35. Omens for military action: yes: 4.3.9, 4.3.17, 4.6.23, 5.4.22, no: 5.5.2. Setting out on a march: 3.5.18 (to set out at the right time); 6.4.14 (not favourable), 7.2.17 (favourable), 7.8.20-22 (favourable: the expedition goes ahead), cf. 7.8.10 (entrails most favourable); sacrifices concerning command: 6.1.31 (whether Xenophon should be commander: no), 7.1.35 (not favourable).

<sup>36</sup> These frontier sacrifices were termed the *diabateria*; see Xenophon *Constitution of the Lacedaemonians* 12-15 (which is the main source for the *diabateria*); historical incidents: Xenophon *Hellenika* 3.4.3, 3.5.7, 4.4.7, 4.7.2, 5.1.33, 5.3.14, 5.4.47-5.4.49, 6.4.19, 6.5.12; Thucydides 5.54.2-3 (cf. 4), 5.55.1-3, 5.116; Pausanias 3.5.9, 3.9.3-4; Athenaeus 561f; Plutarch *Moralia* 191b (7), 208f-209a (10), Plutarch *Agessilaos* 6.2, *Lysander* 23.1-2. See Szymanski 1908: 8-15; Popp 1957: 42-46; Pritchett 1979: 68-71; Dillon 2008: 237-38.

<sup>37</sup> Aristophanes *Birds* 959-90.

<sup>38</sup> The classic example is when King Croesus of Lydia asked if he should attack the Persians: he received the reply that if he crossed the river Halys (the border between Lydia and Persia), a mighty empire would be destroyed. And so it came to pass: Croesus was defeated by the Persians and his empire conquered by them. When he remonstrated with Delphi about this, the priestess replied that the responsibility for the interpretation of the oracle was with him: Herodotus 1.53, 86 (cf. 1.46-47).

one believed her.<sup>39</sup> Kassandra herself is aware of this, arguing that she is no ‘false prophet’,<sup>40</sup> but that Apollo’s deprivation of power to convince her hearers has led her to be called an *agyrtria*, ‘a wandering begging priest’ [1273]; she endured this and other insults, such as being called a ‘false seer’ (pseudo-mantis [1195]).<sup>41</sup> Earlier, she has called upon the chorus to recognise her as a ‘true mantis’ [1241]. Naturally, she is anxious to be believed and accorded recognition as a prophetic power of great authority.<sup>42</sup>

Mason argues that the prophetic Kassandra of Aeschylus is transformed into a frenzied prophetess in Euripides. But such a proposition of transition for Kassandra is incorrect, for she is already described in Aeschylus’ *Agamemnon* as having the god in her mind (being in a state of entheos), even though she is enslaved [1084]. But she is also described as manic (of having mania), and is compared to a wild beast just captured.<sup>43</sup> Euripides also uses the term entheos, perhaps deliberately evoking Aeschylus’ description in order to strengthen his own.<sup>44</sup> In a fragment of a lost play, Kassandra speaks of her inability to persuade with her prophecy, and how she is reckoned to be in a state of mania.<sup>45</sup>

But on the other hand it is in fact true that the portrait of the *maenadic* Kassandra is more fully drawn in Euripides, for whom women’s possession was of great interest and who in another play, the *Bacchai*, explored in detail the connection between women, mania, and possession.<sup>46</sup> He describes Kassandra in the same terms as were employed for maenads.<sup>47</sup> These women were ecstatic women followers of the god Bacchos; in much of Greece every two years these women took to the hills to become possessed by this god. Euripides describes these women as goaded by *maniai* (‘madnesses’) sent by the god, and having been driven by him from their homes.<sup>48</sup> Importantly for the consideration of Kassandra, they have abandoned their homes, and if married, their husbands. That is, as worshippers of Dionysos they are de-facto chaste wives and unmarried women, not interested in sexuality or sex, but only in worshipping their god.<sup>49</sup> Their legendary prowess – able to tear live animals,

<sup>39</sup> Euripides *Andromache* 293-300; cf. Gantz 1993: 562-63. The *Kypria* summary indicates that Kassandra delivered her prophecies as Paris departed from Troy; given Aeschylus’ later portrayal of Kassandra, it is almost certain that the *Kypria* had a long section on what she prophesied and the fact that she was not believed by her fellow Trojans.

<sup>40</sup> False prophet (*pseudo-mantis*): Aeschylus *Agamemnon* 1195.

<sup>41</sup> Aeschylus *Agamemnon* 1273: *agyrtria*; other insults, 1274: ‘beggar’, ‘wretch’ ‘starveling’. Kassandra by these four pejorative terms is assimilated with ‘vagabond’; Plato *Republic* 364b-c mocked wandering priests who went from door to door.

<sup>42</sup> But Kassandra did have one body of believers; the audience of ancient Greeks who watched the *Agamemnon* were able to believe her prophecies because they already knew the outcome of the myth being played out on stage.

<sup>43</sup> Wild beast: Aeschylus *Agamemnon* 1063; *mania*: 1064: ‘she is mad [*mainetai*] and attends to her evil mood’.

<sup>44</sup> Euripides *Trojan Women* 366.

<sup>45</sup> Plutarch *Moralia* [vol. 10] 821b (in Nauck 1964, p. 919, no. 414).

<sup>46</sup> The standard commentary on this play is still Dodds 1960; see also Roux 1972, and more generally, Seaford 1996. Other ancient sources are collected by Henrichs 1978, of which a third-century AD inscription is particularly useful (Henrichs 1978: 123-24); see also Kraemer 1988. See Dillon 2002: 332 n.4 for an extensive bibliography on maenadism, of which see especially Henrichs 1982, & Keuls 1993: 357-80, to which the general discussion of Kraemer 1992: 36-42 could perhaps be added.

<sup>47</sup> And Lykophron in the third century BC follows it with a description of Kassandra’s ‘bacchic mouth’ (Lykophron *Alexandra* 28, cf. 1464); see Davreux 49-55. The debate on the actual date of the work and the identity of the author is not relevant here.

<sup>48</sup> Eur. *Bacch.* 32, 36.

<sup>49</sup> Eur. *Bacch.* 36, 217, 118, 1236.

including cows, apart –<sup>50</sup> further de-emphasised their identity as domesticated, tamed women, and their status as keepers of the hearth. This is confirmed by the iconography, for on Athenian vases of the classical period the maenads are depicted in a manner which underscores their liminal status and rejection of husbands and hearths by having untied their hair so that it flows wildly, and by going barefoot.<sup>51</sup>

Euripides in his play the Trojan Women describes Cassandra as being *entheos*, ‘in the god’.<sup>52</sup> And Cassandra also described herself as being *entheos*; but now she will stand aside from her bacchic frenzy.<sup>53</sup> Having heard that she is to be Agamemnon’s concubine, she comes on stage with burning torches. Dancing, she sings a marriage hymn, such that the chorus leader calls upon her mother Hekabe to stop her frenzied (*bakcheuousan*) daughter; Hekabe takes the marriage torches from Cassandra, saying that she is manic and darting about.<sup>54</sup> At the end of her marriage hymn, the Greek herald Talthybios describes her as having her mind sent frenzied by Apollo.<sup>55</sup>

In fact, in the Trojan Women Cassandra is described as sharing in the frenzy of the god: the god of prophecy and the prophetic devotee alike were in this way ‘co-frenzied’.<sup>56</sup> Euripides in the Hekabe has Cassandra as ‘the inspired Bacchant’,<sup>57</sup> and described by her mother as ‘the frenzied daughter, the prophetess Cassandra’.<sup>58</sup>

Lykophron in the third century BC gives a portrait of a frenzied Cassandra in his *Alexandra*, a work which takes the form of a slave narrator recounting to Priam, King of Troy, the prophecies of his daughter Cassandra concerning the fall of his city.<sup>59</sup> But the narrator in reporting that she had not spoken quietly as of old (that is, as she normally did), describes her in this atypical episode as prophesying in ‘a confused cry, and uttered wild words from her bay-chewing mouth’; she is compared to a sphinx and ‘[he, the narrator] will trace her paths of devious speech...’; she ‘opened her inspired Bacchic lips ... and thus began to speak’. But Lykophron makes clear that this particular incident was unusual: Cassandra’s prophecies as uttered in the *Agamemnon*, *Hekabe* and *Trojan Women* are all orally comprehensible: it is up to the listener to choose to believe them or not. It is not any riddling nature of the prophecies which makes them difficult to understand. She is frenzied and inspired by Apollo, and in some sense is also under a Bacchic influence sent by Apollo, but she is clear, articulate and precise about what she has to say.

<sup>50</sup> The *sparagmos* (‘rendering’) ritual.

<sup>51</sup> For a recent analysis of both the iconographic and literary evidence and how they complement each other, see Dillon 2002: 140-52. For iconography, see also Schöne 1987; Moraw 1998; some illustrations: Dillon 2002: 140-41, 149-52, figs 5.1-4.

<sup>52</sup> Euripides *Trojan Women* 366.

<sup>53</sup> Euripides *Trojan Women* 169, 367, cf. 349.

<sup>54</sup> Euripides *Trojan Women* 342, 349.

<sup>55</sup> Euripides *Trojan Women* 408 (*Apollon exebakkheusen frenas*).

<sup>56</sup> Euripides *Trojan Women* 500 (*sybakche*).

<sup>57</sup> Euripides *Hekabe* 121 (*tes mantipolou Bakkhes*, cf. Aeschylus *Agamemnon* 979: *mantipolei*).

<sup>58</sup> Euripides *Hekabe* 676-77: *to bakcheion tes thespioidou*. In Lykophron [born c. 330 BC] *Alexandra* 1-7, 13-15, 28-30, the narrator in relating that Cassandra had not spoken quietly *as she did of old*, describes her as prophesying in ‘a confused cry, and [she] uttered wild words from her bay-chewing mouth’ and compares her to a sphinx; he will ‘trace her paths of devious speech...’; Cassandra ‘opened her inspired Bacchic lips ... and thus began to speak’. But Lykophron makes clear that the incident he is describing was abnormal: Cassandra’s prophecies of old, and as uttered in the *Agamemnon*, *Hekabe* and *Trojan Women*, were all orally comprehensible. The problem is that the listener has no choice as to whether or not to accept the veracity of the prophecies: the god Apollo ensures that the listener does not give them credence.

<sup>59</sup> Lykophron *Alexandra* 1-7, 13-15, 28-30.

This frenzied behaviour must relate to her style of prophecy. The word *thespiodos*, ‘sing in prophetic strain’<sup>60</sup> is used in connection with her both by Aeschylus and Euripides,<sup>61</sup> which ties in with the description of her singing and dancing her marriage hymn in Bacchic frenzy.<sup>62</sup> The prophecies she makes in the Agamemnon are all sung in verse. A combination of singing and Apolline inspired frenzy which can be described by the sources in Bacchic terms points to the style of her prophecy. Here she is unlike the staid Pythian priestess sitting placidly on her tripod while delivering her prophecies in either prose or verse. This is presumably one of the reasons why she was not comprehended or believed: the Bacchic, frenzied nature of her delivery – while the words themselves were totally comprehensible – did not inspire the confidence of her listeners, but in fact frightened them and predisposed them to ignore her warnings. In contrast, the warnings and advice of the calm and sedate Pythia priestess at Delphi generally inspired universal confidence.

Something more needs to be said about the nature of the inspired prophecy of the Pythia. Long ago the Roman views<sup>63</sup> of the Pythia as a possessed crazed priestess were abandoned by modern scholars.<sup>64</sup> The Greek evidence and experience simply do not tally with this: the Pythia of Herodotos was so far from being deranged, crazed and possessed in a Bacchic sense that she could coolly accept bribes to deliver oracles which the bribers paid her for. In one case, the accusation of bribery was proved, but the office of the Pythia itself was not discredited, only the individual office-holder: the bribed Pythia (called Periallos) was exiled for life. Accusations were made about bribing the Pythia on two other, different occasions, but nothing came of these.<sup>65</sup> Recently, Maurizio has employed some half-baked pseudo-anthropological parallels to claim that the Pythia was ‘possessed’ by Apollo (a pseudo-methodology surely long ago discredited along with the debunking of the Frazerian Golden Bough approach, now a mere literary and historical curiosity). Maurizio also goes to great lengths to show that the Pythia actually spoke the oracles, which is not in dispute, and misreads the arguments scholars have presented about the Pythia. She does not accurately define what is meant by ‘spirit possession’, a most inappropriate and unfortunate term to apply in any consideration of the Pythia and Delphi.<sup>66</sup> Bowden

<sup>60</sup> *LSJ*<sup>9</sup> s.v. *thespioidew*, p. 795, column 2: ‘sing in prophetic strain’, citing line (1161) in the Agamemnon (next note).

<sup>61</sup> Aeschylus *Agamemnon* 1161; Euripides *Hekabe* 677.

<sup>62</sup> Euripides *Trojan Women* 308-341, 353-58. She sees her marriage as facilitating Agamemnon’s destruction (at the hands of Klytaimestra).

<sup>63</sup> Most well-known being the famous crazed Pythia of Lucan’s description in his *Pharsalia* [*Bellum Civile*] 5.123-224, esp. 190-91.

<sup>64</sup> Fontenrose 1978: 208, noting that even in Lucan’s portrayal much of the calmness of the historical Pythia is preserved, in the sense that when she prophesies she is clear and distinct of voice. There is a vast bibliography on individual aspects of the oracle and the oracular process but there are two standard modern works to consult on the Delphic oracle: Parke & Wormell 1956, and Fontenrose 1978. Numerous general works on the Delphic oracle which do not make important scholarly contributions include: Amandry 1950; Parke 1967; Lloyd-Jones 1976; Morgan 1989, 1990; Wood 2003; Bowden 2005.

<sup>65</sup> Periallos: Herodotos 6.66, cf. 5.74.1-75.3, 6.48.1-51; Parke & Wormell 1.161-6. Two other incidents: (1) Herodotos 5.63.1, 5.66.1, 5.90.1; Aristotle *Athenaion Politeia* 19.4; (2) Thuc. 5.16-19, cf. 1.114.2. For these, see Hodkinson 1983: 274-75; Parker 1983: 152-54; Dillon 1997: 85-86.

<sup>66</sup> Maurizio 1995: passim, esp. 76-79; compare similar themes in Maurizio 2001; the cross-cultural approach for Delphi was first attempted by Lloyd-Jones in his 1976 article and it was a failed paradigm then as well (not cited by Maurizio); Bowden 2005: 25 correctly criticises Maurizio. Note too that Maurizio’s efforts to introduce ideas of ‘randomisation’ into the Pythia’s responses also cannot work as she does not discuss the evidence for what constituted a normal Delphic response.

couples an erroneous notion of the Pythia's lower socio-economic background,<sup>67</sup> with an idea that she did not know in fact what she was actually speaking: that she did not know 'what the god was deciding when she prophesied'. Clearly she knew when she was bribed to say certain things; more importantly, as she spoke rationally and calmly, it is difficult how she could not understand the words she was speaking at the time, especially since Bowden can adduce no evidence to support his claim.

Nothing can detract from the verdict of the ancient sources, from Herodotos to Plutarch: the Pythia was staid and, to coin an un-Greek word, 'unbacchant', not possessed, when she delivered her oracles. The only single, historical incident which is an exception to the 'normal' behaviour of the Pythia is the well-known passage from Plutarch, in which a Pythia was unwilling to be consulted but was forced to do so: she went into convulsions and died.<sup>68</sup> Otherwise, the procedure was simply this: the Pythia sat on her tripod in the Delphic temple; the consultant, after a sacrifice, asked their question of her, and received a response in prose or verse. The Pythia was said to be inspired by the god Apollo, and delivered her response in a rational, coherent manner which she understood. The historical enquiries which survive indicate that her responses did not require hallucinogenic substances or gases (emanating from cracks in the rock), and she was not in a state of Bacchic possession. The stress on Cassandra's bacchism (see above) in fact is in every way contrary to the staidness of the Pythia, and itself underlines the Pythia's lack of but Cassandra's possession by a Dionysian-like maenadism pressed on her by Apollo.<sup>69</sup>

As Cassandra went one by one to the citizens of Troy imploring them to dispose of the infant Paris, one can imagine that her Bacchic frenzy was not met with favour or enthusiasm. Perhaps, too, at each successive refusal to believe she became more disposed to mania, and so less credible. Moreover, the chorus in the Agamemnon recoils from the very graphic scenes of destruction and murder which she sings of so clearly, just as in Lykophron she spares the listener not one single bloody, gory detail of the impending destruction of Troy. She is a completely negative prophet, predicting no good whatsoever for her original community, Troy, or for the one she enters with Agamemnon, Mycenae. Doom, death and destruction follow closely at her heels: not brought about by her of course, but unpalatably predicted by her. In historical Greece, no historical mantis predicted distant destruction and murder, or revealed past crimes, through prophetic insight: these 'disturbing' prophetic predictions of the future were lacking in Greek divination as practised by male *manteis*. The Pythia predicted the destruction of Athens in 480 BC, with the Persian army just to the north, with its leader Xerxes having through his messengers having promised just such an outcome.<sup>70</sup> But as a matter of course, prophecy associated with such events was not historical, and belongs firmly to Fontenrose's categories of 'quasi-historical', 'legendary' and 'fictional' responses.<sup>71</sup>

<sup>67</sup> He thus specifically contradicts Plutarch *Moralia* 405c (see too Euripides *Ion* 1323); see Dillon 1997: 85.

<sup>68</sup> Plutarch *Moralia* 438. Parke & Wormell 1956: 1.37 unfortunately construed this, despite Plutarch's detailed comments on the unusual nature of the consultation, as being the normal sequence of events. The passage is correctly interpreted by Dillon 1997: 83.

<sup>69</sup> See for the method of consultation, esp. Herodotos 7.140-41; Parke & Wormell 1956: 1.17-45; Fontenrose 1978: 196-228; Dillon 1997: 82-93; cf. Compton 1994. Bowden 2005: 17-25 contains several inaccuracies; Fontenrose's still remains the most authoritative account, based squarely on the ancient sources, and is followed here.

<sup>70</sup> Herodotos 7.140.

<sup>71</sup> Fontenrose 1978: 268-416.

This contrasts with a fundamental feature of Greek prophecy: divination was staid, whether it involved direct communication with the gods or otherwise. Kassandra, as a prophet in Aeschylus or Euripides, is given no credence by her listeners. Rather, in Greek history itself, as opposed to myth, it is the staid women diviners at the Delphic oracle who are believed, along with the male seers who divined in other ways. Contrary to the imagination of the Roman poets and hence of the western tradition, the women who were the Delphic priestesses did not froth at the mouth, hallucinate, or otherwise: the Greek sources of the classical period stress the calmness and sedateness of the Pythian priestess, who was fully incorporated into the civic, religious and political life of the city-state.<sup>72</sup> Kassandra by contrast was in every sense an outsider and her ‘frenzied’ prophecies rejected. The oracles given by the Pythia at Delphi were generally ‘straightforward’. They were often ritual prescriptions: something had happened in the community and it wanted to know how to change the situation. For example, if there was a plague, the ritual remedy (prescription) would be to placate such and such a god with a sacrifice of a particular, prescribed variety. Oracular centres might provide simple ‘yes’ or ‘no’ answers to particular questions. Often the answer might be a simple affirmative to some suggested course of action. There was, in fact, very little actual prediction of the future. Rather, oracular centres and their ‘inspired’ personnel were more likely to support or condemn proposed courses of action, without specifying exactly what would happen at a specific point in the future.

This type of historical divination as practised by the ancient Greeks is in fact very different from Kassandra’s prophecies in the *Agamemnon* in which she actually describes in full detail how events will unfold and describes them before they happen. Her prophecies are not just that Agamemnon will be killed but she specifically describes to the chorus what is happening to Agamemnon inside the palace while she and the chorus are outside [1125-29 and following]. She also sees into the past and describes the terrible scenes which have occurred in that place over the generations, with babies bewailing their butchering [1090-92, 1095-97]; she sees the murders about to take place and the horrible ones of the past in this same palace and of the clan of the Atreidai to which Agamemnon belongs.<sup>73</sup>

Kassandra’s character exemplifies the risk any prophesying figure takes: that their listeners will not give credence to their words. More importantly, the fact that the Trojans ignore her prophecies – which turn out to be true – is a warning to heed mantic advice which is divinely inspired. The exception proves the rule: divination was widely used and respected in Greek culture. The Greeks, in fact, of all socio-economic classes, gender, and age, gave credence to the divinatory character of omens and prodigies, varying only in their degree of just what could be ominous and have divinatory significance. So why does Kassandra, with divinely inspired, completely accurate prophetic powers as a gift from Apollo, meet with such an incredulous response?

It is a case of ‘all or nothing’ when it comes to mantic abilities. For the listeners of her prophecies at Troy reject all of Kassandra’s oracular pronouncements, ranging from telling them to kill Paris at birth because he will lead to the city’s destruction, to

<sup>72</sup> For the staid nature of the Pythian priestess, see for example Herodotos 7.139-40, and Fontenrose 1978: 204-212; Dillon 1997: 82-86. The fifth-century BC Vulci cup by the Kodros painter (Berlin Museum 2538) is the most widely reproduced of illustrations for the Delphic oracle and shows a calm, sedate Pythia sitting on a tripod, with a consultant standing in front of her.

<sup>73</sup> Cf. Fraenkel 1950: 3.494.

warning against bringing the famous wooden horse into the city.<sup>74</sup> The Trojans pay the price with their own destruction. But it is important that because Apollo himself has made the decision that no-one will believe Cassandra's prophecies, they do not have a choice as to whether to accept the prophecies or not. This contrasts with the basic tenet of Greek divination which is that those practising divination or those seeking the aid of diviners choose to accept the result of divination, whether it be the interpretation placed on a dream, an owl's flight, the entrails of a sacrificed beast, or a lunar or solar eclipse. Credence in divination was universal. Xenophon has Socrates say: 'Those who intend to manage a household or city well require divination (*mantike*) ... What is not clear to mortals they should attempt to learn from the gods by divination. For the gods grant a sign to him whom they consider is in their grace.'<sup>75</sup>

Similarly, the divinatory pronouncements of Greek male diviners were not a case of 'picking and choosing'. A seer's abilities were not occasional or erratic. They did not have a flash of inspiration only once or irregularly in their career. Their advice, whether interpreting an oracle, 'reading' the entrails of sacrificed beasts, or interpreting cosmological phenomena, was always considered to be sound and trustworthy. Similarly, Cassandra's prophecies were always true. But in her case Apollo had arranged that none of her predictions were to be believed. The regular activity of the male prophet can perhaps be juxtaposed to the prophetic announcements of Cassandra. She did not provide regular interpretations. Rather her pronouncements were irregular and concerned only moments of crisis.

In this sense Cassandra's prophecies are unlooked for and unasked for. They had no place in the formal divinatory apparatus of the community. She offers no remedy for the events which she describes. She provides no hope or assistance to counter the crisis and tragedy of the destruction of Troy. Her prophecies threaten the destruction of the social fabric of Troy by urging the repudiation of Paris and the return of Helen to Greece. Even her urging the Trojans not to bring the wooden horse into the city has the potential to divide Troy into two opposing camps at the very moment when victory seems secure. By ignoring her prophecies the community of Troy remains united and stable, until its final destruction. Her prophecies occur outside of the normal divinatory framework of the community: instead of waiting for some omen to be interpreted, which was how Greek divination worked, Cassandra spontaneously provides prophecies at a time when the community is not looking or searching for them. She does not react to omens and divinatory phenomena but speaks outside of the socio-religious context and the ordered gendered milieu of the classical Greek city. This woman diviner goes outside the normal framework and disturbs the community with unlooked for predictions which the gods have not prepared the way for through sending signs which a seer could interpret and about which he could offer advice.

Seers did encounter opposition to their interpretations of omens, but it is the inconvenience of their interpretations which arouses dislike for the prophets themselves. The classic example is Agamemnon, who in the Iliad Book 2 accuses the main Greek prophet – Kalchas – of being nothing but a bearer of bad news. But Agamemnon nevertheless acquiesces and accepts Kalchas' interpretation of the omen in question. He did so also when Kalchas interpreted the prodigy of the eagle and the hare as the Greek fleet was preparing to sail for Troy. The winds would not blow so

---

<sup>74</sup> To kill Paris: Euripides *Andromache* 293-300 (quoted above); wooden horse: Apollodoros *Library (Epitome)* 5.16-18.

<sup>75</sup> Xenophon *Memorabilia* 1.1.9.

he advised Agamemnon to sacrifice his own daughter: and he did. When Hektor in the Iliad ignores Polydamas' interpretation of an omen, the result is disaster. (This must be another sub-theme in the Kassandra myths: Apollo is the source of prophecy, and to ignore this prophetic power and what it has to say is unwise.)

The myth of Kassandra as a prophet who operates as a free agent but whose prophecies are never believed reveals and stresses that the prophetic woman, uncontrolled and prophesying outside of any confines set by male society, is not acceptable. For women's prophecy to be believed it had to be delivered at an official level, within the construct of a male religious structure such as at Delphi, where there was a male priesthood, male authorities making the rules for consultation and enforcing them, males regulating the dress of the woman prophet and her sexual activity, how old she had to be and how often she could prophesy (that is, even the times of her inspiration were regulated) and where and to whom. The Pythian priestess was an important prophet but her activities were organised in an anally retentive way by men, with the prophecies limited to once a month, with the questions considered beforehand, and with male religious staff present when the women Pythian priestesses prophesied. The Pythia was no Kassandra: she did not sit on her tripod making prophecies as the inspiration came to her on any day of the week.

Kassandra was thus an exception to the norm. She had divinatory powers: that is, mantic ability. Possessed by Apollo in a bacchic fashion, she was also maenadic. But as such she was also manic, with a mania which informed her prophecy. Mantic, maenadic, manic, her style of inspired spontaneous prophecy, provoked by the onset of a crisis, did not exist in historical Greece. The rhythms of divination were regular and the means of divination routine and even mundane: her prophetic methods were the stuff only of legend. If there was a crisis, the entrails were consulted without recourse to diviners who were manic, frenzied or possessed. The Pythia priestess, said to be in communication with Apollo, sat sedately on her tripod and answered questions which had been pre-circulated and delivered the answer in a staid voice, with consultations occurring only once a month. The sole woman practitioner of inspired, ecstatic prophecy belonged to myth: Kassandra, doomed not to be believed. The women who served as Pythian priestesses acted as oracle pronouncers and were constrained in a male constructed environment; all legacy of a period in the historical past which women may have been ecstatic prophets was relegated to an archetypal example. This was Kassandra, the mere stuff of tragedies, denied reality in a world where men divined by groping at entrails, watching birds, and pondering on the meaning of eclipses and lightning – but without ecstasy or possession.

## References

### *Ancient texts*

#### Athenaeus

- 1927 The Deipnosophists, trans. by C.B. Gulick, vols. 1-7. Heinemann, London.

#### Aeschylus

- 1926 Aeschylus. Agamemnon, Libation Bearers, Eumenides, Fragments, trans. by H.W. Smyth, vol. 2. Harvard University Press, Cambridge MA.

#### Apollodoros

- 1921 The Library of Greek Mythology: Apollodorus The Library, trans. J.G. Frazer, vols. 1-2. Harvard University Press, Cambridge MA.
- Aristophanes  
2000 Aristophanes. Birds, Lysistrata, Women at the Thesmophoria, trans. J. Henderson. Harvard University Press, Cambridge MA.
- Aristotle  
1912 Constitution of the Athenians, trans. J.E. Sandys. Harvard University Press, Cambridge MA.
- Diodoros  
1950, 1954 Diodorus Siculus. The Library of History, trans. C.H. Oldfather & R.M. Geer, vols. 5, 10. Harvard University Press, Cambridge MA.
- Euripides  
1995 Euripides. Children of Heracles, Hippolytus, Andromache, Hecuba, trans. D. Kovacs, vol. 2. Harvard University Press, Cambridge MA.
- Euripides  
1999 Euripides. Trojan Women, Iphigeneia Among the Taurians, Ion, trans. D. Kovacs, vol. 4. Harvard University Press, Cambridge MA.
- Herodotus  
1996 Herodotus. The Histories, trans. A. de Sélincourt, revised by J. Marincola. Penguin, Harmondsworth.
- Hippocrates  
1994 Hippocrates, trans. W.D. Smith, vol. 7. Harvard University Press, Cambridge MA.
- Homer  
1924-25 The Iliad, trans. A.T. Murray, 2 vols. Harvard University Press, Cambridge MA.  
1919 The Odyssey, trans. A.T. Murray, 2 vols. Harvard University Press, Cambridge MA.
- Iliou Persis*  
1936 Hesiod, Homeric Hymns, Epic Cycle, Homeric, trans. H.G. Evelyn-White. Harvard University Press, Cambridge MA.
- Lucan  
1998 Pharsalia, trans. N. Rowe. Harvard University Press, Cambridge MA.
- Lykophron  
1921 Alexandra. Callimachus: Hymns and Epigrams, Lycophron, Aratus, trans. A.W. Mair and G.R. Mair. Harvard University Press, Cambridge MA.
- Pausanias  
1918-35 Pausanias, trans. W.H.S. Jones, H.A. Ormerod, and R.E. Wycherley, 5 vols. Harvard University Press, Cambridge MA.
- Pindar  
1997 Pindar. Olympian Odes. Pythian Odes, trans. W.H. Race, vol. 1. Harvard University Press, Cambridge MA.
- Plato  
1914 Plato. Euthyphro, Apology, Crito, Phaedo, Phaedrus, trans. H.N. Fowler, vol. 1. Harvard University Press, Cambridge MA.  
1924 Plato. Laches, Protagoras, Meno, Euthydemus, trans. W.R.M. Lamb, vol. 2. Harvard University Press, Cambridge MA.  
1925 Plato. Statesman, Philebus, Ion, trans. W.R.M. Lamb and H.N. Fowler, vol. 8. Harvard University Press, Cambridge MA.

- Pliny  
 1917-33 Natural History, trans. H. Rackham, 17 vols. Harvard University Press, Cambridge MA.
- Plutarch  
 1936 Plutarch's *Moralia*, trans. F.C. Babbitt and H.N. Fowler, vols. 5, 10. Harvard University Press, Cambridge MA.  
 1921-26 Plutarch. *Lives* (Agesilaos, Alkibiades, Dion, Lysander, Nikias, Pelopidas), trans. B. Perrin, vols. 1-11. Heinemann, London.
- Sophokles  
 1996 Sophocles. *Antigone, The Women of Trachis, Philoctetes, Oedipus at Colonus*, trans. H. Lloyd-Jones, vol. 2. Harvard University Press, Cambridge MA.
- Strabo  
 1929 *The Geography of Strabo*, trans. H.L. Jones, vol. 8. Harvard University Press, Cambridge MA.
- Suidas  
 1928-38 *Suidae Lexicon*, edited by A. Adler, vols. 1-5. Teubner, Leipzig.
- Xenophon  
 1923 Xenophon. *Memorabilia, Oeconomicus, Symposium, Apology*, trans. E.C. Marchant and O.J. Todd, vol. 4. Harvard University Press, Cambridge MA.  
 1918-21 *Hellenica [Hellenika]*, trans. C.L. Brownson, vols 1-2. Harvard University Press, Cambridge MA.  
 1922 *Anabasis*, trans. C.L. Brownson, vols. 1-2. Harvard University Press, Cambridge MA.  
 1925 *Scripta Minora: Constitution of the Lacedaemonians*, trans. E.C. Marchant and G.W. Bowersock. Harvard University Press, Cambridge MA.

*Modern Bibliography*

- Amandry, P.  
 1950 *La mantique Apollinienne à Delphes*. E. de Boccard, Paris.
- Bernabé, A.  
 1988 *Poetae Epici Graeci. Testimonia et Fragmenta*, vol. 1. Teubner, Leipzig.
- Bouché-Leclercq, A.  
 1880 *Histoire de la Divination dans l'Antiquité*, vol. 2. E. Leroux, Paris.
- Bowden, H.  
 2005 *Classical Athens and the Delphic Oracle*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
- Braccesi, L.  
 1998 *Siri e la Maledizione di Kassandra*. In *Sibille e Linguaggi Oracolari*, edited by I.C. Colombo and T. Seppilli, 305-14. Istituti editoriali e poligrafici internazionali, Pisa.
- Burkert, W.  
 2005 *Signs, Commands, and Knowledge: Ancient Divination between Enigma and Epiphany*. In *Mantike. Studies in Ancient Divination*, edited by S.I. Johnston and P. Struck, 29-49. Brill, Leiden.

- Collins, D.  
 2002 Reading the Birds: Oionomanteia in Early Epic. *Colby Quarterly* 38: 17-41.
- Compton, T.  
 1994 The Herodotean Mantic Session at Delphi. *Rheinisches Museum für Philologie* 137: 217-23.
- Davies, M.  
 1988 *Epicorum Graecorum Fragmenta*. Teubner, Leipzig.
- Davreux, J.  
 1942 La légende de la prophétesse Cassandre d'après les textes et les monuments. Université de Liège, Liège.
- Dillon, M.P.J.  
 1996 Oionomanteia in Greek Divination. In *Religion in the Ancient World: New Themes and Approaches*, edited by M.P.J. Dillon, 99–121. Hakkert, Amsterdam.  
 1997 *Pilgrims and Pilgrimage in Ancient Greece*. Routledge, London.  
 2002 *Girls and Women in Classical Greek Religion*. Routledge, London.  
 2003 Review of G. Sissa 2000, *The Daily Life of the Greek Gods*. Stanford University Press, Stanford. In *The European Legacy: Toward New Paradigms*. *Journal of the International Society for the Study of European Ideas* 8.2: 231-32.  
 2008 Xenophon Sacrificed on Account of an Expedition: Divination and the Sphagia before Ancient Greek Battles. In *Le Sacrifice Antique: Vestiges, Procédures et Stratégies*, edited by V. Mehl and P. Brulé, 235-51. Presses universitaires de Rennes, Rennes.
- Dodds, E.R.  
 1951 *The Greeks and the Irrational*. University of California Press, Berkeley.  
 1960 *Euripides Bacchae*, 2nd edn. Oxford University Press, Oxford.
- Eitrem, S.  
 1938 Mantis and Sphagia. *Symbolae Osloenses* 18: 9–30.
- Evelyn-White, H.G.  
 1936 *Hesiod, Homeric Hymns, Epic Cycle, Homeric*. Harvard University Press, Cambridge MA.
- Flower, M.A.  
 2008 *The Seer in Ancient Greece*. University of California, Berkeley.
- Fontenrose, J.  
 1978 *The Delphic Oracle: its Responses and Operations with a Catalogue of Responses*. University of California Press, Berkeley.
- Forbes, C.  
 1997 *Prophecy and Inspired Speech in Early Christianity and Its Hellenistic Environment*. Hendrickson, Peabody MA.
- Fraenkel, E.  
 1950 *Aeschylus: Agamemnon*, vol. 3. Clarendon Press, Oxford.
- Gantz, T.  
 1993 *Early Greek Myth: A Guide to Literary and Artistic Sources*. John Hopkins, Baltimore.
- Graves, R.  
 1955 *The Greek Myths*, vols. 1-2. Penguin, Harmondsworth.
- Halliday, W.R.

- 1913 Greek Divination. A Study of its Methods and Principles. Macmillan, London.
- Henrichs, A.  
 1978 Greek Maenadism from Olympias to Messalina. *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology* 82: 121–60.  
 1982 Changing Dionysiac Identities. In *Jewish and Christian Self-Definition*, edited by B.F. Meyer and E.P. Sanders, vol. 3: 137–60. SCM Press, London.
- Hodkinson, S.  
 1983 Social Order and the Conflict of Values in Classical Sparta. *Chiron* 13: 239-81.
- Hovenden, G.  
 2002 *Speaking in Tongues. The New Testament Evidence in Context*. Sheffield Academic Press, London.
- Hornblower, S.  
 1992 The Religious Dimension to the Peloponnesian War, Or, What Thucydides Does Not Tell Us. *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology* 94: 169-97.
- Jameson M.H.  
 1991 Sacrifice Before Battle. In *Hoplites: the Classical Greek Battle Experience*, edited by V.D. Hanson, 197–227. Routledge, London.
- Jordan, B.  
 1986 Religion in Thucydides. *Transactions of the American Philological Association* 116: 119-147.
- Kovacs, D.  
 1987 The Way of a God with a Maid in Aeschylus' Agamemnon. *Classical Philology* 4: 326-34.
- Kraemer, R.S.  
 1988 *Maenads, Martyrs, Matrons, Monastics: a Sourcebook on Women's Religions in the Greco-Roman World*. Fortress Press, Philadelphia.  
 1992 *Her Share of the Blessings: Women's Religions Among Pagans, Jews, and Christians in the Greco-Roman World*. Oxford University Press, New York.
- Lefkowitz, M.R.  
 1986 *Women in Greek Myth*. The Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore.
- LIMC*  
 1974–97 *Lexicon Iconographicum Mythologiae Classicae*, vols. i–viii. Verlag Artemis, Zurich.
- Lloyd–Jones, H.  
 1976 The Delphic Oracle. *Greece and Rome* 23: 60–73.
- LSJ*<sup>9</sup>  
 1996 H.G. Liddell, R. Scott, H.S. Jones, et al. *A Greek-English Lexicon, with a Revised Supplement*. Clarendon Press, Oxford.
- Marinatos, N.  
 1981 Thucydides and Oracles. *Journal of Hellenic Studies* 101: 138-40.
- Mason, P.G.  
 1959 Kassandra. *Journal of Hellenic Studies* 79: 80-93.
- Maurizio, L.

- 1995 Anthropology and Spirit Possession: a Reconsideration of the Pythia's Role at Delphi. *Journal of Hellenic Studies* 115: 69-86.
- 2001 The Voice at the Center of the World: The Pythia's Ambiguity and Authority. In *Making Silence Speak: Women's Voices in Greek Literature and Society*, edited by A. Lardnois & L. McClure, 38-53. Princeton University Press, Princeton.
- Mazzoldi, S.
- 2001 Lo scotto di Cassandra mantis. *Quaderni Urbinati di Cultura classica* 8: 93-98.
- 2001a Cassandra, la vergine e l'indovina: identità di un personaggio da Omero all'ellenismo. Istituti editoriali e poligrafici internazionali, Pisa.
- 2002 Cassandra's Prophecy between Ecstasy and Rational Mediation. *Kernos* 15: 145-154.
- Moraw, S.
- 1998 Die Mänade in der attischen Vasenmalerei des 6. und 5. Jahrhunderts v. Chr.. P. von Zabern, Mainz.
- Morgan, C.
- 1989 Divination and Society at Delphi and Didyma. *Hermathena* 147: 17-42.
- 1990 Athletes and Oracles. The Transformation of Olympia and Delphi in the Eighth Century BC. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
- Nauck, A.
- 1964 Tragicorum Graecorum fragmenta; supplementum continens nova fragmenta Euripidea et adespota apud scriptores veteres reperta [1889] adiecit Bruno Snell. G. Olms, Hildesheim.
- Parke, H.W. & D.E.W. Wormell
- 1956 The Delphic Oracle, vol. 1: The History; vol. 2: The Oracular Responses. Oxford University Press, Oxford.
- 1967 Greek Oracles. Hutchinson, London.
- 1988 Sibyls and Sibylline Prophecy in Classical Antiquity. Routledge, London.
- Parker, R.
- 1983 Miasma: Pollution and Purification in Early Greek Religion. Oxford University Press, Oxford.
- Popp, H.
- 1957 Die Einwirkung von Vorzeichen, Opfern und Festen auf die Kriegführung der Griechen im 5. und 4. Jahrhundert v. Chr., Würzburg.
- Powell, C.A.
- 1979 Religion and the Sicilian Expedition. *Historia* 28: 15-31.
- Prag, A.J.N.W.
- 1985 The Oresteia: Iconographic and Narrative Tradition. Aris & Phillips, Warminster.
- Pritchett, W.K.
- 1979 The Greek State at War. Part III: Religion. University of California Press, Berkeley.
- Richer, N.
- 1999 La recherche des appuis surnaturels topiques par les Spartiates en guerre. In *Le Péloponnèse Archéologie et Histoire*, edited by J. Renard, 135-48. Presses universitaires de Rennes, Rennes.

- Roux, J.  
1972 Euripide les Bacchantes: Introduction, Texte et Traduction, vols. 1–2. Budé, Paris.
- Schöne, A.  
1987 Der Thiasos. Eine ikonographische Untersuchung über das Gefolge des Dionysos in der attischen Vasenmalerei des 6. und 5. Jhs. v. Chr., P. Åström, Göteborg.
- Seaford, R.  
1996 Euripides' Bacchae. Aris & Phillips, Warminster.
- Shelley, C.  
2000 The Influence of Folk Meteorology in the Anaximander Fragment. *Journal of the History of Ideas* 61: 1-17.
- Sissa, G.  
1987 Le corps virginal: la virginité féminine en Grèce ancienne. Librairie philosophique J. Vrin, Paris (= Sissa 1990).  
1990 Greek Virginité. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge MA.  
2000 The Daily Life of the Greek Gods. Stanford University Press, Stanford.  
2008 Sex and Sensuality in the Ancient World. Yale University Press, New Haven.
- Stengel, P.  
1896 Prophezeiung aus den sphagia. *Hermes* 31: 478–80.
- Szymanski, T.  
1908 Sacrificia Graecorum in bellis militaria. Marburg (dissertation).
- West, M.L.  
2003 Greek Epic Fragments from the Seventh to the Fifth Centuries BC. Harvard University Press, Cambridge MA.
- Wood, M.  
2003 The Road to Delphi: the Life and Afterlife of Oracles. Pimilco, London.