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# “Domination through Knowledge”: The Sacred Dimension of Bureaucracy in the Oracular Sanctuary of Dodona

**Abstract:** The debate on ancient Greek divination has received new impetus in the last decade with two main approaches: first, the political use of divination in general and oracles in particular has got a lot of attention. This keyword is connected to the variety of the different uses, the Greeks made of divination within the political field. It has been shown that the integration of oracles into the explanation of more or less political decisions had an important legitimating impact within the Greek oecumene. The second current approach centres on the completely renewed source situation for oracular consultations since the expansion of the known corpus of oracular inscriptions on lead tablets from Dodona by around 4000 new inscriptions. Questions of political communities or kings are a rarity within this material group. The majority of the texts are private oracular questions on daily life topics as marriage, progeny, well-being or economical decisions. The paper focus on whether and how the religious agents at the oracular sanctuary exerted power by the construction of (social) consensus.

**Keywords:** Dodona, sacred bureaucracy, Delphi, Siwa, tablets, cleromancy

## Introduction

A copper engraving in an illustrated edition of Blaise de Vigenère’s French translation of Philostratus’ *Eikones* shows a daytime scene at the sanctuary of Dodona, as it was imagined in the early 17<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>1</sup> The oracular oak, decorated with ornamented rings or crowns, dominates the centre of the picture; young women and men wearing

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<sup>1</sup> Vigenère 1615, 546.

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oak crowns and sashes dance around the tree. Three different groups of people – elderly men wearing oak leaves around their heads, barely vested young women waiting in a position reminiscent of Renaissance ballet and young men playing flutes and leading two oxen – gaze at the dancers. In the background one can see a round temple with a smoking altar and a female statue; far behind the horizon line shows a contemporary 17<sup>th</sup> century city skyline. The engraving corresponds with the text of Philostratus' description of Dodona only in parts.

Under the almost full-page illustration an epigram of Thomas Artus, sieur d'Embry, reveals the interpretation of oracles, priests and their relation to political entities in early modern France. The text reads as follows:

Lequel semble plus grand miracle,  
Ou qu'un chefne ait dit quelque oracle,  
Ou qu'un homme ait peu en ce lieu,  
Tenir un chefne pour un Dieu?  
Ceux cy veulent une couronne,  
Des mains des prestres de Dodone,  
Qui au lieu de les faire Roys,  
Les rendent esclaves d'un boys.  
Car leur ame toute charmée,  
Par cette chose inanimée,  
Ils en font leur deuotion,  
Leur Dieu & leur religion.<sup>2</sup>

D'Embry starts with a ridicule of the idea of the Dodonean oak being part of the divinatory process or even claiming some form of holiness. He continues describing Dodona in the same spirit in the second stanza, where he, at least in the context of this paper, reaches the essentials: D'Embry points out, that those, who like to be crowned by the priests of Dodona, will not achieve what they desire, as the priests make them to slaves of a piece of wood. In the last stanza the author explains the misfortune of the petitioners at Dodona with the priestly devotion to an inanimate thing. On the one hand, d'Embry thus delegitimises the pre-Christian ritual practice at Dodona as a form of idolatry. On the other hand, the wit of the epigram works, because in the monarchic and Christian world of the author's priests, or rather bishops, could 'make' kings – they could crown them, but also enable them to be kings in a more figurative sense of the phrase; their actions were justified by their position as intermediaries between god and the mankind.

Within the context of this paper I aim to shed some light on the historical situation at the oracular sanctuary of Dodona. My central question is therefore: Did the priests hold a position which enabled them to influence the political situation? Or are there any markers for the priestly exertion of power or influence into other spheres

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2 Vigenère 1615, 546. I thank Prof. Dr. Peter Cichon (Vienna) for his support with the interpretation of the historical writings of this epigram.

of society? And if so, how did they manage to exert their power and how can we describe its character?

The material group I aim to focus on in this matters for the major part consists of oracular enquiries of individual consultants and answers of the oracle, both written on lead tablets, from Dodona.

Depending on the topic of this volume, the power of the priests, this paper consists of the following sections: As a first step the categories 'priests' and 'power' will be recapitulated. Therefore, the modern debate on priesthood in ancient Greece will be delineated very briefly, concentrating on aspects of ritual performance and religious expertise; this section will be followed by a discussion of the term 'power' and its cognates in significance 'influence', 'domination' and 'authority'. Subsequently I will proceed with a concise introduction on the sanctuary of Zeus at Dodona, the oracular tablets and the main lines of the current debate on divination. Thereupon I will outline some functions of primarily private oracular consultations, as we can reconstruct them from the known enquiries and responses. In this context I will focus on the role the priestly committees played in ritual practice at Dodona and the reasons for the enquirers' decision for the consultation of the Dodonean oracle.

## Knowledge is Power

The nexus between power and knowledge is a commonplace in western civilisations at least since the Age of Reason. In his *Meditationes Sacrae* Francis Bacon coins the phrase "for knowledge itself is a power" or "*nam et ipsa scientia potestas est*"<sup>3</sup> in the Latin version of the text. In this passage the (absolute) power of god is characterised within the wider discussion of heresy and atheism,<sup>4</sup> while talking of human power Bacon uses "*potentia*".<sup>5</sup> Two decades later Bacon even strengthens the connection between human power and knowledge in his famous *Novum Organum scientiarum* explaining that "*scientia et potentia humana in idem coincidunt, quia ignoratio causae destituit effectum*".<sup>6</sup> Since then Bacon's equation of knowledge and power inspired political and scientific theories as well as cultural interpretations from – to name but a few examples – Thomas Hobbes to Michel Foucault, from Wilhelm Liebknecht to

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<sup>3</sup> Bacon 1597.

<sup>4</sup> On the religious context of Bacon's knowledge/power concept cf. Briggs 1996, esp. 183.

<sup>5</sup> Rossi 1996, 15.

<sup>6</sup> Bacon 1620, I 3: "knowledge and power fall into one, for where the cause is not known the effect cannot be produced".

anonymous *Sponti*-poets or from the Soviet popular scientific journal *Знание–сила* to the HBO-series *Game of Thrones*.<sup>7</sup>

Taking Bacon's equation into account power can be exerted within the sphere of politics – as for him human power acts *in politicis* – based on knowledge, that is expertise in a special field. Defining this field as the religious, we will not be able to avoid the question, whether religious experts could gain an amount of power within the political life. For Egypt or Near Eastern civilisations a positive answer has been given.<sup>8</sup> Piotr Steinkeller for instance defines the cultic elite in Babylonia as a “managerial class” with an own political agenda and enormous economic resources.<sup>9</sup> Moreover, in a paper comparing Greece and the Near East Johannes Renger asserts that Mesopotamian divination was a result of professional expertise based on rational criteria. Their actions allowed the religious experts to gain independence face to face with the ruling elite and thus to gather a certain amount of power. In Greece, he states making up a stark contrast, the Pythia prophesied in trance.<sup>10</sup>

## Priests?

Without opening the secondary theatre of war of trance-divination,<sup>11</sup> further attention should be given to the questions whether and to which degree Greek priests could be seen as religious experts and what kind of power or influence they could gather. The

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7 Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan* I 10 (London 1688): “scientia potentia est”. Hobbes, who has been secretary to Bacon in his early years, diminishes the equation by the apposition “*sed parva*”. Michel Foucault develops the concept of “knowledge-power-relations” in *Naissance de la prison. Surveiller et punir* (Paris 1975, engl. translation by Alan Sheridan, New York 1977). He assumes “that power produces knowledge [. . .]; that power and knowledge directly imply one another; that there is no power relation without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge, nor any knowledge that does not presuppose and constitute at the same time power relations.” (Foucault 1977, 27). For the interpretation of the knowledge/power-equation in the scientific debate of the 20<sup>th</sup> century cf. Rodríguez García 2001.

Wilhelm Liebknecht's speech “Wissen ist Macht – Macht ist Wissen” in Dresden 1872 stands for the socialist emphasis of the importance of national education, its variation “Wissen ist Macht, nichts Wissen macht nichts” etc. in West-German left wing student circles of the 1970ies for protest.

The journal *Знание–сила* (knowledge–power) goes back to 1926 and cites Bacon *in extenso* in its statutes; in episode *The Night Lands* (01/02) of HBO series *Game of Thrones* a comparison is made between the actions of power through knowledge and power through power.

8 For the Egyptian conception of priesthood cf. e.g. already Hall 1913, 279–285; Kees 1933, 242–257; Conde 2006, esp. 12–21; for the role of priests in Near Eastern societies cf. Maul 1999; Tsumura 1999; Zamora López 2006, 27–30; Watts 2009, esp. 41–44, 58–59. See also the papers of S. Kubisch and N. Marković in this volume.

9 Steinkeller 2017, 50–57.

10 Renger 2008, 26–27.

11 On the Pythia's trance-divination cf. now Trampedach 2015, 179–199.

answers to these questions have differed throughout the scientific debate. Even the term 'priest' in pre-Christian religious contexts has been challenged for very good reasons.<sup>12</sup> As there is no exhaustive treatment of an old problem, I would like to highlight two opposite positions: Martin P. Nilsson points out in his epochal *Geschichte der griechischen Religion* that priests gained expertise through their service and thus turned to guardians of the religious traditions<sup>13</sup> and on the other end of the scale Walter Burkert comments that "Greek religion might almost be called a religion without priests", as there was no exclusive priestly group with an own, to use modern terms, group identity.<sup>14</sup> Burkert's almost-aphorism refers to the idea, slowly evolving to form the *communis opinio*, of priestly service in Greece being part of the social and political life and not demanding special expertise evolving from other sources than passive attendance in rituals.<sup>15</sup>

In 2008 this debate has been revitalised by Kai Trampedach's and Beate Dignas' edited volume "Practitioners of the Divine. Greek Priests and Religious Figures from Homer to Heliodorus".<sup>16</sup> In eleven chapters scholars carry out the state of research and open up new perspectives on different aspects of priesthood in chronologically and geographically varying *environments* of the Greek oecumene. Furthermore, the editors attempt to establish the expression "practitioners of the divine" as a superordinate and inclusive term for the different types of religious personnel from *hiereus* to *mantis*.<sup>17</sup>

Within the scope of this paper Angelos Chaniotis' contribution entitled "Priests as Ritual Experts in the Greek World" deserves closer attention. Based on predominantly epigraphic sources the author defines priests as "performers of rituals" and underlines the manifold occasions for Greek citizens to fulfil priestly duties.<sup>18</sup> But, he points out in agreement with the already mentioned *communis opinio*, for the majority of ritual functions expertise was not indispensable. Exceptions of this rule refer particularly to mystery cults, magic, divination and purification, as there special and partly secret knowledge is central. Furthermore, Chaniotis stresses out that magic or divina-

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12 Extensively treated in Henrichs 2008, who reassembles the different scholarly positions on ancient priesthood and points out that a "widespread approach to the concept of Greek priests is the *via negativa* that defines them in terms of how the Greek evidence frustrates our Christianizing expectations of what priests and priesthoods should be" (Henrichs 2008, 4); cf. also the substantial discussion in Bremmer 2012, 220–225; cf. further North–Beard 1990, 3; North 1996, 1245; Hedrick 2007, 289–290, 295; Osborne 2009, 118–119; Bremmer 2013, esp. 160–161.

13 Nilsson 1967, 54–55; cf. Bruit-Zaidmann/Schmitt Pantell/Cartledge 1992, 54: "guardians of sacred law during their term of office, ensuring that the laws were respected and thereby guaranteeing the perpetuation of ancestral tradition."

For the sake of convenience, I will use the term priest in the sense of *hiereus*.

14 Burkert 1985, 95.

15 Stengel 1920, 33; Garland 1984, 75–76; Bremmer 1994, 6–8; Gschnitzer 2003a, 149; Gschnitzer 2003b, 36; cf. further Henrichs 2008, 9–14.

16 Dignas/Trampedach 2008.

17 Dignas/Trampedach 2008, 231–233.

18 Chaniotis 2008, 17–19.

tory rituals could have been performed by non-specialists, as long as they had access to some form of tutoring *e.g.* through a book or personal instruction; but this did not mean, he proceeds, that ritual experts lost their legitimacy.<sup>19</sup>

In any case, at least in particular ritual fields, some form of expertise was necessary divination being one of them. Thus, *manteis* and *chresmologoi* as ‘practitioners of the divine’ were experts with focus on ritual communication with the divine sphere.<sup>20</sup> With Michael Flower *manteis* even acted as skilled and charismatic religious experts, gaining a level of authority through their deeds.<sup>21</sup> The author separates the ‘seers’ from the ‘priests’ explicating that the priestly authority depended on the office and the mantic on the parentage and personal charisma of the seer.<sup>22</sup>

But how does that observation fit the situation in oracular sanctuaries? What degree of expertise can assume for oracular priests? Where is the difference between priests and prophets and how can we separate their duties? And last but not least, is there a form of power or authority adhering to all of them?

The state of research is quite complicated in these matters. Priests and prophets in oracular sanctuaries seem to differ as well from ‘regular’ priests as from *manteis* and *chresmologoi*, at the same time having a partly common ground with both groups. Concerning the articles on manifold ancient religious performers collected in the comparative volume “Priests and Prophets among Pagans, Jews and Christians” Robert Parker underlines in his introduction that in oracular sanctuaries the differences between priests and prophets were obscure.<sup>23</sup> Focussing on Imperial Asia Minor Nicole Belayche illustrates very convincingly that and why it is not possible to draw a clean line between the two groups in many contexts. According to her, priests perceived divination as a part of their genuine religious duties, acted as diviners and were thus able to strengthen their social position.<sup>24</sup>

Also beyond the idea of priests extending their socio-political status using their expertise in divination, there are strong arguments to assume that they gained some

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<sup>19</sup> Chaniotis 2008, 19.

<sup>20</sup> Dignas/Trampedach 2008, 239–241; Trampedach 2008, 227; cf. further Trampedach 2015, 480–497; Johnston 2008, 5–30, 118–119.

<sup>21</sup> Flower 2008b, 188–190; Flower 2008a, esp. 58–60; Flower 2015; cf. Trampedach 2008, 226.

<sup>22</sup> Flower 2008b, 190–191, 193; cf. further Chaniotis 2008, 29–31, where the author concentrates on the purchase of priesthoods in cults requiring expertise and figures out, that next to the purchaser an expert could be called in.

<sup>23</sup> Belayche 2013, 120–122, 135.

<sup>24</sup> Parker 2013, 13; he further denotes: “We are, however, learning to avoid easy generalisations about ancient priests, and priests who have more on their minds than just looking after good order in the sanctuaries of which they have charge. Both also show that Scheid’s critique, in relation to Roman religion, of the opposition between priest and prophet, can be extended to the Greek world: even in the great oracular sanctuaries of the west coast of Asia Minor, where one might have expected a clear differentiation between different honourable functions, the lines between the roles can be blurred.” (Parker 2013, 3–4).

sort of power or authority through genuine priestly characteristics and functions. The religious practitioners could acquire prestige through their office, just to name one possible explanation for the purchase of priesthoods or the pursuit of a “priestly *cur-sus honorum*”,<sup>25</sup> and use it as ‘symbolic capital’ in the sense of Pierre Bourdieu to improve their own position within the socio-political sphere.<sup>26</sup> On the other hand, priests were also the ones to ensure that traditional sacred laws were followed during their term of office.<sup>27</sup> Doing this, they were able to control the economics of the sanctuary, the access to the sanctuary and the performance of the rituals within the sanctuary; all three factors might have enlarged their ability to exert influence, at least into the social sphere.

Accepting the idea of blurred lines between the ritual performers and religious experts in divination (to an even higher degree in oracular sanctuaries) and beyond that, acknowledging the fact that the particular practitioners of the divine could gather some form of standing through their expertise and office, light should be shed on the second part of the aforementioned equation: power.

## Power

Before plunging *in medias res*, there is a need to consider, how to imagine, and even more important, how to describe the form of power, influence and/or authority<sup>28</sup> religious practitioners held – with respect to their expertise or performance – in the special surrounding of a Greek oracular sanctuary. The general problem to describe power from a sociological point of view has been seen already by Max Weber. For him ‘power’ (Macht) is the “Chance, innerhalb einer sozialen Beziehung den eigenen Willen auch gegen Widerstreben durchzusetzen, gleichviel worauf diese Chance beruht.”<sup>29</sup> Besides, ‘power’ is “sociologically amorphous” for it is based on coercion and

25 On the *cur-sus honorum* cf. Dignas 2003. The problem of the purchase of priesthoods is more complex; we know from epigraphical sources that sometimes volunteers were not that easy to find, cf. Dignas 2002, 250–270; Chaniotis 2008, 24–25, with a connection to honorary inscriptions for priests; Chaniotis 2013, 98.

26 For the “habitus-field-theory” cf. Bourdieu 1983; Bourdieu 1987; in matters of religion cf. Bourdieu 1985; cf. further Müller 2005; Jurt 2010; for a summary with connection to the religious and political field in ancient Greece, cf. Knäpper 2014, esp. 30–32.

27 Bruit-Zaidmann/Schmitt Pantell/Cartledge 1992, 54.

28 Imbusch 2012, 9, stresses out, dealing with power in scientific context we encounter “eine unendliche Vieldeutigkeit der mit Macht und Herrschaft bezeichneten Phänomene (etwa Autorität, Einfluss, Zwang, Gewalt, etc.)” and, additionally, partly synonymous, hardly differentiated parlance.

29 Weber 1980, 28. Out of the high and still increasing number of translations of Weber’s classic definition of power and domination (authority), see the translation of the phrase in the English version of Weber’s *Economy and Society* edited by Günther Roth and Claus Wittich, Weber 1978, 53: “‘Power’ (Macht) is the probability that one actor within a social relationship will be in the position to carry

incidental reasons, as personality or external conditions, can fortify its effects.<sup>30</sup> Petra Neuenhaus-Luciano points out, that with Weber individuals are able to exert power in social relationships but not necessarily within a social order.<sup>31</sup> In contrast to that Weber defines ‘authority’ or ‘domination’ (in German both ‘Herrschaft’)<sup>32</sup> as the “Chance, für einen Befehl bestimmten Inhalts bei angebbaren Personen Gehorsam zu finden”<sup>33</sup> and thus as a special facet of power in context of a ‘legitimate social order’. Hence the key difference between the exercise of power and authority lies in the presence or absence of a legitimate social order. Stephen Kalberg puts it in a nutshell:

In essence, authorities seek to convince themselves of their right to exercise authority and attempt to implant the view, in demarcated groups of people, that this right is deserved. If they succeed, a willingness to obey arises, in the form of patterned social action, that secures their authority far more effectively than would sheer coercion.<sup>34</sup>

Legitimate order always arises from “convention” and “law”,<sup>35</sup> causing “belief in legitimacy” and “claim to legitimacy”.<sup>36</sup> The analysis of these two, belief in and claim to legitimacy, allows Weber to classify types of authority in a second step. He assumes three ideal types of legitimation of authority, to be specific a ‘rational-legal’, a ‘traditional’ and a ‘charismatic’ type. He further denotes that these types usually occurred in mixed forms.<sup>37</sup>

Characterising the ideal types of legitimation of authority Weber figures out that ‘traditional authority’ refers to the belief in the legitimacy of ancestral traditions, ‘charismatic authority’ is linked to the extraordinary charisma of a leader and, last but not least, ‘rational-legal authority’ depends on “a belief in the legality of enacted rules and the right of those elevated to authority under such rules to issue commands”.<sup>38</sup> These rules may be as well written laws as norms. The apparatus of power

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out his own will despite resistance, regardless of the basis on which this probability rests”; on the translations cf. Wallimann/Tatsis/Zito 1977, 231.

<sup>30</sup> Weber 1978, 53.

<sup>31</sup> Neuenhaus-Luciano 2012, 97.

<sup>32</sup> The classic translation of Weber’s ‘Herrschaft’ used in *Economy and Society* (Weber 1978) is ‘domination’, but also ‘rulership’ and ‘authority’ are frequent in the scholarly debate, cf. Kalberg 2005, 173, 177 *adn.* 1. For Weber’s concept of ‘Herrschaftstypen’ the phrase ‘types of authority’ is the most frequent translation in modern research, spreading from there into other contexts. For the sake of convenience, I will use ‘authority’ for Weber’s ‘Herrschaft’.

<sup>33</sup> Weber 1980, 28; Weber 1978, 53: “Domination’ (Herrschaft) is the probability that a command with a given specific content will be obeyed by a specific group of persons.”

<sup>34</sup> Kalberg 2005, 174. On state of research on Weber’s concept of power and authority cf. the essays in Imbusch 2012; cf. further Kalberg 2005, 173–193.

<sup>35</sup> Weber 1978, 33–38; in German “Konvention” and “Recht”, see Weber 1980, 17–20.

<sup>36</sup> Weber 1978, 213; in German “Legitimitätsglaube” and “Legitimitätsanspruch”: Weber 1980, 122.

<sup>37</sup> Weber 1978, 215–300; German version: Weber 1980, 122–180.

<sup>38</sup> Weber 1978, 215; Weber 1980, 124: “auf dem Glauben an die Legitimität gesetzter Ordnungen und des Anweisungsrechts der durch sie zur Ausübung Berufenen ruhen”.



connected with ‘rational-legal authority’ is constituted as an “agency” (Behörde), where the “organisation of offices follows the principle of hierarchy” and the “members of the administrative staff should be completely separated from ownership of the means of production or administration”.<sup>39</sup> Thus, the setting of the exertion of ‘rational-legal authority’ can be described as a modern ‘bureau’, the ‘rational-legal authority’ itself as “bureaucracy”: the officials hold positions because of their certified expertise and act impartially on the basis of binding rules.<sup>40</sup> The rational character of bureaucratic administration lies in the simple formula “Herrschaft kraft Wissen”; because of that feature bureaucratic organisations tend to accumulate more power by increasing their knowledge during the exercise of their office.<sup>41</sup>

Wishing to examine the oracular performance at Dodona in accordance with Weber’s ideas of bureaucracy and rational-legal authority, the time has come to turn to Dodona.

## Oracular Sanctuary of Zeus Naios at Dodona

Placed on the north-western edge of the Greek world Dodona is home to one of the most important as well as famous oracular sanctuaries.<sup>42</sup> Herodotus claims the oracle of Zeus Naios to be the eldest of its kind in Greece.<sup>43</sup> Within the literary tradition attestations of Dodonean divination start with Homer and last beyond antiquity, as the mentioned poem of Thomas d’Embry might show. This literary tradition, treated famously by H.W. Parke in his book on “The Oracles of Zeus”, provided the main source for the scientific debate on Dodona for long time.<sup>44</sup>

In contrast to the easily accessible literary tradition Dodona’s archaeological remains were localised quite late. Furthermore, in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century the first excavations were affected by a long-lasting conflict between the excavators Zigmunt Mineyko and Konstantinos Karapanos. The latter published a book entitled “Dodone et ses ruines” in 1878<sup>45</sup> drawing a first overview of the archaeological remains of Dodona.

<sup>39</sup> Weber 1978, 218–219. German version: Weber 1980, 125–126.

<sup>40</sup> Weber 1978, 219–220. German version: Weber 1980, 126–127.

<sup>41</sup> Weber 1980, 129; Weber 1978, 225: “Bureaucratic administration means fundamentally domination through knowledge. This is the feature of it that makes it specifically rational.”

<sup>42</sup> For a general introduction on Dodona and the oracle of Zeus Naios cf. Threadwell 1970, 6–56; Dieterle 2007, 15–24, with a discussion of the scientific debate; cf. further Moustakis 2006, 15–32, 60–76; Trampedach 2015; Piccinini 2017, 17–44.

<sup>43</sup> Hdt. 2, 54–57; cf. also Bichler 2001, 172–178; Nesselrath 1999.

<sup>44</sup> The literary evidence is collected in Dieterle 2007, 275–341; De Gennaro/Santoriello 1994, 384–391; for a discussion of the literary evidence on the sanctuary of Dodona cf. Dieterle 2007, 25–69; Parke 1967, 1–93, 129–163; cf. further Moustakis 2006, 27–32.

<sup>45</sup> Karapanos 1878.

In the 1920ies the Greek Archaeological Society started undertaking excavations at Dodona at a regular basis and publishing reports in archaeological journals.<sup>46</sup> With the exception of an archaeological guide to the site and a quasi-monographic treatment of the *hiera oikia*, both written by Sotiris Dakaris,<sup>47</sup> the archaeological material was not assembled and contextualised with the literary and epigraphic sources until Marina Dieterle's 1999 dissertation.<sup>48</sup> This book seems to have stimulated research a lot, as in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century several monographs on Dodona were written almost simultaneously. Nikola Moustakis interpreted the role of the sanctuary within the Greek world, while Eric Lhôte and Esther Eidinow focussed on the edition and analysis of the oracular tablets;<sup>49</sup> only somewhat later Tomoko Emmerling challenged the *communis opinio* starting a new debate on the dating and interpretation of main archaeological structures at Dodona.<sup>50</sup>

However, from archaeological point of view Dodona seems to have been the place of cult practice since at least the Iron Age,<sup>51</sup> whereas the eldest major structures go back to classical times.<sup>52</sup> The archaeological findings, besides, do not allow a certain definition of the main divinity or its gender.

The assumption of divination prior to classical times relies on the literary tradition, where divination at Dodona, as mentioned above, is attested already by Homer. He tells us about the holy oak of Zeus and *Selloí*, male and uncultivated priests, sleep-

46 On the rediscovery and excavation history of the sanctuary cf. Dieterle 2007, 7–15; exhaustively Emmerling 2012, 12–20; cf. further Moustakis 2006, 18; Piccinini 2017, 18–21.

47 Dakaris 1971; Evangelidis/Dakaris 1959.

48 Dieterle 1999 (<https://ediss.sub.uni-hamburg.de/handle/ediss/86> [accessed 11 August 2023]) = Dieterle 2007.

49 Moustakis 2006; Lhôte 2006; Eidinow 2007.

50 Emmerling 2012; cf. also the positive reviews Dieterle 2013; Moustakis 2014; in contrast Mancini 2013; Piccinini 2017, 24; cf. further Chapinal Heras 2017.

51 There are some hints to Dodona as a cult place already before the Iron Age. Mylonopoulos 2006, 197–199, discusses the main arguments in this context: On the one hand smaller archaeological findings beginning with the Early Bronze Age may be interpreted as cult objects. Dieterle 2007, 235–262, lengthily discusses the question of cultic or domestic use of these objects and prefers to assume cultic use at least for the Early and Middle Helladic Periods; Mylonopoulos 2006, 198–199 follows her; cf. contrasting, but extremely brief Piccinini 2017, 40–41.

On the other hand, the mention of an oracle of Zeus at Dodona in Homer (Hom. Il. 225–250; Hom. Od. 14, 327–330; Hom. Od. 19, 296–299) is interpreted as a marker of an early beginning of cult practice at Dodona. Besides, the exclusive epiclesis of Zeus of Dodona, Naïos, as an *-io*-derivation to \*vapoç ‚dwelling‘ with Catherine Trümper (1986, 169–170) goes back to the second millennium BC; cf. further Mylonopoulos 2006, 198, adn. 83, with the citation of a letter of Trümper, where she explains her interpretation closer; other etymological explanations are listed in Mylonopoulos 2006, 198, adn. 80 and 81; cf. now Zolotnikova 2019a.

52 Evangelidis/Dakaris 1959, 34–35; Dakaris 1963, 35; within the younger discussion Dieterle 2007, 105–110; Mylonopoulos 2006, 188–191 and Piccinini 2017, 40–41 keep the date; Emmerling 2012, 95–115, dates the eldest building down to the late 4th century and disputes the interpretation as temple of Zeus.

ing on the ground with unwashed feet,<sup>53</sup> with no further explanation of the modes of divination. We might assume that these priests have been specialised to some degree, as they are known only from this very specific context.

In classical times we get to know a second tradition about Dodonean divination through Herodotus' report on its aetiological myth. Two black doves, coming from Thebes in Egypt, initiated the oracles of Zeus at Siwa and Dodona, where one dove sat down on the on the holy oak and articulated the first oracle ever given in Greece. Herodotus explains that the doves are to be understood as priestesses speaking a foreign language and were still called *péleiai* in his times.<sup>54</sup>

These two main stories on the early divination at Dodona have been interpreted a lot as well in antiquity as in research. Already Arthur Bernard Cook collected the sources very precisely in his book on Zeus, while Parke discussed in even more detail.<sup>55</sup> Without taking up the whole debate on the *aition* and the modes of divination at Dodona, I wish to summarize the main information given within the literary tradition relevant to this article: we hear of priestesses and priests of the oracular sanctuary of Dodona, a holy oak or even a sacred grove, divination via interpretation of the rustling of the oak and later via lot. But it is unclear whether our sources mirror different rituals in the course of time, a development, or different traditions leading into a kind of 'syncretism'. There may also be literary inventions or anachronisms. When it comes to the priests – their gender, their functions and the mode of their articulation of the god's will – we have furthermore to deal with adaptations leaned on the Delphic model.<sup>56</sup>

Thus, since the literary sources are as well manifold as to some degree contradictory, it seems hazardous to delineate a tenable long-term model for the divination practice at Dodona within the scope of this article. Furthermore, from archaeological point of view, the sanctuary gained importance in later classical times, as it got extended in the 4th and 3rd centuries, what coincides with the growing number of oracular consultations on lead lamellae.

To sum up, concerning the modes of divination, the role and functions of the priests at Dodona we should act on the assumption of collegia of male and female priests taking up different duties and presumably using differing divination methods within the course of time. At least from the Classical period onwards we have to deal

<sup>53</sup> Hom. Il. 16, 225–250.

<sup>54</sup> Hdt. 2, 53–57. A fragment of Hesiod (Frg. MW 240) might, but not necessarily as the respective verse is incomplete, refer to doves also. If the doves are complemented rightly, the fragment (derived from a scholion on Sophocles' *Trachiniae*) would show that the story of the oracle spreading doves of Dodona has been considered old in Herodotus' age; for the discussion on this passage cf. the brief commentary of Marg 1970, 529–530; Parke 1967, 63–67.

<sup>55</sup> Cook 1914, esp. 363–370; Parke 1967, esp. 20–45; 69–76; Johnston 2008, 60–66; cf. further Threadwell 1970, 36–44; Zolotnikova 2019b.

<sup>56</sup> Johnston 2008, 82; Trampedach 2015, 194–195.

with consultation of the oracle via lot, but also the parallel use of other oracular techniques – both mirrored through the oracular enquiries found on thousands of lead lamellae.

## Oracular questions on lead tablets

In a nutshell, the scientific audience knows of questions to the oracle written on lead tablets since the early days of excavations at Dodona. But, Dodonean oracular lead tablets did not gain much scientific attention in the course of 20th century. A lot of them have been sold on the art market and can now be seen at the British Museum, the Louvre, the Berlin Antiquities Collection or due to a donation of Karapanos at the Athenian National Museum. Already Karapanos himself published a bulk of oracular inscriptions in his aforementioned book on Dodona<sup>57</sup> and different single pieces were published by the later excavators.

Due to Éric Lhôte the major part of those widely scattered publications is now collected and the inscriptions were reedited following standardised guidelines in one volume.<sup>58</sup> The added translations and commentaries may have helped to open the discussion on Dodona tablets within the scientific community. One year later Esther Eidinow's historical analysis of the Dodona tablets set another starting point for the newer discussion on divination, by the way completing the re-collection of the known texts.<sup>59</sup>

In 2013, after many years of work, a publication of the biggest part of Dodonean oracular lamellae from Ioannina entitled with "Ta christiria elasmata tis Dodonis ton anaskaphon Evangelidi" was finally released. As the main editors of this corpus Sotiris Dakaris, Ioulia Vokotopoulou and Athanasios-Phoivos Christidis died, a team under the aegis of Sotiris Tselikas finished the book. This publication raised the number of known oracular inscriptions from Dodona by over 4000.<sup>60</sup>

The Berlin collection of Dodonean lead tablets counts 96 lamellae and, as far as we know, belongs to the first archaeological campaign at Dodona of Karapanos and/or Mineyko. Parke describes this excavation in his book on the oracles of Zeus as a slightly controlled plundering.<sup>61</sup> Without going into detail, the Berlin Museums seem to have bought their collection of Dodonean lead tablets from Mineyko somewhen in the last decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>62</sup> In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century the tablets have been

<sup>57</sup> Karapanos 1878, 68–82.

<sup>58</sup> Lhôte 2006.

<sup>59</sup> Eidinow 2007.

<sup>60</sup> Dakaris/Vokotopoulou/Christidis 2013 (further DVC); cf. Souref/Vasileiou 2017; for statistics cf. Bonnechère 2017.

<sup>61</sup> Parke 1967, 94–95.

<sup>62</sup> For the history of the collection cf. Greifenhagen 1981.

prepared for publication,<sup>63</sup> but due to the course of World history this plan has ever been realised.

In the post-war period the Berlin tablets seem to have been supposed not exploitable, as Lhôte reports in his book. He cites a letter of Pierre Cabanes, who – without specification of time or involved persons – states that one of his students has been to (still divided) Berlin to see the tablets and declared to have found them in an enormously bad condition.<sup>64</sup> This opinion about the Berlin collection of oracular lamellae reflected in this comment is not tenable. In fact, the condition of the Berlin collection is very comparable to that of the tablets published within the DVC, where also only a few tablets have been preserved as a whole; some have been folded or rolled; most tablets have been reused, some even several times and last, but not least, the inscriptions show a variety of scripts and dialects. From the point of view of the oracular lead lamellae the oracle of Dodona has been frequented by different groups and individuals from around the Greek world between the sixth century BC and first century AD.<sup>65</sup>

## 'Sacred Bureaucracy' at Dodona?

But, who were the people seeking for advice at Dodona and why did they go there? Were the Dodonean priestly collegia able to 'make kings' as the early modern high-brow Thomas d'Embry imagined the ancient people to believe? Or what other kind of influence could they generate within the social and political sphere? And if there was a form of priestly power or authority, what mode of divination would have been connected to her?

Within the scientific debate the political importance of oracles has been disputed for a long time. This concentration on politically important questions of public enti-

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<sup>63</sup> Cf. Kekulé von Stradonitz/Winnefeld 1909. The preparation of a publication is further documented by photographs of the most promising lamellae, which have been ordered by "Dr Dörner" in 1936 and are still in the possession of the Berlin Antiquities Collection.

<sup>64</sup> Lhôte 2006, 7.

<sup>65</sup> Lhôte 2017, 41, Lhôte 2006, 11–21, sets a *terminus ante quem* for oracular practice (and thus all oracular inscriptions) at Dodona with the destruction of the sanctuary by L. Aemilius Paullus in 167 BC. But the historical picture seems to be more complicated. As Frank Daubner (Daubner 2018, 152–153, 166, *adn.* 94, 237–238) shows with a hint to Mithridates' pillage in 88 BC (Cass. Dio. 30–35, 102, 2), the sources rather point to a plundering of the sanctuary than to a destruction under Pain 167 BC. He denotes that the sanctuary might have lost importance for the benefit of Butrint, but even the *Naia* have been celebrated again soon after 167 BC; in 64/63, with Daubner, L. Manlius Torquatus (Dion Hal. 1.19.3, Λεύκιος Μάλλιος) has visited the sanctuary and written down oracular responses. Jessica Piccinini (Piccinini 2013a, 181–185) also questions the 'traditional' date of the destruction of Dodona extensively. She figures out that the evidence for Dodona has even grown in Latin sources later than 88 BC and she further strengthens the importance of the sanctuary in Augustan times by connecting a group of eight identical statue bases with an inscription honouring Livia.

ties, such as kings, *poleis* or *ethne*, results from the tradition of oracular records within the sources: For a long time the biggest amount of oracular consultations was attested for Delphi and through the literary tradition via ancient collections of so called *chresmologoi* and historiography; by far the most oracular enquiries transmitted this way dealt with political questions and went back to public consultants;<sup>66</sup> the few epigraphically preserved oracular responses, which have been known for a long time, fitted the bill.<sup>67</sup> Thus, oracles have been seen as places of big politics and attestations of private concerns being brought up in oracular sanctuaries, as attested *e.g.* in Plutarch,<sup>68</sup> analogously have been interpreted as markers of decline.

A milestone of the more elaborate discussion of political importance of oracles can be found in Robert Parker's 1985 article *Greek States and Greek Oracles*, where the author emphasises the role of oracles within decision making processes as well as in connection to the legitimization of decisions;<sup>69</sup> although referring to individual consultants and political communities in his introduction, Parker's attention shifts to the political *modi operandi* of oracles. Furthermore, the author claims that powerful entities would never have stopped their plans because of negative oracles<sup>70</sup> and thus points to the tension between the acceptance of oracles within the political field on the one hand and the will to pursue the own political agenda on the other.

Within the current debate, the role of oracles *in politicis* has been underlined very much – to name but a few – by Pierre Bonnechère, who shows how the Greeks used to embed the consultation of oracles into their political long term considerations, Julia Kindt and Nino Luraghi, who discuss the narrative strategies of oracular stories within historiography,<sup>71</sup> or Kai Trampedach, who treats the different aspects of divination within the political sphere *in extenso*.<sup>72</sup> One of his essential objections for this article is to delineate within the framework of a case study on democratic Athens, how special circumstances could change the way oracles have been treated in political contexts: to a certain point in time the Athenians stopped using oracles for the legitimization of decisions in favour of disputing them within the *ekklesia*.<sup>73</sup>

The Dodonean lead tablets do not fit very well into this 'traditional' interpretation of oracles as political hotspots, as only 8% of the material known before 2013 is of

66 Bonnechère 2017 collects and evaluates the statistical data on oracular consultations.

67 Oracular responses, considered to be authentic: Fontenrose 1978, 244–267 (Delphi); Fontenrose 1988, 179–208 (Didyma); Stauber/Merkelbach 1996 (Klaros).

68 Plut., de Pyth. or.; de E; de def. or.

69 Parker 1985.

70 Parker 1985, 325.

71 Cf. Kindt 2016; Luraghi 2014.

72 Cf. Bonnechère 2009; Bonnechère 2012; Bonnechère 2013; Trampedach 2015.

For the newer discussion on divination cf. further Rosenberger 2001; Rosenberger 2013; Johnston/Struck 2005; Motte/Pirenne-Delforge 2013; Bowden 2013; Johnston 2008; Eidinow 2007, esp. 10–41; Eidinow 2013; Eidinow 2014.

73 Trampedach 2015, 277–294, 468–470.

public origin<sup>74</sup> and the majority of the lamellae points to an intense use of the oracle on the part of individuals dealing with private matters. Even the younger debate on the role of oracles within the Greek world has been led considering their private use exceptional, until Esther Eidinow clearly revealed the commonness of private frequentation of oracles by individuals and their significance for the daily life in antiquity in her book.<sup>75</sup>

The increase of evidence for oracular consultations at Dodona with the publication of the DVC in 2013 confirmed the hypothesis of the first and foremost individual and private consultation of the oracle listing, as Pierre Bonnechère works out evaluating the material statistically, only 2% of public consultations among the exploitable inscriptions.<sup>76</sup>

Within the Berlin material no public consultation can be made up for sure. Thus, the tendency is obvious: The Dodonean oracle had a solid basis of private consultation. With regard to contents the Berlin collection can be used for demonstration of the spectrum of oracular enquiries at Dodona: First of all, a lot of names or parts of names are stated; secondly, typical oracular vocabulary – that is the invocation formula, the naming of Zeus Naïos or Dione (to some degree also of other gods or goddesses), verbs indicating the communication with the gods (such as ἐπικοινωνώ, ἐρωτάω, αἰτέω), the formula to which god or hero should be prayed or offered to succeed (τυγχάνω) or to be good or better (αγαθός, λωίω, ἀμείνω) – is used. But, and this is third, the subject of the questions often stays dark, albeit there are some hints, as the denomination of family members (mostly γυνή, but also θυγάτηρ, παῖς) or the concentration on issues as health, rescue, well-being or substinence. The analysis of the texts of the DVC allows us to add questions about work, travel, emigration, law, slaves, money etc. To sum up, the Dodonean lamellae mirror the very own fears and problems of the daily life of oracular consultants and offer by far the most authentic oracular enquiries by individuals from antiquity.

Accepting such a predominance of individual oracular consultations on lead lamellae from Dodona, the question arises, how to integrate this conclusion into the framework of Greek divination. Do ritual practice and *raison d'être* at Dodona severely differ from the model developed along with other oracular sanctuaries, especially Delphi? Should we think of entirely distinct oracular systems in Delphi and Dodona, the first being a place of 'big' politics, the latter of 'small' private concerns? And if so, what would that mean for the position of the Dodonean priests and their ability to exert power or influence?

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<sup>74</sup> Bonnechère 2017, 73.

<sup>75</sup> Eidinow 2007, esp. 42–138; cf. further Eidinow 2013; Eidinow 2014.

<sup>76</sup> Bonnechère 2017, 75.



Well, obviously the lead tablets contain oracular enquiries differing from the ‘politico-centric’ norm, transmitted within literary sources and inscriptions on stone;<sup>77</sup> but this does not mean that they show a completely other phenomenon. The difference in the nature of evidence seems important, too. Because Dodona allows us to listen to the many voices of oracular consultants, not only to those who were more or less politically important and/or could afford to publish the answer, and thus to contextualize and remember it in public,<sup>78</sup> the Dodonean lamellae might simply display another facet of the reality of divinatory practice.

Regarding the religious agents at Dodona, the Weberian concept of ‘rational-legal authority’ seems to open an approach for the interpretation of their role. Based on the outlined observation that divination, in the way it took place in oracular sanctuaries, was characterised by some form of special knowledge,<sup>79</sup> the priestly collegia at Dodona may be considered as officials in the sense of a Weberian ‘bureau’. Their expertise within the field of divination could then be interpreted as mirrored in the sources by the ‘foreign’ language of the *péleiai* or the strange habits of the *Selloi* and related to the different modes of divination, as the interpretation of the rustling of the oak and later the lot; this special knowledge, furthermore, qualified these religious experts for their duties within the sanctuary.

The consultants, on the other hand, were the specific group, which, in Weber’s words, ‘obeyed their command’ and hereby accepted the priestly authority. On the basis of this assumption, the role of the Dodonean priests within society and politics could be contextualised even better by shedding light on the methods and manners of ritual communication – of asking and answering – at Dodona.

My first point in this context is, how to imagine the ritual communication between the human and the divine at Dodona, practically: The variation of the used scripts, the rare use of the local Dodonean alphabet, the syntactically diverging formulae, the different dialects and last but not least the unequal abilities in writing suggest that the questions have been written down on lead by the consultants themselves. The reason why ‘ordinary’ people, who might have needed help, wrote by themselves, is not easy to envisage. Depending on an interpretation of the oracular scenes of Sophocles’ *Trachiniai* Piccinini proposes, that our tablets must have been some kind of bearers of memory on the occasion of the oracular consultation.<sup>80</sup> If this was the case, the lamellae would have had nothing to do with the rituals performed at Dodona, what would explain, why the priests did not write the questions down. Although this is thought-provoking hypothesis, the fact that many tablets have been reused, seems to speak against an exclusive memory-scriptuality. Another explanation for the

77 Cf. Bonnechère 2017, 69–70, for statistics on way of tradition, findspots and topic of non-Dodonean oracular consultations.

78 Eidinow 2013, esp. 36.

79 See 4–6.

80 Piccinini 2013b.



hand written questions to the oracle could lie in the idea of ritual necessity.<sup>81</sup> If the lead tablets would have been part of the ritual act, the consultants needed to write them down. The oral markers, which Piccinini finds within the inscriptions, could then reflect the performative character of the tablets. Moreover, choice of lead as writing material seems to favour this interpretation, as lead had a magical significance in antiquity.

Second, I wish to focus on the *modi* of ritual communication Dodona. These also have been discussed primarily on the basis of ancient literature.<sup>82</sup> This means, revealing of aetiological myths – the oak and the doves – and adaptations along the Delphic model – as the insertion of the idea of trance-related divination – played an important role. Apart from that, lot, used in many parts of Greek everyday life, has been presented to be a divination technique at Dodona already by Cicero whose source was Callisthenes.<sup>83</sup> The DVC lamellae confirm that fact. Cleromancy can be derived from positive and negative decision questions (DVC 1124 A: ἔ τύχοιμι κα τὰν ἡοδὸν τοῦταν; 'Will I be successful this way?'; DVC 2089 A: ἦ νικάσω [ - - ] ἐν Ἀμπρα[κίαι - - ]; 'Will I win at Ambrakia?'; DVC 2169A: αἶ μοι [μένοντ]ι ἐν τ[ῇ] οἰκίαι ἦ νῦν [οἰκ]έω; 'Should I stay in the house I live in now?'), short possible answers (DVC 1509 B: ἐνγενεῖται. 'It will happen.'), or the hint for the god, which tablet to draw (DVC 2229: τοῦταν ἀνελε. 'Take this one!'; DVC 2475: αἶ δὲ μή, οὔτος. 'If not, take this one!'), on the lamellae, as Parker and Chaniotis point out.<sup>84</sup> Folding and labelling the lamellae with signs, names and parts of names seems also to belong to this divination technique.

But as cleromancy cannot give answers to any questions formulated at Dodona, divination there is not to be characterised by the lot-oracle alone. This can be seen within the problematic complex around legal issues, even more if capital crimes are involved;<sup>85</sup> and moreover, in the use of a very frequent formula 'τίνι κα θεῶν εὐχόμενος;' 'to which god should one pray?' to be good, better or to succeed (αγαθός, λωίω, ἀμείνω, τυγχάνω). This formula can be extended, so that goddesses (θέαι) or heroes (ἥρωι) accompany the gods, sacrificing (θύω) accompanies the praying. Sometimes a more or less complex asking formula can be added, the phrase can be gendered or varied dialectally.<sup>86</sup> Not a small amount of oracular enquiries follows such free formulae. This makes them inconvenient for cleromancy, but already gives a hint to the mode of the prospective oracular responses: the questions at least suggest the execution of ritual acts.

<sup>81</sup> The interpretation of 'killing with one's own hand' for αὐτοφόνος (*Lex Sacra* from Kyrene) αὐτοπέκτας (*Lex Sacra* from Selinous) could show the same idea, for editions and literature cf. Knäpper 2018, 60–62.

<sup>82</sup> Graf 1997 collects the sources and the interpretations in very concise way; Trampedach 2015, 179–199; but cf. Johnston 2008, 74–75; Rosenberger 2001, 32–33.

<sup>83</sup> Callisthenes FGrH 124 F 22 = Cic. div. 1,76; 2,69.

<sup>84</sup> Parker 2015; Chaniotis 2017, 55–58, both with examples.

<sup>85</sup> Parker 2015, 114 outlines the importance of such questions for the understanding of the oracle of Dodona; Chaniotis 2017, 58–63, where the author collects DVC texts connected to legal disputes.

<sup>86</sup> Instances for this formula are legion, cf. e.g. DVC 20 A; 352 A; 436 A; 558 B; 1864 A.

That answers to such questions are a type of their own, even if there is a clear disproportion in numbers and hundreds of questions face only few answers, has been shown by Jean-Mathieu Carbon, whose collection of five, more elaborate oracular answers prescribing ritual acts outlines the importance of these consultations for our understanding of the oracle of Zeus Naios.<sup>87</sup>

Within the scope of this paper, I aim to concentrate on two of the texts, Carbon treats.<sup>88</sup> One of them belongs to the Berlin collection and has been presented by Reinhard Kekulé von Stradonitz and Herrmann Winnefeld to the Emperor William II. in a splendid coffee table book on occasion of his 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 1909. Showing another tablet – dealing with the very aristocratic issue of successful marriage – in more detail, the oracular answer with the Berlin Collection number 10755,32 has only been translated into German briefly. Thus, its approximate design has been known for quite a long time, when Lhôte retranslated it into Greek.<sup>89</sup>

The oracular answer is placed on an opisthographic tablet; broken on the left side. On side A an inscription of three lines is curved. It shows a usual oracle consultation of a certain Philotas. Due to the fragmentary state of the lamella the topic of his question stays unclear, but it seems plausible to expect the question to which gods or heroes should be offered to achieve a special goal. The script is constant and belongs to the end of fourth century BC.

On side B an answer of the oracle is written. There is no need that the inscriptions belong together, but there is also no hard contra-argument. The inscription also belongs to the end of the fourth century BC and consists of a list of gods. As the inscription is still inedited I can only give a brief abstract of the original text I currently prepare for publication.<sup>90</sup>

Ineditum; Berl. Coll. No. 10755, 32 (Kekulé von Stradonitz–Winnefeld 1909, 52–53; Lhôte 2006, 142; SEG 56,662; Carbon 2015, No. 1).

To Zeus Naios a bowl/ a table (ἄβαξ).

To Zeus Olympios a piglet (ἀπαλίον).

To Zeus Eukles a piglet.

To Zeus Bouleus a libation.

To Kora a piglet.

To Artemis Agemona a statue(ette).

To the Heros Archagetas a libation.

To Zeus Bronta[- - -]

a piglet (?).

This answer of Zeus illuminates the *modus operandi* of the oracle. First of all, the patterns and mechanisms of oracular answers transmitted through literature or epigra-

<sup>87</sup> Carbon 2015.

<sup>88</sup> Carbon 2015, no. 1–2.

<sup>89</sup> Kekulé von Stradonitz/Winnefeld 1909, 52–53, only translation; Lhôte 2006, no. 142, retranslation into Greek (SEG 56, 662).

<sup>90</sup> For an edition and commentary of the text cf. Knäpper (forthcoming).

phy on stone are not effective here. The inscription is neither ambiguous nor is it constructing a special relationship between the god and the consultant. This oracular response is a sober ritual instruction. The god communicates through his priestly committee that a series of rituals should be fulfilled, no verse, no riddles.

Carbon, who discusses the inscription thoroughly on the basis of Lhôte's translation, outlines that the list of gods moves from general to particular – starting with "the local and the lofty sky, to agricultural concerns, and, in turn, to leadership".<sup>91</sup> For this reason and because of the sum of the offerings, he prefers to interpret this oracular answer as referring to a public consultant. Diego Chapinal Heras goes a step further and connects this inscription with a dedication to (Artemis) Hagemona at Rodotopi,<sup>92</sup> the extraurban sanctuary of ancient Passaron, capital of the Molossians, proposing an additional cult of the goddess at this sanctuary, usually associated with Zeus Areios.<sup>93</sup> Although this hypothesis is partly speculative at the current state of debate, it discloses an interesting aspect of Dodonean ritual communication: if he is right, the oracular responses, handed out by the priestly collegia, would take the geographical/cultural origin of the consultant into account.

Under the half dozen more elaborate oracular responses prescribing ritual actions from Dodona another inscription bears the same logic.<sup>94</sup> Considering its date, mixed dialect and content already Lhôte pleads for an Athenian-Dorian origin.<sup>95</sup> What is interesting about this tablet is that there might be a relationship between the question on side A and the answer on side B. Both inscriptions belong to fourth century BC. The consultant is an Athenian woman, Nike, who asks a question dealing with juridical adversaries (ll. 5–6: τὸς ἀντιδίκος καὶ τὰς φοικίας) on behalf of her husband. The response given by Zeus and transmitted by the priests of Dodona reads as follows:

Ed.: Evangelidis 1952, 305, No. 22; Lhôte 2006, No. 141 (SEG 15, 391); Carbon 2015, no 2:

| <b>B a</b>                          | θεός. | God!                                   |
|-------------------------------------|-------|--|
| Διὶ Πατρόϊω ΠΕΡΙ...ΙΟ <sup>96</sup> |       | To Zeus Patroios [a special offering]. |
| Τύχαι λοιβάν,                       |       | To Tyche a libation.                   |
| Ἡρακλεῖ, Ἐρεχθεῖ,                   |       | To Heracles, to Erechtheus,            |
| 5 Ἀθάναι Πατρόϊα(ι).                |       | To Athena Patroia [other offerings?].  |

<sup>91</sup> Carbon 2015, 77.

<sup>92</sup> AE 1914, 239, no. 20.

<sup>93</sup> Chapinal Heras 2018, esp. 64–65; problematic is the epithet Bronta[ios] in l. 2, as it is only attested in Asia Minor, cf. Carbon 2015, 76, *adn.* 13; but as the epithet is connected to a core attribute of Zeus, it might be formed spontaneously, for Zeus Bront- cf. Cook 1925, 839–841.

<sup>94</sup> Carbon 2015, no 2; Lhôte 2006, no. 141 (SEG 15, 391).

<sup>95</sup> Lhôte 2006, 293, thinks of an Athenian woman married to a Dorain man.

<sup>96</sup> The alternative offerings are ἱερεῖον or περιβώμιον, cf. Carbon 2015, 78; Matuszewski 2020, 9, analysing offerings, which have been sacrificed without an altar, insists to chose the latter.

The list of gods refers to Athens (Erechtheus, Zeus Patroios and Athena Patroia) and the situation of the consultant (Heracles stands for the overcoming of struggles, Tyche for success). The mentioned two cases are not isolated; several other examples of rituals in connection to traditional deities can be found within the DVC.<sup>97</sup> It seems very likely that the ritual acts evolving from this and analogous oracular responses were to be performed at home, in this case in Athens. Thus, the prescribed rituals could construct a form of ritual publicity for the consultant's problems for a second time (the first being at Dodona) and spotlight their solution in accordance with the Dodonean oracle within the respective political and social community.

Thereby the ritual acts evolving from oracular enquiries could help to arrange a social consensus for the problems of the consultant: If the god accepts the consultant's way of solving problems, what could his fellow citizens criticise? The consultant has shown that he/she deliberated long term considerations, problems or fears in an interaction process with the divine sphere, got a religious backstop for his/her issues and finally brought certainty into the imponderables of life.<sup>98</sup>

With view to the religious agents at Dodona, oracular responses prescribing ritual instructions show how the priestly committees at Dodona developed authority: they obtained special expertise within the strict rules and procedures of the oracular practice and thus created a matrix of actions which enabled them to communicate the god's will to the consultants. The rituals evolving from oracular responses announced the priest's ability to create consensus on controversial matters in all corners of the Greek oecumene and confirmed their authority. The legitimization of their authority originated from the functioning of the oracular system and thus from the sacral sphere; hence the oracular consultations allow to extrapolate a 'sacred dimension' of bureaucracy à la Weber.

In her treatment of the epigraphic evidence for religious authority in Greece Claire Taylor sums up that this form of authority was not configured through dogma, sacred scripts or a generally exceptional position of priests. One of the many ways of representing authority was "through monumentalizing of decisions, processes, and religious practice through epigraphic display",<sup>99</sup> another might have been through prescribing rituals in the course of oracular consultation and thus legitimating consensus as well as social peace.

Within this bureaucratically functioning system the priests could exert influence into society and under certain circumstances – when public entities consulted the oracle – even into the world of politics. Although only a smaller part of oracular lead lamellae from Dodona refers to political entities, in these cases the priestly authority

<sup>97</sup> Carbon 2015, no. 3–5, treats three further inscriptions: DVC 2393 A; 2035 A; 1122 B; cf. further DVC 274 A; ritual actions for other gods or heroes: DVC 1299 B; 2430 (?).

<sup>98</sup> Rosenberger 2001, 68, denotes comparable motivation for oracular consultations in Context of African cultures.

<sup>99</sup> Taylor 2016, 102.

could even reach the political sector and in very special cases, when kings consulted the oracle,<sup>100</sup> the priests were able to 'make kings'. They could legitimate the kings' decisions and create a publicity to their enterprises in the same way as they created consensus for the concerns of common people, although the fascinating question, whether the priestly committees had an own political agenda, should be discussed elsewhere.

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**100** For consultations of kings or at least dealing with their issues cf. DVC 41 A; 191 A; 2111 A; 2148 A; 3160 A.

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