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## Epigraphical documentary evidence for the Themis cult: prophecy and politics

The oracular nature of Themis is well known and, although not epigraphically documented before the 4th cent. B.C., clearly attested to by literary and iconographical sources<sup>1</sup>. The literary sources trace it back to the very ancient time of mythical Greek pre-history. In this mythical past Themis is the one who suggests to Zeus that he should not marry Thetis, because she will bear him a child more powerful than Zeus himself<sup>2</sup>; she is the one who decides, together with Zeus, to start the Trojan War, in order to lighten the overburdened Earth<sup>3</sup>; and finally, she comes to assume the role of a “predecessor” in some of the main Greek inter-state sanctuaries. As the mythical elaboration and the inscriptions attest, the goddess seems to have played an active role in the history and in the myth of the three main Greek oracles: Delphi, Olympia and Dodona.

### Delphi

In Delphic mythology Themis is undoubtedly present at least from the 5th cent. B.C. onwards, even if the reliability of the so called “Previous Owners Myth” has often and with good reason been called into question<sup>4</sup>. The two main versions of this myth are reported by Aeschylus (*Eumenides*, 1-19) and by Euripides (*Iphigeneia in Tauris*, 1259-1283). Aeschylus presents a peaceful succession of the oracle from Gaia to Themis to Phoebe and finally to Apollo, whereas Euripides reports a violent usurpation by Apollo of the oracle once legitimately held by Themis. Despite these differences it can still be seen that in both versions Themis and her mother Gaia precede Apollo.

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<sup>1</sup> Sources: AESCH., *Pr.*, 209-215, 873-874; *Eu.*, 1-19; EUR., *I.T.*, 1259-1283; *Or.*, 164; DIOD. SIC., V, 67; DION. HAL., *Ant.* I, 31; APOLLOD., *Bibl.* I, 4,1 [22]. Iconography: red-figured cup from Vulci, Berlin Staatl. Mus. F 2538, *ARV*<sup>2</sup> 1269, 5; bell-krater, Wien, Kunsthist. Mus. IV 935, *ARV*<sup>2</sup> 1439, 2.

<sup>2</sup> *Cf.* n. 35.

<sup>3</sup> Argumentum of the *Cypria*, *ap.* PROCLUS, *Chrest.*, 84 Seve (= M. DAVIES, *EGF* p. 31, 5-6); so called “Themispelike”, St. Petersburg, Ermitage St 1793, *ARV*<sup>2</sup> 1476, 2; calyx-krater, St. Petersburg, Ermitage ju.0.52 (St 1807), *ARV*<sup>2</sup> 1185, 7.

<sup>4</sup> I will not discuss here the problems of this myth, for which *cf.* Ch. SOURVINOU-INWOOD, “Myth and History: The previous Owners of the Delphic Oracle”, *Reading Greek Culture*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1991, p. 217-243.

One of the main arguments of the critics against the reliability of this myth is that the earliest attestations of an oracle coincide with attestations of Apollo<sup>5</sup> and, since Delphi was an established Apolline oracle already in the 8th cent. B.C., there cannot be space for Gaia and Themis as mistresses of the oracle. Yet, even if the archaeological evidence excludes that the history of the Delphic sanctuary can be dated back earlier than the 8th cent. B.C., since there is no real proof of a cultic occupation on the site before this date, I believe that nothing prevents us from thinking of a coexistence of Gaia and Themis with Apollo already from a quite early period<sup>6</sup>. Moreover, when the myth of the predecessors appears, just before the middle of the 5th cent. B.C., it appears already in its more articulated version, which recounts a peaceful succession of the oracle, but it suggests between the lines a more ancient variant (with a violent succession), maybe the same one which was revived some years later by Euripides<sup>7</sup>. The formative stage of the myth must precede the tragedy of Aeschylus by some years, going back at least to the beginning of the 5th cent. B.C..

Two Delphic inscriptions coming from a monument the reconstruction and placement of which are still being argued confirm this. They are two bases<sup>8</sup> found in the 1930's near the Castalia source, and designed, as shown by the inscriptions and by the dowel holes, to support the bronze statues of Themis and Ga. The inscription bearing the name of each goddess is, on both the bases, repeated twice: once on the upper face of the stone, in retrograde late archaic letters, and once on the front face, in bigger progressive letters datable to the 4th cent. B.C.. The retrograde inscription dates in both cases to the beginning of the 5th cent. B.C..

These two bases have been compared to other similar stones, found inside the sanctuary of Apollo, which have nearly the same dimensions and the same characteristic flat band in relief, with or without inscriptions and with or without holes to support statues<sup>9</sup>. They have been interpreted as

<sup>5</sup> HOM., *Od.* VIII, 79-81.

<sup>6</sup> I would emphasize the fact that Gaia and Themis have familiar ties with Apollo already in the *Theogony*, 130-136 (Phoebe is the sister of Themis; Phoebe and Themis are both daughters of Gaia), 404-408 (Phoebe is the mother of Leto); and, as far as Themis is concerned, in the Delian part of the *Homeric Hymn to Apollo*, 123-126 (Themis feeds Apollo with nectar and ambrosia).

<sup>7</sup> For the interpretation of the myth, cf. M. CORSANO, *Themis. La norma e l'oracolo nella Grecia antica*, Lecce 1988.

<sup>8</sup> M.F. COURBY, *FD II, Topographie et architecture, La terrasse du temple*, Paris, 1927, p. 163-165; P. DE LA COSTE MESSELIÈRE, R. FLACELIÈRE, "Une statue de la Terre à Delphes", *BCH* 54 (1930), p. 283-295.

<sup>9</sup> Amongst them the most famous ones are maybe those from the so called "ex-voto de Liparéens" datable, for historical reason, before the 473 B.C. (COURBY, *o.c.* [n. 8], p. 142-153), and those, belonging to a different monument, bearing the names of Zeus and Elatos respectively engraved, both in double copy, in retrograde letters from the beginning of the 5th cent. B.C. and in progressive letters from the 4th cent. B.C. (R. FLACELIÈRE, *FD III*,

being part of a crowning row of a wall, some blocks of which have been used, in the years immediately following the construction, as a support for dedications.

Scholars disagree about the wall which hosted these blocks: Courby thinks that the Themis-Ga group belongs to the Polygonal wall<sup>10</sup> and that the "Liparean blocks" belong to the wall of the *Esplanade*<sup>11</sup>; Bousquet thinks that all the blocks (including both the Gaia-Themis group and the Liparean one) belong to the *peribolos* wall<sup>12</sup>. In both cases it seems evident that all the offerings should be dated in the period between the 548/510 B.C., when the new terrace and the new larger Alcmeonid *peribolos* were built, and the beginning of the 5th cent B.C., which is the period of the first inscriptions.

The erection of the two statues is an important *terminus ante quem* for the introduction of the cult: if the goddesses received a statue at the end of the 6th – beginning of the 5th cent. B.C., we can conclude that they were already being worshipped at this time.

The introduction of the cult of Gaia-Themis might, therefore, be contemporary with the definitive settlement of the Apolline theology in the second half of the 6th cent. B.C., after the First Sacred War, which marks the victory of the inter-state interests represented by the Amphictiony over the local ones, and the final passage of the Delphic sanctuary from the regional to the international sphere.

In the 4th cent B.C. the Gaia cult is undoubtedly attested to by an inscription<sup>13</sup> which mentions some restorations close to her *hieron*. We should suppose that the *hieron* was situated by the Fountain of the Muses, on the Terrace of the Polygonal Wall, close to the south side of the temple of Apollo. Even if no archaeological evidence has survived, the identification, based on a quotation by Plutarch<sup>14</sup> and on the interpretation of the inscription, is very probable<sup>15</sup>. The hypothesis that the mother and the daughter were worshipped together should not be excluded, all the more so if one notes that, generally, Themis does not seem to have had any cult building for her own.

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4. *Épigraphie, Inscriptions de la Terrasse du Temple et de la région nord du sanctuaire*, Paris, 1954, p. 217-219). Cf. A. JACQUEMIN, *Offrandes monumentales à Delphes*, Paris, 1999 (*BEFAR*, 304), p. 121.

<sup>10</sup> COURBY, *o.c.* (n. 8), p. 163-165.

<sup>11</sup> COURBY, *o.c.* (n. 8), p. 142-155.

<sup>12</sup> J. BOUSQUET, *BCH* 78 (1954), p. 430; *id.*, *CID* II, Paris, 1989, p. 182.

<sup>13</sup> BOUSQUET, *o.c.* (n. 12), 62, III a.

<sup>14</sup> PLUT., *De Pythiae oraculis*, 402c-d.

<sup>15</sup> J.-F. BOMMELAER, *Guide de Delphes. Le site*, Paris, 1991, p. 228-229; BOUSQUET, *o.c.* (n. 12), p. 125. The long continuity of the cult of Gaia on the same area from the 4th cent. B.C. till the time of Plutarch, can be one more piece of evidence for the archaic nature of the cult itself.

We must also remark that not even Gaia was ever said to have been worshipped in a temple: neither the quotation of Plutarch about her cult in the roman time, nor the inscription mentioned above, record any *naos* but only a *hieron*. This explains why the search for a cult building for Gaia and Themis has never yielded results<sup>16</sup>. It would seem most probable that both of these divinities were worshipped in the open-air, as was usual for many old natural divinities. This is even more probable, if we consider that for the entire 8th cent. B.C. there is no convincing evidence in Delphi of any definitive cult building and that even the pre-alcmeonidan temple can be dated, at the earliest, to 650 B.C.<sup>17</sup>. We may also compare the situation with Olympia, where the first great temple of Hera cannot be dated to before the end of the 7th cent. B.C..

By the 3rd cent. B.C. the "pacific" version of the transmission of the Pythian oracle was well established and propagated by the Delphic clergy, as is shown by the Hymn of Aristonoos from Corinth, engraved on the walls of the Athenian Treasury<sup>18</sup>.

It is easier to discern both the presence of the double cult of Gaia and Themis in the early history of the sanctuary, and the relationship of the two goddesses with the oracle, at Olympia, where the antiquity of the cult seems genuine.

## Olympia

At Olympia the inscriptions do not attest the presence of Themis. Nevertheless, Pausanias (V, 14, 10) mentions an ash-altar of Ge on the so-called Gaion, with which once an oracle was associated, and an altar of Themis close to the so called *Stomion*. It is likely that the Gaion should be identified with the layer of Kronos Hill which extends as far as the temple of Hera, at the edge of that northern area of the Altis, where there is a high concentration of female cults<sup>19</sup>. The fact that the altar of Ge was made of ash and the presence of the *stomion* – perhaps a *chasma gbes* – and of the oracle, seem to confirm the authentically archaic nature of this cultic context.

Furthermore, at the time of Pausanias<sup>20</sup>, the chryselephantine statue of Themis, work of the Lacedaemonian Dorikleidas datable, according to

<sup>16</sup> Cf. SOURVINO-U-INWOOD, *I.c.* (n. 4), p. 223-224.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. C. MORGAN, *Athletes and Oracles. The Transformation of Olympia and Delphi in the VIIIth cent. B. C.*, Cambridge UP, 1990 (*Cambridge Classical Studies*), p. 133.

<sup>18</sup> G. COLIN, *FD III, 2. Épigraphe, Inscriptions du Trésor des Athéniens*, Paris 1909-1913, 191.

<sup>19</sup> H.V. HERRMANN, *Olympia, Heiligtum und Wertkampfstätte*, München, 1972, p. 29-32, 69-70.

<sup>20</sup> PAUS., V, 17, 1.

Stewart<sup>21</sup>, around the middle of the 6th cent. B.C., was still visible in the cella of Hera's temple. Next to the statue, there were the sitting Horai (daughter of the goddess and Zeus<sup>22</sup>), work of the Aeginian Smilis, a contemporary of Daedalos<sup>23</sup>. Again, we find the goddess attested in a very archaic context.

The archaeological data, recently re-analysed by C. Morgan<sup>24</sup>, testify, for the sanctuary of Olympia, to a very long pre-history, which would make the presence of a very ancient oracle of Gaia in association with a cult of Themis – as in the Delphic myth – plausible, even if Themis has never been explicitly reported as having any oracular function in Olympia.

If in Delphi there is no trace of cultic activity during the entire Protogeometric period, which marks a clear and stratigraphically well documented interruption in relation to the previous settlement, in Olympia the series of votives begun in the 10th cent. B.C. is uninterrupted. As early as the end of the 10th cent. B.C. – beginning of the 9th cent. B.C., there must have been a rural shrine in Olympia, which served as a meeting place for the local aristocracies, in which many different deities were worshipped – among them many female deities – and where the pre-eminence of Zeus must have emerged only very slowly.

In historical times an oracle of Zeus<sup>25</sup> is attested in Olympia, surely famous till the age of Pindar, who refers of Olympia as *δέσποινα ἀλαθείας*<sup>26</sup>, which then slowly declined and finally disappeared during the course of the 5th cent. B.C., in parallel with the rise of the Delphic sanctuary. It is plausible then that the classical oracle of Zeus in Olympia arose, like in the Delphic mythology, from a primitive natural oracle, held by Gaia through an intermediate oracle of Themis, although the evidence for the role of Themis is here less clear than in Delphi.

## Dodona

Extremely interesting is also the case of Dodona, the main oracle of Zeus in Greece. Here the association of Themis with Zeus, which we have already observed at Olympia, is much more explicit, even though the lack of documentation does not allow us to draw anything but partial conclusions which must remain as working hypotheses. In the 1960's, while excavating inside the Bouleuterion, Dakaris found an oracular lead tablet<sup>27</sup> datable at

<sup>21</sup> A. STEWART, *Greek Sculpture. An Exploration*, New Haven / London, Yale UP, 1990, p. 107, 242.

<sup>22</sup> HES., *Theog.*, 901-902.

<sup>23</sup> PAUS., VII, 4-7.

<sup>24</sup> MORGAN, *o.c.* (n. 17), p. 25-56.

<sup>25</sup> PINDAR, *Ol.* VI, 5; STRABO, VIII, 353.

<sup>26</sup> PINDAR, *Ol.* VIII, 2.

<sup>27</sup> S.I. DAKARIS, "Ἀνασκαφή τοῦ ἱεροῦ τῆς Δωδώνης", *ΠΑΑΗ* (1967), p. 50, 7.

the first half of the 3rd cent. B.C., in which Themis Naia appeared beside Zeus and Dione Naioi. The appearance of the goddess in this particular epithet belonging to the couple owner of the sanctuary brought Dakaris to the conclusion that Themis must have had a very important role in the sanctuary and her own temple near the *hierà oikia* – for this reason building Z was attributed to her<sup>28</sup>. Even if the arguments for the attribution of the temple are not very convincing, the importance of Dakaris' discovery cannot be ignored. The presence of Themis is confirmed by another lead tablet from the 4th cent. B.C., unfortunately very fragmentary, in which the goddess is mentioned together with Apollo<sup>29</sup>.

It comes as no surprise that Themis is associated with Zeus, of whom she was, according to Hesiod's *Theogony*, the second wife after Metis and before Hera<sup>30</sup>, while Dione is only one of Oceanus' daughters, an 'Ὠκεανίη<sup>31</sup>, and never appears as the companion of Zeus. Themis therefore seems to emerge as a figure who is both identical with and alternative to Dione, as a "shadow-wife" almost completely lacking an independent cult, whose presence is possibly justified by the co-existence of different cultural traditions. This point seems clearer in light of the relationships of the Homeric Dodona with Thessaly<sup>32</sup>, where the cult, which was wide spread in historical time, is certainly ancient and well attested by the inscriptions. The relations between Thessaly and the Epirotic sanctuary are historically confirmed by oracular lead tablets<sup>33</sup>, despite the fact that the main interlocutor of the Thessalians since the foundation of the Amphictiony, is actually the Delphic sanctuary.

Generally speaking, the presence of the Themis cult in Epirus, and specifically in Thesprotia, is confirmed by a decree of manumission from the middle of the 4th cent. B.C., found at Goumani, in which the emancipated slave is dedicated to the goddess<sup>34</sup>.

<sup>28</sup> S.I. DAKARIS, *Dodona*, Athens, Ministry of Culture, Archaeological receipts fund, 1996<sup>2</sup>, p. 20.

<sup>29</sup> DAKARIS, *l.c.* (n. 27), p. 49, 5. If therefore the goddess appears in the sanctuary *milieu* of the 4th cent. B.C., it is difficult to say exactly when her cult was introduced and if it is original or not; the same problem applies anyway to the much more certain Dione. The relation of Themis with Gaia is here less clear than in Delphi or in Olympia, and even the existence of an Earth cult in Dodona is much debated.

<sup>30</sup> HES., *Theog.*, 885-901.

<sup>31</sup> HES., *Theog.*, 353.

<sup>32</sup> Cf. HOM., *Il.* XVI, 233-248, where the Thessalian hero Achilles prays to the Pelasgian Zeus from Dodona. In historical times Pelasgiotis is one of the four main Thessalian regions, even if the interpretation of the Homeric passage is debated and the relation between the Thessalian region and the epithet of the god is not accepted from every author. In *Il.* II, 749-750 the Enienes and the Peraebi, peri-Thessalian people, are mentioned among the people "around" Dodona.

<sup>33</sup> *SGDI* II, 1557-1560.

<sup>34</sup> S.I. DAKARIS, *AD* 16 (1960), p. 207. Text in P. CABANES, *L'Épire de la mort de Pyrrhos à la conquête romaine*, Paris, 1976, p. 576, 49.

## Conclusions

We have seen that in three important inter-state sanctuaries characterised by the presence of an oracle, we find attested the figure of Themis, in the mythical pre-history, as in the reality of cult worship. It is, nevertheless, evident that the oracular function of the goddess does not appear to have been autonomous in any of these cases: at Dodona her oracular nature, like that of Dione, is inseparable from that of Zeus; at Olympia the oracle belongs, in the strictest sense, to Gaia, even if Themis seems to be well integrated in the same cultic context; at both Delphi and Olympia, she is the link between the primitive oracular power connected with the Earth and the prophecy of the younger members of the divine family, the “new” Olympic deities, Zeus or Apollo. It is moreover a fact that literary and iconographic documents testifying to the oracular nature of Themis are very rare before the 5th cent. B.C.<sup>35</sup>.

Themis does not seem, according to the cult practice, to have held any independent oracle; when the literary sources allude to Themis' possession of an autonomous oracular role this is only in the mythical past, as in the Delphic foundation myth or in the history of the marriage of Peleus and Thetis or in the tragedy of Prometheus. Themis lends her character to the oracle (importing notions of justice and right), but the oracle itself is usually held by somebody else. This can be explained by her particular role as goddess of justice and law.

The oracular nature of Themis, which derives from the one of Gaia and is generally associated with the latter, it is nevertheless not identified with it: compared with Gaia, the oracular nature of Themis is more specific, more ideologically and morally characterised; for it expresses the need for an ethical force in the divine will, which has to conform to the law and the morality of men. Having placed Themis, goddess of the rule and of the right law, at the beginning of the oracles of Zeus and of Apollo guarantees their truth and infallibility.

This oracular Themis who guides the men through her right responses (she is said to be *orthoboulos* in Aeschylus, *Prometheus*, 18) is the other side of the political Themis who was worshipped in Thessaly from the first half of the 5th cent. B.C. Here Themis appears as the goddess of the civic

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<sup>35</sup> She appears as a oracle for the first time in PINDAR, *Isthm.* VIII, 26a-45a, in connection with the myth of the marriage of Peleus and Thetis. It is because of her prophecy about the powerful son of Thetis and Zeus, who would menace the kingdom of the father that the assembly of the gods decide to give Thetis to a mortal as a wife. The myth appears again, with some differences, in AESCH., *Pr.*, 913-925 and, later, in APOLL. RHOD., IV, 790-809 and APOLLOD., *Bibl.* III, 13, 4-5. Nevertheless, a *dinos* from Sophilos (British Mus. 1971.11-1.1, ex Erskine, BEAZLEY, *Addenda*<sup>2</sup> 10) dated around 580 B.C., representing the procession of the gods – including Themis – at the marriage of Peleus and Thetis, testifies that the myth is older than Pindar, and that it was well known at Athens already in the time of Solon.



community, with the function of a poliadic deity, as the guardian of the Treasure<sup>36</sup> and of the Archives<sup>37</sup>. Furthermore, from the beginning of the 4th cent. B.C., possibly already from the end of the 5th cent. B.C., Themis is certainly being worshipped with the epithet of "Agoraia"<sup>38</sup>. This "political" function of the goddess has already been mentioned in Homer, where she convenes and breaks up the assemblies of gods and men<sup>39</sup>. An echo of this old civic nature also survives in the well known statement  $\theta\acute{\epsilon}\mu\iota\varsigma \acute{\epsilon}\sigma\tau\acute{\iota}$ ,  $\omicron\upsilon \theta\acute{\epsilon}\mu\iota\varsigma \acute{\epsilon}\sigma\tau\acute{\iota}$ , well documented in the sacred laws.

The political connotations of Themis become more explicit in her daughters, the Horai, who have the talking names of Dike, Eirene and Eunomia<sup>40</sup>. They are tied to the increase of the community by their dual function as goddesses of fertility and of seasonal cycles and as goddesses of balance and peace. It is therefore maybe not coincidental that at Olympia, which was originally a rural shrine, they have a place, already from the archaic age, in the cella of Hera's temple, together with their mother.

It will be the Delphic theology, in particular, to insist on the oracular tie with Themis and to make a political use of these relationships. This is emphasised through the specific terminology which refers to the god's responses as *themistes* and to the act of prophesying as *themisteuein*. The first term, which had already appeared in the Delphic part of the *Homeric Hymn to Apollo*, 394, is revived with the same meaning in the forth *Pythian Ode*, 54, by Pindar, a poet very close to the ideology of the Delphic clergy<sup>41</sup>. The verb *themisteuein* is used at v. 253, 293 of the same Homeric Hymn and perhaps in a paean in honour of Apollo composed by Alcaeus in the first half of the 6th cent. B.C. (fr. 307c Voigt)<sup>42</sup>, where Apollo is said to have spent one year prophesying (*themisteúsas*) in the land of the Hyperborean, before reaching Delphi. The association is even clearer in the inscription on the

<sup>36</sup> *Syll<sup>2</sup>* 2, 793. The inscription is a requirement maiden from the *koinon* of the Mondaitan to the Dodonean Zeus, about the best way to handle with the Treasure of Themis.

<sup>37</sup> B. HELLY, *Gonnoi* II, Amsterdam, 1973, 69. It is a honorary decree from Gonnoi, for a judge from Mondaia. A copy of the decree has to be collocated  $\acute{\epsilon}\nu \tau\acute{\omega} \lambda\epsilon\rho\acute{\omega} \tau\eta\varsigma \theta\acute{\epsilon}\mu\iota\delta\omicron\varsigma$  in the town of Mondaia.

<sup>38</sup> A.S. ARVANITOPOULOS, "Inscriptions inédites de la Thessalie", *RPh* 35 (1911), p. 300-301 from Magnesia; K.I. GALLIS, *AD* 28 B2 *chronika* (1973) [1977], p. 338, from Atrax.

<sup>39</sup> HOM., *Il.* XX, 4-5; *Od.* II, 68-69.

<sup>40</sup> J. RUDHARDT, *Thémis et les Hôrai. Recherche sur les divinités grecques de la justice et de la paix*, Geneve, Droz, 1999 (*Recherches et Rencontres. Publications de la Faculté des Lettres de Genève*, 14), p. 82-96, 156-158.

<sup>41</sup> Pindar also quotes Themis in connection with the Pythian oracle in *Pyth.* XI, 9-10, where the daughters of Cadmos are invited to visit the sanctuary of Apollo Ismenion in Thebes and to celebrate Themis *ierá*, Python and the *omphalós orthodíkas*. Here, together with the *omphalós orthodíkas*, Themis symbolize the "right" sacrality of Delphi.

<sup>42</sup> The fragment is known from HIMER., *Or.* XIV, 10, who has preserved a paraphrase of it.

Athenian Treasury, where the activity of Apollo is said φρικώεντος ἔξ ἀδύτου μελλόντων θέμιν εὐσεβῆ χρημοῖς εὐφρόνγυ τε λύρας αὐδαῖς<sup>43</sup>. It is through the intermediate figure of Themis that the ambiguous Loxias becomes the god of the right and unerring oracle<sup>44</sup>. In the *Homeric Hymn* to *Hermes*, of uncertain date, Apollo himself reaffirms the characters of his prophecy: it is certain, without deceptions or false signs, away from any *metis*.

The necessity of characterising the Apolline prophecy as certain originates from the existence of another opposite tradition, which insists instead on the unreliability and obscurity of the responses of the god. This need became more obvious when Delphi evolved out of the regional sphere, after the First Sacred War, and entered the international one, becoming the pre-eminent political oracle, to whom is ascribed the push to the colonization and the taking of sides in important state decisions. Such a strongly political oracle cannot be untrustworthy, and any obscurity will, if necessary, be blamed on the human inability to understand.

In conclusion, the presence of Themis, in the three analysed cases, seems to fulfil two requirements: (a) to link the oracular practice to the oldest pre-Olympian deities and to demonstrate through this, real or supposed, ancientness, venerability, respectability, credibility, and (b) to give a foundation of justice to the oracular – and political – activity practised there, as shown by the Delphic propaganda.

It is impossible to say, due to the scarcity of documentation, whether the oracular aspect of the goddess precedes the political/juridical one or vice versa. Certainly, the two functions are closely related and one should not ignore the possibility of a chronological co-existence, even if the political side seems to me dominant on the whole. It is nevertheless simplistic to attribute the oracular nature of Themis only to a late elaboration.

During the Imperial age Themis will appear again in oracular contexts. An inscription from Dydimas, dated to the 2nd-3rd cent. A.D., re-proposes the link with the Apolline oracle<sup>45</sup>. A very peculiar case is the association of Themis with Asklepios, attested by Pausanias (I, 22, 1 and II, 27, 5) for Athens and Epidauros, and from the so called *Lex sacra von der Hallenstrasse* from

<sup>43</sup> COLIN *o.c.* (n. 18), 191 v. 12-14.

<sup>44</sup> The same word *themistes* and the same verb *themisteuein* also appear in more political contexts, to indicate the activity of rulings and giving laws. Some examples of this "political meaning" can be found especially in the epic poetry: in HOMER, *Il.* I, 238-239; IX, 99; XVI, 385-389; IX, 156 the *themistes* come from Zeus and are a prerogative of the chiefs, who administrate them and must follow them in ruling the State; those who do not respect the *themistes* like the Cyclopes in *Od.* IX, 106-115, are outside of the human community; in HES., *Erga*, 9, 221 and *Theog.*, 85, *themistes* are the right sentences; in *Od.* XI, 568-571, Minos judges (*themistéuonta*) the deaths. We may also note that in the Hymn of Alceus quoted above, the meaning is, maybe with purpose, double: Apollo, with his oracles, has brought the laws in the land of the Hyperborean. For the different meanings of *themistes* and *themisteuein*, cf. RUDHARDT, *o.c.* (n. 40), p. 29-34, 40-43.

<sup>45</sup> *CIG*, 2852; cf. *SEG* 41 (1991), 952.

Pergamon which imposes to offer a *popanon* to Themis inside the *enkomiaterion*<sup>46</sup>.

It is difficult to explain the meaning of this association, which may be related to the specific form of medical *oneiromancy* (dream divination). Certainly, this form of prophecy is not related in any way to the public and political sphere, but rather to the private and individual one. This Themis who was worshipped together with Asklepios in the Imperial age has lost any political character in connection with the oracle. Her presence expresses in a certain sense the ineluctable but always right will of the god, which also decides on the illness and on the health of men.

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<sup>46</sup> C. HABICHT, *Altertümer von Pergamon*, VIII, 3. *Die Inschriften des Asklepieions*, Berlin, 1969, 161.