

THE CULT OF APOLLO DEIRADIOTES

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There existed at classical Argos an official cult of Apollo Pythaeus, known locally as Apollo Deiradiotes. This cult is noteworthy in two ways. It played a very important rôle in the political life of Argos, for the worship of Apollo Pythaeus was one premise upon which Argos based her bid for power in the Peloponnese, her attainment of the lot of Temenos. The cult was also noteworthy for its unusual mode of divination. I hope to discuss the political aspects of this cult in a future study, but at present I propose to limit this paper to a consideration of the oracle of Apollo Deiradiotes at Argos and its bearing on the religious history of Apollo. Some work has already been done on this cult, but each researcher has dealt only with one aspect of the evidence: archaeological, epigraphical, etc. No one has yet attempted to gather and evaluate all the available data as a whole. Also there are some interesting possibilities relating to this cult, such as the rôle of the *πυροφόρος* and the use of phial-oracles, which have never been adequately examined. I will attempt in this paper to present all the evidence and to draw as full a picture of the cult as can be reasonably surmised.

On a ridge between the two citadels of Argos there stood a temple of Apollo. According to Pausanias (2.24.1) the temple was founded by Pythaeus, son of Apollo, who brought the cult from Delphi. At this site the god possessed the epithet Deiradiotes, because the spot was known as the Deiras, or “ridge.”¹ One night a month the priestess, who was sworn to sexual abstinence, drank the blood of a sacrificed ewe, became possessed by the god, and prophesied. This oracle was active at least until the time of Pausanias.²

Several inscriptions which mention this cult were found at Argos by W. Vollgraff. Two of these do no more than name the person making the

¹J. G. Frazer, *Pausanias' Description of Greece* III (London 1898) 207; Hitzig-Bluemner, *Pausaniae Graeciae Descriptio* I (Berlin 1896-1907) 595; Preller-Robert, *Griechische Mythologie* I (Berlin 1894^a) 307–08; Jessen, “Deiradiotes,” *RE* 4,2 (1901) 2409.

²Paus. 2.24.1: *μαντεύεται γὰρ ἔτι καὶ ἐς ἡμᾶς*.

dedication to Apollo.³ Vollgraff dates these two inscriptions to the fourth or third century B.C. Much more interesting is an inscription, again of the fourth or third century B.C.,⁴ which describes some repairs made to the temple and its environs:⁵

- Θεός. Προμάντιες ἀνέθεν
 Ἀπόλλωνι Ἀρισ[τ]εὺς Σφυρή-
 δας, Φιλοκράτης Ναυπλιά-
 δας, γροφέε Αἰσχύλος Ἀραχνά-
 5 δας, Τρυγῆς Αἰθωνίδας καὶ κα-
 τεσκεύασσαν καὶ ἴσαντο [θήας]
 ἐκ μαντήας Γᾶς ὀμφαλὸν καὶ τ[ᾶ]-
 ν περίσταϊν καὶ τὸ φάργμα, καὶ τὸν
 βωμὸν προάγ[αγ]ον ποτ' ἄ[ρ]ῳ καὶ πέ-
 10 τρινον ἔθεν, καὶ τὰν ἀγχιπύραν
 ὑπὲρ αὐτοῦ καὶ θαυρὸν ἐν τῷ μαν-
 τήῃ κατεσκεύασσαν τοῖς πελα-
 νοῖς κλακτόν. καὶ τὰν ὁδὸν ἡργάσ-
 σαντο ἅπανσαν καὶ ὀφρύαν πεδ' [ἰ]α-
 15 ρὸν καὶ τὰν ἐπιπολάν, καὶ τὸν βω-
 μὸν ἐνς τάξιν πεδάγαγον καὶ τ[ὸν]-
 ς κολοσσόν, καὶ τὰν ἐπιπολὰν ὠ[μά]-
 λιξαν, καὶ τοίχον [π]έτρινον παρ τὸ[ν]
 . . . λ . . . ἔθεν, καὶ τὰν[ς] θ[ύρα]ν τοῦ ναοῦ
 20 ὠχύρωαν, [καὶ . . .] λο[π]ίδας καὶ ἐπιχύ-
 [τ]αν ἀργύρεα ἔθεν, καὶ θαυρὸν ἐνσε-
 [πρί]αντο, καὶ τὸν Σ[μ]ιθαῖον ὀφρύα ὑπέ-
 [στααν, καὶ τ]ὸ [χωρ]ῖον ὠ[μ]άλιξαν ἐννῶ[ι]
 [διαφθαρὲν καὶ δάφναν]ς καὶ δένδ[ρη]
 25 [-----ἐν]έφυσα[ν]
 ----- AM --

The cult officials making this dedication are two male *προμάντιες* and two secretaries (*γροφέε*, 4). At one time Vollgraff took this inscription as evidence that this oracle of Apollo was delivered by male prophets in the fourth century.⁶ However, there is another inscription from Argos which disproves this theory:⁷

³Vollgraff, *BCH* 27 (1903) 277–78, nos. 29, 30.

⁴W. Vollgraff, *Le Sanctuaire d'Apollon Pythéen à Argos* (Paris 1956) 26, 109; but cf. G. Roux, "Le Sanctuaire argien d'Apollon Pythéen," *REG* 70 (1957) 482.

⁵See esp. Vollgraff, *BCH* 33 (1909) 171–75, no. 1; Vollgraff (above, note 4) 109–17; J. Pouilloux, "Sur une Inscription d'Argos," *REA* 60 (1958) 50–66.

⁶*BCH* 27 (1903) 274–75.

⁷*BCH* 33 (1909) 175–200, no. 2; E. Schwyzer, *Dialectorum Graecarum Exempla Epigraphica Potiora* (Leipzig 1923) no. 94; *SIG*³ 735.

- Ἐπὶ γραμματέος τῶν
 συνέδρων Ἰέρωνος τοῦ
 Ἐπικύδεος,
 ἱερέος δὲ τοῦ Πυθαέος
 5 Δαμοσθένης τοῦ Νικοκρά-
 τεος Παιονίδα,
 προμαντίων δὲ Σωίβιου τοῦ
 Σωίβιου, Ἀντιγένης τοῦ
 Πολυκράτεος Ναυπλιαδᾶν,
 10 γροφῆων δὲ Θερσαγόρου τοῦ
 Νικοφάεος, Φιλοκλέος τοῦ
 Ξενοφάντου Δμαίπιδᾶν,
 πυροφόρου Τιμαγόρου τοῦ Χα-
 ριτίμου Κλεοδαΐδα,
 15 προμάντιος Φιλοκρατείας
 τῆς Λυσίωνος Αἰθαλέας,
 χρησμὸς
 ὁ γενόμενος τῇ πόλει τῶν Μεσ-
 σανίων ἀνεγράφη κατὰ τὸ ψά-
 20 φισμα τῶν ἀρχόντων καὶ συνέ-
 δρων, μαντενομένου Μνασιστρά-
 του τοῦ ἱεροφάντα περὶ τῆς θυσί-
 ας καὶ τῶν μυστηρίων·
 ὁ θεὸς ἔχρησε· Μεγάλους Θε-
 25 οῖς Καρνείοις καλλιερῶντι κα-
 τὰ τὰ πάτρια. Λέγω δὲ καὶ Μεσ-
 [σανί]ο[ι]ς ἔ[πι]τελεῖν τὰ μυστή-
 [ρια] ---

This inscription, from the second or first century B.C., again mentions two male *προμάντιες* (7–9), but adds a female *πρόμαντις* (15–16). It seems obvious that here the term *πρόμαντις* is used with two meanings. The woman mentioned in this inscription must be fulfilling the same function as the *γυνὴ προφητεύουσα* in Pausanias' description of this oracle.⁸ The two men, on the other hand, were probably the interpreters of the woman's inspired utterances. The confusion among the various terms for seers and their interpreters, as well as for the various types of prophecy, was very great in antiquity. Herodotus, in a single passage (8.135), calls a prophet of Apollo both *πρόμαντις* and *προφήτης*. Plato, in his *Timaeus* (72a), complains about the common confusion of the terms *μάντις* and *προφήτης*, and then shows the same confusion, in *Phaedrus* 244a, by

⁸P. Amandry, *La Mantique apollinienne à Delphes* (Paris 1950) 121, note 4.

calling the Pythia a *προφῆτις*.⁹ Thus it is clear that the same term *πρόμαντις* could be applied to two different functionaries, the deliverer of the god's message and the interpreters of that message.

It might, however, still be objected that an inscription giving the official titles of cult personnel should make some distinction between these different functions. There are several possible answers to this objection. It might be that every Greek would, as a matter of course, know that the mouthpiece of Apollo's prophecies was always and ever a woman. Or it might be that the female *πρόμαντις* delivered one type of oracle, namely that described by Pausanias, while the male *προμάντιες* delivered another type, perhaps given by means of the small terra cotta phials found by Vollgraff in a cistern in the sanctuary of Apollo Deiradiotes.¹⁰ This type of oracle, in which the sinking or floating of some object gave an answer of yes or no to the supplicant's question, was also used at Perachora, Epidaurus, and in Sicily.¹¹ This use of a second form of prophecy could compare with the possible use of lot-oracles at Delphi.¹² However, the most probable explanation for this double use of the word *πρόμαντις* is simply that most Greeks did not differentiate between the possessed speaker of the god's words and the rational interpreters of those words. A true believer would have thought that all these people were only delivering to him the words of the god with, perhaps, some divinely approved exegesis. It remained for more rational, scientific minds to attempt to define more closely these differences of function.

It will be noted that the second inscription given above also mentions a priest of Apollo (*ιερέος δὲ τοῦ Πυθαέως*, 4). There were priests also at Delphi,¹³ but there seems to be some question whether the priests at Delphi were not the same as the *προφῆται*.¹⁴ Whatever was the case at Delphi, however, this inscription makes it clear that the priest was a separate individual at Argos. The duties of the priest must have included the sacrifices preliminary to the actual consultation of the oracle.

The two *γροφῆε*, or secretaries, would have been necessary officials for an influential cult. Records had to be kept. The inscription given below

⁹See also in *RE* 23,1 (1957), Radke, "Promantis," 647; van der Kolf, "Prophetes," 797-814 and "Prophetis," 814-16.

¹⁰Vollgraff (above, note 4) 47-48.

¹¹Perachora: T. J. Dunbabin, "The Oracle of Hera Akraia at Perachora," *ABSA* 46 (1951) 61-71; Epidaurus: Paus. 3.23.8-9; Sicily: Ps. Aristotle, *Mirab.* 834b7-17.

¹²Amandry (above, note 8) 29-36; Parke-Wormell, *The Delphic Oracle* 1 (Oxford 1956) 18-19.

¹³Plutarch, *De Def. Or.* 51 (438a-b); *De E Ap. D.* 5 (368b).

¹⁴A. Bouché-Leclercq, *Histoire de la Divination dans l'Antiquité* III (Paris 1879-82) 95-96; Amandry (above, note 8) 119.

shows to what use such records could be put. The *πυροφόρος* (13) is a rare title. Its meaning, however, is made clear from several other sources.¹⁵ The duty of this functionary would have been to care for the sacred fires. There is no mention, except the hint in this title, of any sacred fire on the Deiras. But there was a very large and impressive altar where, presumably, sacrifices were made before consulting the oracle, and fire would, of course, have been necessary. An even more likely use, however, for the sacred fire would have been at the monthly sacrifice of the ewe whose blood the prophetess drank. This ritual communion with the god might very well have required the purifying agency of sacred fire.¹⁶ It is to be noted that there was a sacred fire at Argos, that of the hero Phoroneus, kept burning in the temple of Apollo Lykeios (see below, p. 000). Other examples of blood drinking, most notably the drinking of bull's blood by the priestess of Ge at Aegae in Achaea,¹⁷ were thought to be useful in proving the purity of the priestess; the draught would be poisonous to anyone who was unchaste.¹⁸ At Argos, however, unless Pausanias is mistaken, the blood drinking was not a test of chastity, but a communion by means of which the priestess could make physical contact with the god.

The petitioner of this inscription, Mnasistratos (21–22), is mentioned also in the famous inscription which gives the rules for the mysteries of the Great Gods at Andania.¹⁹ Each cult official in the present inscription from Argos, as in the preceding dedication, has the name of his phratry appended to his own name. Vollgraff has made an admirable study of the origins of these names, deriving most of the names mentioned from heroes of the Argolid.²⁰ Others, such as *Παιονίδαι* and *Αἰθαλέες*, come from regions outside the Argolid, such as Messenia and Thessaly. Such names derive possibly from the days when the Dorians were first entering Greece (see below, p. 000).

Vollgraff has published another interesting inscription relating to the oracle at Argos, of which, unfortunately, only a small fragment remains:²¹

¹⁵Epidaurus: *IG* IV², 1.304, 328, 382, 385, 393, 400, 401, 530, 742, lines 4 and 6; Sparta: *IG* V, 1.997, 1021; Xen. *Lac.* 13.2; Delphi: *SIG*³ 711 D¹ 22, 728 I; Lerna: *IG* IV 666, line 5. See also v. Geisau, "Pyrophoroi," *RE* 24 (1963) 75–76.

¹⁶Bouché-Leclercq (above, note 14) 226–27; L. R. Farnell, *Cults of the Greek States* III (Oxford 1896–1909) 11–12; J. G. Frazer, *Golden Bough* I (London 1911–15³) 381–82; O. Gruppe, *Griechische Mythologie und Religionsgeschichte* II (Munich 1906) 925, and note 2.

¹⁷Paus. 7.25.13; Pliny, *HN* 28.41 (147).

¹⁸Farnell (above, note 16) 12; Frazer (above, note 16) 382, note 1; M. P. Nilsson, *Geschichte der griechischen Religion* I² (Munich 1955) 159, note 4.

¹⁹*SIG*³ 736.

²⁰*BCH* 33 (1909) 182–200.

²¹*BCH* 33 (1909) 450–55, no. 22.

- [ε]σσα
[με]γάλαι καὶ
οὐκ ἐφάν[η]
[ἀρ]γύριον ἦρ
5 αὐτοὶ παῖδα
- [τὸ μα]ν[τ]ήρον ἐπεὶ εἰ
[ἀμ]έρα ἅμα φαῖ' ἐστ
ἄβυσσον, ἐν λωπίω[ι]
10 [ἄβυ]σσον καὶ οὐκ ἂν δύν[ασθαι]
σον, ὁ [δ]ὲ θιδὸς ἐμάντευ[σέ]
α μαστεύων τὰς οἰκίας ν
τῶι προθύρῳ εὔρε καίπερ
[ἄβ]υσσον(ν) οἰκείῃ, κοινανόντι δ[ὲ]
15 ουσι τοῦτο ἐπικε. ἔσαι ἀμεί[ρα]
π[α]ρχρῆμα ὁ μεσότοιχος τοῦ
ο. καὶ κατέκανε
ιο. σπαγύντος ἐπεὶ
ροι

This fragment appears to give the histories of three people who consulted the oracle. Such *ἰάματα* are known also from the sanctuary of Asclepius at Epidaurus.²² In this fragment very little can be made out of the first (1–6) or third stories (18–19). Of the second history, however, a fairly good account can be made. A prophecy had been made concerning some abyss and the petitioner's inability to do something, presumably to avoid that abyss. The god was consulted, and he told the applicant to search in his own house. The man obeyed and found some pit near his front door. He was then helping to do something, presumably fill the hole, when suddenly a wall fell on the man and killed him. This is a common genre of tale, in which a man strives in vain to overcome his fate. The oracle, while speaking the truth and foretelling the future, nevertheless helps to bring about the supplicant's foreordained end.²³

There are, in addition to these inscriptions and the description in Pausanias, three other possible references in the ancient sources to this cult of Apollo. Plutarch, in his biography of Pyrrhus (31), says that when Pyrrhus was planning to attack Argos a prophetess of Apollo Lykeios ran forth shouting that she saw the city full of blood and corpses, and an eagle descending upon the throng and then disappearing. Since no other ancient author mentions any seer attached to the famous sanctuary of Lycian Apollo at Argos, some scholars suggest that perhaps Plutarch erred by

²²*G IV 951–56*; R. Herzog, "Die Wunderheilungen von Epidauros," *Philologus*, Suppl. 22 (1931) pt. 3, pp. 1–164.

²³As, e.g., in the story of Oedipus, or Croesus (Hdt. 1.34–91).

attributing the prophetess of Pythian Apollo to the cult of Apollo Lykeios.²⁴ It is also noteworthy that Pausanias (2.19.3–6), in his description of this sanctuary of Lycian Apollo, mentions no seer, but does describe a sacred fire of Phoroneus which was always kept burning.²⁵ Perhaps this is the fire which the *πυροφόρος* had to carry up to the altar of Pythian Apollo on the Deiras.

The two remaining literary references both describe the same historical event. Thucydides (5.53) and Diodorus Siculus (12.78.1), in their discussions of the events of 419 B.C., say that Argos declared war on either Epidaurus or Sparta because the proper sacrifice had not been sent to the temple of Apollo Pythaeus. Thucydides adds that the Argives were *κυριώτατοι τοῦ ἱεροῦ*, implying that other cities had some power in the cult. It has been argued that these references cannot be to the cult at Argos.²⁶ Thucydides would not have said that the Argives were *κυριώτατοι* of a cult in their own city. It is generally accepted that Thucydides, and hence Diodorus, is talking about the cult of Apollo at Asine, a city about twelve miles southeast of Argos. The arguments appear convincing, and it seems better to set aside these two pieces of evidence for the present.

The archaeological evidence of the site itself is, unfortunately, extremely meager. The excavations were carried out by W. Vollgraff and later by the French school under Vollgraff from 1902 until 1930.²⁷ A monumental altar was found along with remains of several buildings. Unfortunately there has been no agreement on the functions of these buildings, and it is not even known which, if any, of them was the temple of Apollo. The present altar dates back only to the fourth or third century B.C.²⁸ But it was at this time that the repairs mentioned in the first inscription quoted above were made. Among the renovations carried out was the moving and refitting of the altar (lines 8–11). Where the original altar had been located and what its age was remain unanswered questions. However, there is evidence that part of the terrace on which the altar is found does go back to archaic times.²⁹ The evidence does not permit any more precise dating.

The remains do show, however, that the sanctuary of Apollo Pythaeus was an impressive sight. The sanctuary was built on a series of terraces which were cut into the hillside. There were imposing buildings and large,

²⁴Bouché-Leclercq (above, note 14) 227–28; Latte, "Orakel," *RE* 18,1 (1939) 847.

²⁵See also schol. on Soph. *El.* 4 and 6.

²⁶See esp. W. S. Barrett, "Bacchylides, Asine, and Apollo Pythaeus," *Hermes* 82 (1954) 426–29, 438–42.

²⁷Vollgraff (above, note 4) 10; Roux (above, note 4) 474–87; G. Roux, *L'Architecture de l'Argolide aux IV^e et III^e Siècles avant J.-C.* (Paris 1961) 65–82.

²⁸Roux (above, note 4) 481.

²⁹Roux (above, note 4) 480.

open areas for votive offerings. The inscriptions show that there existed a fairly large number of people concerned with the running of the cult. The preceding vague picture is, unfortunately, all our present state of knowledge allows us to draw.

I shall now attempt to sketch the history of the founding of this Argive temple. The evidence is again extremely scanty, and the results are thus very tenuous. However, they do form a reasonable picture of the foundation of this cult. Telesilla, the fifth century Argive poetess, declared that Pythaeus, the son of Apollo, visited Argos first of all places in Greece.³⁰ Pythaeus is known to us only in this story of the founding of this cult of Apollo. It seems quite clear that this story is merely the mythological way of saying that this cult was derived from the Pythian cult of Apollo at Delphi.³¹ The cult of Apollo Pythaeus is known from other sites in the Peloponnese: Asine, Hermione, Sparta, Mantinea, Cynuria, and Megara.³² Apollo Pythaeus also had a cult on the island of Rhodes.³³ It will be noted that most of these settlements were Dorian strongholds.

It appears most probable that the immigrating Dorians brought with them into the Peloponnese the cult of Apollo Pythaeus. They had for many years previous to their incursion into the Peloponnese dwelled in Doris, on the borders of Delphi.³⁴ There is some possibility that the Dryopes, the inhabitants of that district later known as Doris who were expelled by the incoming Dorians, brought this cult with them and established it at Asine and Hermione in the Peloponnese before the coming of the Dorians.³⁵ The evidence, however, does not seem to support this conclusion. Apollo's cult was important in these Dryopian settlements, but it is more likely that this importance dates to the period of the dominance of the Dorian settlers from Argos. A poem of Bacchylides, apparently composed for performance at Asine, says that it was the seer Melampus who brought the cult to Asine from Argos.³⁶ Also the Dryopes always appear in mythology as enemies of Apollo.³⁷ It was this very hostility toward Apollo that caused Heracles, the champion of the Dorians, to wage war against them. It does

³⁰Paus. 2.35.2, with 2.24.1.

³¹v. Geisau, "Pytha(i)eus," *RE* 24 (1963) 170–71; Bouché-Leclercq (above, note 14) 110; Preller-Robert (above, note 1) 267; Frazer (above, note 1) 207; Farnell IV (above, note 16) 134.

³²Asine: Paus. 2.36.5; Hermione: Paus. 2.35.2; Sparta: Paus. 3.11.9; Mantinea; H. Roehl, *Inscriptiones Graecae Antiquissimae* (Berlin 1882) 100; Cynuria: Roehl 59; Megara: *CIG* I 1058, 1065.

³³M. Holleaux and C. Diehl, "Inscriptions de l'île de Rhodes," *BCH* 9 (1885) 112–14.

³⁴V. R. d'A. Desborough and N. G. L. Hammond in *CAH*³ II 686.

³⁵Farnell IV (above, note 16) 111, 118.

³⁶Barrett (above, note 26) 421, 426–29.

³⁷Sources are collected in J. Fontenrose, *Python* (Berkeley and Los Angeles 1959) 35–44.

not seem likely that these ancient enemies of Apollo at Delphi should have become the missionaries of his cult in the Peloponnese.

Sometime then during the twelfth or eleventh century the incoming Dorians brought with them into Argos the cult of Apollo Pythaeus. Their reasons for placing his sanctuary on the old Mycenaean acropolis, rather than in the newly formed lower city,³⁸ can only be conjectured. Perhaps there had already existed on the slopes of the Deiras some pre-Dorian oracle which Apollo took over. Continuity of Mycenaean cult sites is fairly common.³⁹ Such a takeover of a pre-existing oracle could also explain the somewhat unusual method of divination practiced at Argos. As Farnell has said: "we see that there is no specially Apolline method of divination. As the modes of divination were sufficiently various in the earliest Hellenic, perhaps even in the 'Aryan' period, Apollo could annex to himself any that happened to be in vogue."⁴⁰ At this particular cult site an unusual form of blood-enthusiasm was borrowed from an earlier inhabitant, while many trappings from the Delphic worship of Apollo, such as the omphalos,⁴¹ were added by the new worshipers. At the same time that the Dorians brought this cult to Argos, they founded similar cults throughout the Peloponnese. The Argives, when they had won hegemony over the Argolid, further spread the cult to such cities as Asine. The importance of this cult probably grew and then waned in the Peloponnese together with the power of Argos itself.

³⁸R. A. Tomlinson, *Argos and the Argolid* (Ithaca 1972) 64–66.

³⁹Desborough and Hammond in *CAH*³ II 670–71.

⁴⁰Farnell IV (above, note 16) 232.

⁴¹See above, inscription on p. 94, line 7.