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Prophesizing for kings and emperors: Apollo of Didyma and the epigraphic culture of Miletos

Prorokowanie dla królów i cesarzy: Apollo z Didymy a kultura epigraficzna Miletu

Abstract: This paper deals with Apollo's Oracle at Didyma in the Hellenistic and Roman age when it fully belonged to the polis of Miletos. Authors bring information on Didyma's oracles to Alexander the Great, Seleukos I, Nikomedes II, Diocletian and Licinius. Inscriptions refer to oracles to other Seleukid kings. Indirect evidence points to oracles for Augustus, Trajan and Julian. These oracles correlate with periods of strong local activity attested by the epigraphic curve for Miletos. Sometimes an oracle set off a chain of events leading to material and political gains for Miletos. Didyma's prophesies for kings and Emperors contributed enormously towards building Miletos' prestige and position in the Hellenistic and Roman age.

Keywords: Didyma, oracle, Miletos, Seleukos I, Octavian Augustus, Trajan, Emperor Julian, epigraphic curve

Streszczenie: Ten artykuł jest poświęcony wyroczni Apollona w Didymie w czasach hellenistycznych i rzymskich, gdy znajdowała się ona pod władzą Miletu. Źródła lite-

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rackie poświadczają wyrocznie dla Aleksandra, Seleukosa I, Nikomedesa II, Dioklecjana i Licyniusza, inskrypcje wskazują na wyrocznie dla innych Seleukidów. Przepuszczalnie wydano też wyrocznie dla Augusta, Trajana i Juliana Apostaty. Występuje silna korelacja między tymi wyroczniami a okresami aktywności Miletu poświadczonymi przez krzywą epigraficzną. Niejednokrotnie wyrocznia prowadziła do zysków materialnych i politycznych Miletu, a prorokowanie dla królów i cesarzy przyczyniało się do budowania prestiżu tego miasta.

Słowa kluczowe: Didyma, wyrocznia, Milet, Seleukos I, Oktawian August, Trajan, Julian Apostata, krzywa epigraficzna

Introduction

The Oracle at Didyma, situated some 19–20 km from Miletos along the Sacred Way and closely tied with this city, was a venerable oracular establishment established in the early Archaic age, silenced during the Persian Wars – when its guardians, the Branchidai, were relocated by Xerxes to Sogdiana – and re-launched in 331 BCE.¹ From this moment until at least the reign of Emperor Julian, it operated as an institution run by the polis of Miletos. In Hellenistic and Roman times, the Oracle was run by a *prophetes*, a Milesian official selected by lot, while the will of Apollo was pronounced by a *prophetis*.² This paper handles this phase of the Oracle, best documented in our sources. Throughout the Hellenistic and Roman times, it gained an enormous reputation as an infallible Oracle,³ together with Delphi and Klaros belonging to “the big three of

¹ The standard history of Didyma is J. Fontenrose, *Didyma: Apollo's Oracle, cult, and companions*, Berkeley 1988. On Didyma in the age of the Persian Wars and on re-launching the Oracle under Alexander, see K. Nawotka, *The Nourisher of Apollo. Miletos from Xerxes to Diocletian*, Wiesbaden 2023, pp. 11–14, 45–47, with reference.

² K. Nawotka, *Prophetes, prophetis and the epigraphic culture of Miletos*, in: *Serving the gods. Artists, craftsmen and ritual specialists in the ancient world*, eds. A. Kubiak-Schneider, B. Schneider, Wiesbaden 2025, pp. 112–122.

³ In an epigram commissioned in the 3rd century by the people of Rhodes (*I. Didyma* 83, ll. 6–7): θέσπισεν ἀψεύστων/ πολλάκις ἐκ τριπόδων. See M. Nissinen, *Ancient prophecy: Near Eastern, biblical, and Greek perspectives*, Oxford 2017, p. 307 for a discussion of infallible oracles in the Imperial age.

Apollonian prophecy”.⁴ Although most surviving oracles were issued on the request of private people and cities, intriguing questions pertain to Didyma’s dealings with rulers of great empires of Hellenistic and Imperial times and to temporal and perhaps causal links between its oracular activity and shifts in local inscribing as indicative of the general prosperity of the polis, its constitution and willingness to monumentalise the views of the Milesian elite.

The majority of Didyma’ oracular responses between Alexander and Late Antiquity are known from inscriptions, but none delivered to a monarch is quoted directly by epigraphic evidence. Literary sources offer information on oracles delivered to two kings and to two emperors, one oracle per monarch: Alexander the Great, Seleukos I, Diocletian and Licinius. In addition, Ps.-Skymnos alludes to an oracle or oracles delivered to Nikomedes II of Bithynia.⁵ This paper argues that more than three prophecies can be tentatively identified based on literary and epigraphic evidence: one for Octavian (Augustus) and Trajan each, and almost certainly more than one for Seleukos I, Antiochos I, and his successors, including Antiochos III. It is likely that Apollo of Didyma delivered a response (or responses) to Emperor Julian as well. As it seems, most monarchs in question did not visit Didyma personally but the response was given to them by ambassadors. There is nothing unusual in this procedure; it was the norm rather than the exception when it came to a king or a foreign entity consulting any Oracle. This paper looks at the correlation between these nine (or more) oracular responses and the epigraphic curve for Miletos, the polis who governed Didyma in Hellenistic and Roman times. Bearing in mind the very substantial epigraphic output of Miletos (over 2,700 in-

⁴ Lucian frequently lists these three Oracles in one phrase, e.g. *Alex.* 29, 43, *DDeor.* 18.1. In general, see R. Stoneman, *The ancient oracles. Making the gods speak*, New Haven 2011, pp. 84–100; A. Lampinen, *Θεῶν μεμελημένε Φοίβω. Oracular functionaries at Claros and Didyma in the Imperial period*, in: *Studies in ancient oracles and divination*, ed. M. Kajava, Rome 2013, pp. 49–88; M. Nissinen, op. cit., pp. 224, 307. The quotation is from *ibidem*, p. 224.

⁵ Ps.-Scymnus 56–57; J. Fontenrose, *Didyma: Apollo’s Oracle...*, p. 191 (Historical Responses 16).

scriptions) overwhelmingly concentrated in the Hellenistic age and the Early Empire, the epigraphic curve is a fair measure of social and political activity in the polis at a given moment. Superimposing attested oracles for major kings and emperors on the epigraphic curve may help address the question of a causal, not only temporal, link between the intense oracular activity and the development of the polis. An attempt is made here to assess the oracular activity of Didyma as a means of grabbing the attention of the main monarchs of this era on behalf of the city that administered the Oracle. Admittedly, influencing policies of great territorial powers must have been a difficult but necessary task for a city, important though it was, even if after the Archaic age it never played in quite the same league as Rhodes in the Hellenistic age or Ephesos under the Empire.⁶

The oracle for Alexander

In his narrative of Alexander's sojourn in Egypt in the early spring of 331 BCE, Kallisthenes related the arrival of an embassy from Miletos who announced the resumption of activity of the Oracle at Didyma, after a hiatus of approximately 150 years, and its (spontaneous) oracles concerning the descent of Alexander from Zeus, Alexander's future victory at Gaugamela, the death of Darius, and the war with Agis III of Sparta.⁷ This is generally accepted as a factual, if a bit embellished, report by Alexander's official historian and not as a *vaticinium ex eventu*.⁸ If Strabo's words are understood literally, Didyma issued a few oracles for Alexander (μαντεῖα πολλά), but since they were delivered to the king by the Milesian embassy as a bundle, I treat them here as one oracle. The Milesian embassy and the oracles it delivered are generally interpreted as an attempt to obtain Alexander's financial assistance to rebuild the temple at

⁶ See K. Nawotka, *The Nourisher of Apollo...*, pp. 49–76, 101–143 on the relatively undistinguished position of Miletos in Hellenistic and Roman times.

⁷ Callisth. *BNJ* 124 F14a, ap. Str. 17.1.43.

⁸ J. Fontenrose, *Didyma: Apollo's Oracle...*, p. 181 (Historical Responses 4); K. Nawotka, *The Nourisher of Apollo...*, pp. 195–196.

Didyma, just as Priene and Ephesos were granted subsidies enabling them to construct their principal shrines.⁹ Miletos failed this time but tried its luck again either at the end of Alexander's rule or in the beginning of the age of Successors.¹⁰

The oracles for the Seleukids

In the foundation story of Antioch-on-the-Orontes and Daphne, Libanios says of Seleukos I: "For in addition to these signs from heaven which met his eyes, there also impelled him an oracle which he had received from Miletos, as support against his adversity, from which he had drawn courage. This oracle promised him good fortune, and commanded him, when he won the rule over Syria, to make Daphne sacred to god".¹¹ Libanios may have conflated stories of two oracles in one sentence. The first, known from Diodoros and Appian,¹² is certainly spurious since it would have been pronounced in 334 BCE, almost three years before Didyma was back in business.¹³ The second is probably genuine: Seleukos surely asked for a propitious oracle before founding Antioch in Syria and the great temple of Apollo adjacent to it.¹⁴ Since Didyma was the only

⁹ B. Haussoullier, *Études sur l'histoire de Milet et du Didymeion*, Paris 1902, p. 4; W. Günther, *Das Orakel von Didyma in hellenistischer Zeit. Eine Interpretation von Stein-Urkunden*, Tübingen 1971, p. 22; H. W. Parke, *The Oracles of Apollo in Asia Minor*, London 1985, pp. 42–43; J. Fontenrose, *Didyma: Apollo's Oracle...*, p. 16; K. Nawotka, *The Nourisher of Apollo...*, p. 45.

¹⁰ Ps.-Callisth. 3.33.18; K. Nawotka, *The Alexander Romance by Ps.-Callisthenes. A historical commentary*, Leiden–Boston 2017, p. 255.

¹¹ Lib. Or. 11.99 (translation by G. Downey [with minor adjustments]).

¹² D.S. 19.90.4; App. Syr. 283–284.

¹³ J. Fontenrose, *Didyma: Apollo's Oracle...*, pp. 215–216 (Quasi-Historical Responses 41, 42); K. Nawotka, *Apollo, the tutelary god of the Seleucids, and Demodamas of Miletus*, in: *The power of individual and community in ancient Athens and beyond. Essays in honour of John K. Davies*, eds. Z. Archibald, J. Haywood, Swansea 2019, pp. 268–269.

¹⁴ H. W. Parke, op. cit., p. 46; J. Fontenrose, *Didyma: Apollo's Oracle...*, pp. 216–217 (Quasi-Historical Responses 43) lists this oracle as not genuine, not taking into account the possibility of Seleukos making his enquiry by letter.

Milesian oracular establishment, it must be meant in Libanios' phrase "ἐκ Μιλήτου δεξάμενος [scil. τὴν μαντείαν]" or "an oracle which he received from Miletos".¹⁵

This episode belongs to the story of building special relations between the house of Seleukos and Miletos, a process initiated approximately 300 BCE by Demodamas son of Aristeides, a Milesian friend and general of Seleukos I and Antiochos I. This process is known from an epigraphic dossier from Didyma and Miletos.¹⁶ Its focal point was the temple at Didyma whose construction works were to be financed from the proceeds from the major arcade funded by Antiochos (Ἀντιόχου στοά)¹⁷ in 299 BCE, while in 288/7 BCE Seleukos sent sacrificial animals and other gifts to Didyma.¹⁸ A major ideological shift ensued from proclaiming the divine protection by Zeus in the early years of Seleukos I, in line with the religious policy of Alexander the Great,¹⁹ to Apollo becoming the founder and divine protector of the dynasty in the early to mid-Seleukid age.²⁰ It culminated in the recognition of Seleukos as the son of Apollo, as we learn from a poem from Erythrai dated either to 281 BCE or to 274.²¹

¹⁵ W. Günther, *Das Orakel von Didyma in hellenistischer Zeit...*, p. 70; H. W. Parke, op. cit., p. 46; K. Erickson, *The early Seleukids, their gods and their coins*, London 2019, p. 75; K. Nawotka, *The Nourisher of Apollo...*, p. 57.

¹⁶ *I. Didyma* 114, 479, 480, 481; *Milet* 158. See K. Nawotka, *Apollo, the tutelary god of the Seleucids...*, for discussion of these events.

¹⁷ *Milet* 145, l. 29, also *Milet* 270, l. 7.

¹⁸ *I. Didyma* 424. See K. Nawotka, *The Nourisher of Apollo...*, pp. 58–59 on the scale of these donations, by far outstripping the usual Seleukid standards.

¹⁹ K. Nawotka, *Seleucus I and the Seleucid dynastic ideology. The Alexander factor*, in: *Iran and the transformation of ancient Near Eastern history. The Seleucids (ca. 312–150 BCE). Proceedings of the third Payravi conference on Ancient Iranian history, UC Irvine, February 24th–25th, 2020, Wiesbaden 2023*, pp. 87–100.

²⁰ K. Nawotka, *Apollo, the tutelary god of the Seleucids...*

²¹ *I. Erythrai* 205, ll. 75–76: ὑμνεῖτ<ε> ἐπὶ σπονδαῖς Ἀπόλλωνος κυανοπλοκάμου/παῖδα Σέλευκον, ὃν αὐτὸς γείνατο χρυ[σ]ολύρας. The date: 281 BCE: J. U. Powell, *Collectanea Alexandrina. Reliquiae minores poetarum Graecorum aetatis Ptolemaicae, 323–146 A.C., epicorum, elegiacorum, lyricorum, ethicorum*, Oxford 1925, p. 140; A. Primo, *La storiografia sui Seleucidi. Da Megastene a Eusebio de Cesarea*, Pisa 2009, pp. 103–104;

As the oracle for Alexander demonstrates, the proper way of declaring a king son of a god was by words of a god, delivered by his Oracle. In all probability, the decades of close ties between the house of Seleukos I and Apollo of Didyma came to a climax in an oracle proclaiming him son of Apollo.²² Once this happened, Miletos and the Seleukids were tied by bonds of kinship (*syngeneia*).²³ One may think that some other oracle(s) were issued for Antiochos I, the only known recipient of *promanteia* or the privilege of priority in consulting the Oracle.²⁴ In his letter to the *boule* and *demos* of the Milesians, Seleukos II makes a reference to benefactions afforded by his father (Antiochos II) and his ancestors (Seleukos I and Antiochos I) to Miletos “because of oracles issued by your temple of Apollo Didymeus”.²⁵ The letter speaks of oracles in the plural (χρησιμούς), so, if read literally, there must have been at least two. Even if one of them was the oracle proclaiming Seleukos I son of Apollo, one additional response from Didyma seems to be attested in this letter. It could be proclaiming Antiochos II god (Theos) by Milesians, as Appian says,²⁶ although we have not a shred of evidence that this was done through an oracle issued at Didyma. Founding a colony or re-founding an existing city was an obvious occasion to ask Apollo for an oracle and bearing in mind the enormous scale of colonization effort of the two first

K. Nawotka, *Apollo, the tutelary god of the Seleucids...*, p. 274; K. Erickson, op. cit., pp. 77–78; 274 BCE: C. Habicht, *Gottmenschen und griechische Städte*², München 1970, p. 85.

²² E. R. Bevan, *The House of Seleucus*, London 1902, vol. I, p. 121, n. 1; F. Stähelin, *Seleukos. 2*, in: *RE* IIA, Stuttgart 1923, col. 1232; C. Habicht, op. cit., p. 86.

²³ Apollo as the ancestor of the Seleukids: *OGIS* 212 (= *IMT* 190), 237 (= *I. Iasos* 4), 219 (= *IMT* 187) with Robert, *BEp* 1955, 122. Kinship with Miletos: *OGIS* 227 (= *I. Didyma* 493); D. Musti, *Sull'idea di syngeneia in iscrizioni greche*, “ASNP” 1963, vol. 32, pp. 230–231.

²⁴ *I. Didyma* 479 of 300/299 BCE.

²⁵ *I. Didyma* 493, ll. 2–5: τῶμ προγόνων ἡμῶν καὶ τοῦ πατρὸς πολλὰς καὶ μεγάλας/ εὐεργεσίας κατατεθειμένων εἰς τὴν ὑμετέραμ πόλιν διὰ τε/ τοῦς ἐγδεδομένους χρησιμούς ἐκ τοῦ παρ' ὑμῖν ἱεροῦ/ τοῦ Διδυμέως Ἀπόλλωνος; J. Fontenrose, *Didyma: Apollo's Oracle...*, does not list these oracles.

²⁶ App. Syr. 344.

Seleukids,²⁷ one would expect a number of responses issued by Apollo of Didyma to his direct descendants, Seleukos I and Antiochos I. One example which Seleukos II might have in mind is the case of the early Seleukid colony Seleukeia-Tralleis which referred to Apollo of Didyma as “the founder of the kindred relationship” between Miletos and Seleukeia.²⁸ Since Tralleis was not a Milesian colony, the only way kinship between these two cities could have come into existence was through Antiochos I who refounded Tralleis having asked Apollo of Didyma for an oracle prior to his action.²⁹ Then we learn from a decree of Iasos in honour of Antiochos III from approximately 195–190 BCE of the king’s behaviour: “acting in accordance with the benevolence that he has inherited from his ancestors, and the god who is founder of the king’s family has given testimony in support of the king”.³⁰ Since the divine ancestor of the Seleukid dynasty was Apollo Didymeus, his testimony must have taken the form of an oracle issued by Didyma whose historicity should not be doubted.³¹ Thus, the epigraphic evidence suggests two, or maybe more, Apollo oracles for Seleukid kings after Seleukos I and no later than

²⁷ App. Syr. 295–299; G. M. Cohen, *The Seleucid colonies. Studies in founding, administration and organization*, Wiesbaden 1978, p. 11.

²⁸ Milet 143B, ll. 64–66: πέμπεσθαι δὲ καὶ θεωροὺς τοὺς/ [σ]υγγελέσοντας θυσίαν τῷ Ἀπόλλωνι τῷ Διδυμῆϊ τῷ ἀρχηγέτῃ τῆς οἰκῆι/[ό]τῃτο[ς]. This inscription contains two decrees, of Miletos and of Seleukeia-Tralleis. The Milesians speak of *syngeneia* and the Seleukeians of *oikeiotes* (the quotation is from the decree of the later). The beginning of the Milesian decree is much damaged and the appropriate passage (ll. 2–4) in Rehms restorations reads: [καὶ/ νῦν? Σελευκεῖς διὰ προγόνων οἰκείως χρώμενοι τῷ δήμ[ωι τῷ/ Μιλησίων διὰ τὴν ἀπὸ τοῦ θεοῦ] συγγένειαν. See S. Saba, *Isopoliteia in Hellenistic times*, Leiden–Boston 2020, pp. 62–63 about the controversy about the concurrence of the two terms.

²⁹ See K. Nawotka, *The Nourisher of Apollo...*, pp. 61, 81 on recognition of the “kinship through the god” by Miletos.

³⁰ *I. Iasos* 4, ll. 52–56: πᾶσσων/ τῇ διὰ πατέρων ὑπαρχούσῃ αὐτῷ πρὸς τοὺς Ἑλληνας/ εὐεργεσίαι, ὃ τε θεὸς ὁ ἀρχηγέτης τοῦ γένους τῶμ/ βασιλέων συνεγεμαρτύρηκεν τῷ βασιλεῖ παρακα/λῶν μεθ’ ὁμονοίας πολιτεῦεσθαι; transl. by J. Fontenrose, *Didyma: Apollo’s Oracle...*, p. 185.

³¹ J. Fontenrose, *Didyma: Apollo’s Oracle...*, pp. 184–185 (Historical Responses 9).

195–190 BCE which puts the total number of oracles for the Seleukids at three or more.

A putative oracle for Octavian

Although there is no direct evidence of an oracle from Didyma delivered to Augustus, I advance the hypothesis that one was issued, in light of the plethora of evidence pertaining to strong and lasting ties of Octavian, then Augustus with Miletos and Didyma. Since the case for the oracle for Octavian is circumstantial, the discussion here touches upon a few coincidences which justify this hypothesis: the unusual ties of Octavian and his family with Miletos, the role of Octavian in restoring to Miletos the status of free city, Apollo in Octavian's ideology, the birth story of Octavian and a possible role of an oracle from Didyma in spreading the idea of Apollo siring Octavian.

I begin with the ties of Octavian and his family with Miletos. As an unparalleled show of favour to Miletos, Augustus assumed the office of eponymous *stephanephoros* twice in 17/16 BCE and in 7/6 BCE, as did his two adopted sons Gaius Caesar in 1/2 CE and Tiberius in 8/9 CE.³² The sixth *stephanephoric* list of Miletos begins with his term of office: οἶδε μολπῶν ἡσύμνησαν·Αὐτοκράτωρ Καῖσαρ θεοῦ υἱός.³³ This is truly remarkable in the light of the well-known reluctance of Roman emperors to hold eponymous Greek magistracies with only 37 attested examples, among them Augustus in two cities, Gaius Caesar in three, Tiberius in four.³⁴ Miletos was granted by Augustus with the new land created every

³² *Milet* 127, ll. 22, 31; *I. Didyma* 412. Dates: Herrmann, *Milet* VI.1, p. 167; R. K. Sherk, *The eponymous officials of Greek cities V. The register. Part VI. Sicily*, "ZPE" 1993, vol. 96, pp. 267–295; K. Nawotka, *The Nourisher of Apollo...*, p. 111.

³³ *Milet* 127, ll. 1–2, Augustus' second *stephanephoric*: *Milet* 127, ll. 13.

³⁴ R. K. Sherk, *op. cit.*, pp. 285–286; T. Boulay, A.-V. Pont, *Chalkêtôr en Carie*, Paris 2014, pp. 84–102 list 47 Emperors and members of their families who assumed eponymous magistracies in the East. On imperial eponymy as a privilege: L. Robert, *Études épigraphiques et philologiques*, Paris 1938, p. 150; T. Boulay, A.-V. Pont, *op. cit.*, pp. 111–113.

year in the progradation of the delta of the Maeander and Didyma received from him tax privileges.³⁵ Most important of all, in 39/8 BCE Miletos regained the status of free city it had lost as a result of its involvement in the First Mithridatic War on the wrong side.³⁶ This event is one of only three recorded in lists of eponymous *stephanephoroi* of Miletos which cover, albeit with lacunae, the period from 525 BCE until Tiberius.³⁷ Hence, in the eyes of the Milesian elite, the restoration of freedom belonged to a handful of the most noteworthy events in the history of their city.

Now the second issue: the role of Octavian in restoring to Miletos the status of a free city. We do not know how the decision to restore freedom to Miletos was made on the Roman side, i.e. who stood behind the presumed vote in the Senate.³⁸ Although the East was at that time the province of Marcus Antonius, there is no reason to assume that he sponsored the motion in the Senate.³⁹ In general, there is little evidence to say with certainty who of the triumvirs was behind granting freedom to Greek cities in this period.⁴⁰ Marcus Antonius, unlike other mighty Romans active in the East in the second half of the 1st century. BCE is conspicuously absent from Milesian epigraphy. This leaves us with Octavian, who most likely supported or even sponsored the motion in the Senate. He was effectively in control of Rome in 39/8 BCE when the embassy from Miletos

³⁵ *Milet* 1131; P. Herrmann, *Milet unter Augustus. C. Iulius Epikrates und die Anfänge des Kaiserkults*, “MDAI(I)” 1994, vol. 44, pp. 210–215.

³⁶ *I. Didyma* 218, 342; K. Nawotka, *The Nourisher of Apollo...*, pp. 105–107, 110–111.

³⁷ *Milet* 122–128.

³⁸ The decision was made in Rome, as we learn from an inscription commemorating the successful Milesian embassy: *I. Didyma* 218II, ll. 3–5: *πρεσβεύσας δὲ καὶ εἰς Ῥώ/[μην καὶ ἀπο]καταστήσας τήν τε πρό/[τερον ἔκκ]λησίαν τῶι δήμῳ καὶ τοὺς νόμους.*

³⁹ G. Kleiner, *Das römische Milet. Bilder aus der griechischen Stadt in römischer Zeit*, Wiesbaden 1970, p. 11 wanted, for no stated reason, to attribute agency in this act to Marcus Antonius.

⁴⁰ R. Laignoux, *Reconnaître Octavien et ses concurrents en Anatolie: les allégeances asiatique durant les guerres civiles de la fin de République*, in: *Auguste et l'Asie Mineure*, eds. L. Cavalier, M.-C. Ferrière, F. Delrieux, Bordeaux 2017, pp. 231–232.

led by its best diplomat Lysimachos son of Sopolis presented the case.⁴¹ There is no direct proof for Octavian's agency but a lot of circumstantial evidence, including the later testimonies of exceptional ties between Miletos and Augustus and his family, but not limited to them. The dossier of 20 documents related to the triumvirs' dealings in the East and concentrated in 39 BCE shows that Octavian was far more active than Marcus Antonius in forging ties with Greek cities in the East.⁴² Since Octavian had full legal right to communicate with cities within the province of Marcus Antonius and to act on their behalf,⁴³ there would have been nothing unusual in his sponsoring the bill to restore freedom to Miletos.

One wonders what might have prompted Octavian to do things for Miletos which his adopted father never had, for all the efforts of his Milesian friends, to name only Epikrates who had ransomed Julius Caesar abducted by pirates in 76/5 BCE.⁴⁴ Something extraordinary must have happened to endear a second-class provincial city to a world leader. We may be sure that while in Rome in 39/8 BCE Lysimachos invoked all and any means necessary to accomplish his mission and this recalls the biggest immaterial asset of Miletos: Apollo of Didyma.

This brings us to the third issue of Apollo in Octavian's ideology. Apollo had become a favourite god of Octavian by 36 BCE when the future emperor dedicated the temple of this god on Palatine, on the site of the lightning strike, one of only four new temples he built in Rome.⁴⁵ Although ostensibly, the spot for the temple was selected by the god through the thunderbolt, a skeptical mind cannot exclude the possibility that *haruspices* advised Octavian to dedicate the temple to Apollo because this

⁴¹ K. Nawotka, *The Nourisher of Apollo...*, pp. 110–111.

⁴² A. Raggi, *Triumviral documents from the Greek East*, in: *The triumviral period. Civil War, political crisis and socioeconomic transformations*, ed. F. P. Polo, Zaragoza 2020, pp. 431–449; R. Laignoux, *op. cit.*, pp. 216–217, 219–220.

⁴³ F. Millar, *Triumvirate and Principate*, "JHS" 1973, vol. 63, p. 57; A. Raggi, *op. cit.*, p. 445.

⁴⁴ K. Nawotka, *The Nourisher of Apollo...*, pp. 108–109.

⁴⁵ Vell. 2.81.3; Suet. *Aug.* 29.3; D.C. 49.15.5; O. Hekster, J. Rich, *Octavian and the thunderbolt. The temple of Apollo Palatinus and Roman traditions of temple building*, "CQ" 2006, vol. 56, pp. 149–168, with ample reference.

god had already been close to the triumvir.⁴⁶ For all later reverence shown to Apollo, Octavian's choice of this god in 36 BCE was far from obvious and so far no good explanation has been provided by modern scholarship.⁴⁷ Needless to say, Apollo was an important god in Rome, amply represented among coin images from the early-3rd century BCE until the end of Republic. But despite its alleged role in the early years of *gens Iulia*,⁴⁸ Apollo is inconspicuous in Caesar's image-making. In the years of the civil war between the *triumviri* and the anti-Caesarian *Liberatores*, the image of Apollo graced coins associated with Brutus, not with Octavian, while ancient authors convey conflicting accounts as to which side used the name of Apollo as the watchword at Philippi.⁴⁹ In later years, Apollo became the favourite god of Octavian/Augustus, as illustrated by Apollonian features in Augustus' coin imagery, statues and portraits,⁵⁰

⁴⁶ Suet. *Aug.* 29.3. O. Hekster, J. Rich, op. cit., p. 157; C. H. Lange, *Res Publica constituta. Actium, Apollo and the accomplishment of the triumviral assignment*, Leiden–Boston 2009, p. 40.

⁴⁷ O. Hekster, J. Rich, op. cit., pp. 160–162.

⁴⁸ The temple of Apollo Medicus was dedicated in 431 BCE, by consul Cn. Iulius (Liv. 4.25.3, 29.7). C. H. Lange, op. cit., p. 41, n. 91 argues that this story is not significant as evidence for the long tradition of particular ties between gens Iulia and Apollo since it was a prodigy temple, dedicated to avert pest, not a temple erected by a victor. The identification of Apollo with Veiovis (Gell. 5.12.11), to whom Iulii erected an altar, is speculative; J. Fischer, *Folia ventis turbata. Sibyllinische Orakel und der Gott Apollon zwischen später Republik und augusteischem Principat*, Göttingen 2022, p. 264.

⁴⁹ Coins: RRC 503/1, 504/1, 506/2; they all bear an inscription BRVTVS IMP. or BRVT. IMP. Watchword 'Apollo': Val. Max. 1.5.7 (the triumvirs), Plu. *Brut.* 24.7 (Brutus); C. H. Lange, op. cit., pp. 42–43.

⁵⁰ J. Liegle, *Die Münzprägung Octavians nach dem Sieg von Actium und die augusteische Kunst*, "JDAI" 1941, vol. 56, pp. 92–94; J. Pollini, *Man and god. Divine assimilation and imitation in the Late Republic and Early Principate*, in: *Between Republic and Empire. Interpretations of Augustus and his principate*, eds. K. A. Raaflaub, M. Toher, Berkeley 1990, p. 349; R. S. Lorsch, *Augustus' conception and the heroic tradition*, "Latomus" 1997, vol. 56, p. 795; D. E. E. Kleiner, *Semblance and storytelling in Augustan Rome*, in: *The Cambridge Companion to the Age of Augustus*, ed. K. Galinsky, Cambridge 2005, pp. 208–209; B. Levick, *Augustus*, Harlow 2010, pp. 203–204; F. R. Nocchi, *Commento agli Epigrammata Bobiensi*, Berlin 2016, p. 249.

placing Apollo and Diana in a chariot on top of the commemorative arch put up to celebrate Octavian's natural father C. Octavius,⁵¹ attributing to Apollo's and Diana's protection victories over Sextus Pompeius, favourite (and son) of Neptune and Marcus Antonius, the new Dionysus,⁵² and erecting Apollo's temple next to Octavian's house, connected by a ramp with the forecourt of the temple, as well as associating the birthday of Octavian with a holiday of Apollo.⁵³ But this process lasted almost twenty years, with many stages, one of which was selecting Apollo as Octavian's heavenly protector in the struggle with Dionysiac and oriental-leaning Marcus Antonius.⁵⁴

The earliest identifiable instance of Octavian showing affinity to Apollo was the notorious banquet at which Octavian appeared dressed as Apollo, known from Suetonius and dated by him to the period 43–36 BCE.⁵⁵ The conventional date in modern scholarship, not based on evidence of ancient sources but on academic tradition, is approximately 40 BCE,⁵⁶ but it could have been as late as 36 BCE, to coincide with erection of the temple. The mature stage of the process of Octavian's affinity with Apollo was achieved after Actium when Apollo's image appeared on Octavian's coinage beginning with denarii dated to 29–27 BCE.⁵⁷ More

⁵¹ Plin. *Nat.* 36.36; F. S. Kleiner, *The arch in honor of C. Octavius and the fathers of Augustus*, "Historia" 1988, vol. 37, pp. 347–357.

⁵² L. R. Taylor, *The divinity of the Roman Emperor*, Middletown 1931, pp. 120–122; C. H. Lange, *op. cit.*, pp. 41–42.

⁵³ P. Zanker, *Der Apollontempel auf dem Palatin*, in: *Città e architettura nella Roma imperiale* ("AnalRom" Suppl. 10), Odense 1983, pp. 23–25; *idem*, *The power of images in the age of Augustus*, Ann Arbor 1988, pp. 49–53; J. Scheid, *Augustus and Roman religion. Continuity, conservatism, and innovation*, in: *The Cambridge companion to the age of Augustus*, ed. K. Galinsky, Cambridge 2005, pp. 178–179; J. Fischer, *op. cit.*, pp. 266–268.

⁵⁴ P. Zanker, *Der Apollontempel auf dem Palatin*, pp. 21–22; *idem*, *The power of images in the age of Augustus*, pp. 48–65.

⁵⁵ Suet. *Aug.* 70; L. R. Taylor, *op. cit.*, p. 120; R. S. Lorsch, *op. cit.*, p. 798.

⁵⁶ L. R. Taylor, *op. cit.*, p. 119; R. S. Lorsch, *op. cit.*, p. 798; D. Ogden, *Alexander, Scipio and Octavian. Serpent siring in Macedon and Rome*, "Syllecta Classica" 2009, vol. 20, p. 46; F. R. Nocchi, *op. cit.*, p. 249.

⁵⁷ RIC I 271, 272. Tripod and laurel wreath, which may be associated with Apollo, appeared earlier, in 37 BCE: BMCRR Gaul 115.

or less at that time the arch commemorating C. Octavius and crowned with Apollo in a chariot was erected (ca. 31–28 BCE) and the temple of Apollo on Palatine consecrated in 28 BCE.⁵⁸ The final stage of Apollo's advancement in Augustean religious policy was the transfer of the Sibylline Books from the temple of Capitoline Jupiter to that of Apollo on Palatine traditionally dated to 12 BCE, but perhaps housed there already in 28 BCE.⁵⁹

In this context, one needs to ponder the story of Apollo siring Octavian which is the fourth item in this discussion. It is known from two principal sources. Suetonius says, after Asklepiades of Mendes, a little known author of the late 1st century BCE/early 1st century CE:⁶⁰ "I find in the theological books of Asklepiades the Mendesian, that Atia, upon attending at midnight a religious solemnity in honour of Apollo, when the rest of the matrons retired home, fell asleep on her couch in the temple, and that a serpent immediately crept to her, and soon after withdrew. She, awaking upon it, purified herself, as usual after the embraces of her husband; and instantly, there appeared upon her body a mark in the form of a serpent, which she never after could efface, and which obliged her, during the subsequent part of her life, to decline the use of the public baths. Augustus, it was added, was born in the tenth month after, and for that reason was thought to be the son of Apollo. The same Atia, before her delivery, dreamed that her bowels stretched to the stars, and expanded through the whole circuit of heaven and earth. His father, Octavius, likewise, dreamt that a sun-beam issued from his wife's womb".⁶¹ Dio Cassius

⁵⁸ P. Zanker, *Der Apollontempel auf dem Palatin*, pp. 21–40; F. S. Kleiner, op. cit., p. 348.

⁵⁹ Suet. *Aug.* 31.1; J. Scheid, op. cit., p. 191; J. Fischer, op. cit., pp. 325–337.

⁶⁰ S. Gambetti, *BNJ* 617.

⁶¹ Suet. *Aug.* 94.4: "In Asclepiadis Mendetis Theologumenon libris lego, Atiam, cum ad sollemne Apollinis sacrum media nocte uenisset, posita in templo lectica, dum ceterae matronae dormirent, obdormisse; draconem repente irrepsisse ad eam pauloque post egressum; illam expergefactam quasi a concubitu mariti purificasse se; et statim in corpore eius exitisse maculam uelut picti draconis nec potuisse umquam exigi, adeo ut mox publicis balineis perpetuo abstineret; Augustum natum mense decimo et ob hoc Apollinis filium existimatum. eadem Atia, prius quam pareret, somniauit inte-

preserves an abbreviated version of this story stating that Julius Caesar made Octavian his heir because Apollo had sired him.⁶² The veracity of Dio can be questioned since in all probability he drew on Suetonius as his source, embellishing the story of Octavian's conception with a reference to Caesar, the principal point of reference for Octavian.⁶³ Yet, the story of the divine conception of Octavian was not an invention of the Antonine age. Almost certainly it belongs in the beginning of his political activity, if we agree with the early dating of an epigram of Domitius Marsus on Atia containing an obvious reference to the divine conception of her son: "Ante omnes alias felix tamen hoc ego dicor,/ Sive hominem peperit femina sive deum".⁶⁴ In later antiquity, the birth story of Octavian resurfaced in Sidonius Apollinaris.⁶⁵

To most modern scholars, this story reads as reworking of the birth legend of Alexander the Great,⁶⁶ although Robin Lorsch has noticed that siring a major historical character by a god in the form of a giant snake was a topos of ancient literature, applicable not only to Alexander and Octavian.⁶⁷ Apart from Alexander, the best known character sired by Zeus/Jupiter in form of a giant snake was Scipio Africanus. The earliest evidence of the story of his conception is Hyginus,⁶⁸ an author of the age of the

stina sua ferri ad sidera explicarique per omnem terrarum et caeli ambitum. somniauit et pater Octavius utero Atiae iubar solis exortum".

⁶² D.C. 45.1.2.

⁶³ F. Millar, *The study of Cassius Dio*, Oxford 1964, pp.85–87; C. H. Lange, op. cit., p. 45; J. Fischer, op. cit., pp. 268–270.

⁶⁴ *Epigrammata Bobiensia* 39. The date before 27 BCE: F. R. Nocchi, op. cit., pp. 248–250.

⁶⁵ Sidonius Apollinaris *Carmina* 2.121–125.

⁶⁶ E.g. L. R. Taylor, op. cit., pp. 119, 233; A. R. Bellinger, *The immortality of Alexander and Augustus*, "YCS" 1957, vol. 15, pp. 91–100; D. Kienast, *Augustus und Alexander*, "Gymnasium" 1969, vol. 76, pp. 430–445; A. B. Bosworth, *Augustus, the Res Gestae and Hellenistic theories of apotheosis*, "JRS" 1999, vol. 89, pp. 1–18; G. Weber, *Kaiser, Träume und Visionen in Prinzipat und Spätantike*, Stuttgart 2000, p. 145; F. R. Nocchi, op. cit., p. 248.

⁶⁷ R. S. Lorsch, op. cit., pp. 790–799.

⁶⁸ Hyginus ap. Gellius 6.1.1; D. Ogden, *Alexander, Scipio and Octavian...*

Second Triumvirate, and it was widely repeated in the age of Augustus and later.⁶⁹ There are two caveats to placing the story of the conception of Octavian in this topical tradition: the god who sired Octavian was Apollo, not Zeus as in most other stories, and the strange motif of a mark on Atia's body. They both belong to another story of the divine conception: of Seleukos I, known from Justin, after Pompeius Trogus, an author of the age of Augustus: Laodike had a dream in which she conceived a son with Apollo and her son, Seleukos, and all his descendants had a birth mark on the thigh, in the shape of an anchor.⁷⁰ It looks that the unique tale of the divine conception of Octavian borrowed from both story lines.⁷¹

Since siring an important character by a god under the guise of a giant snake was already topical in the age of Augustus, it is not surprising that stories of this nature were told about Octavian, too. The unusual parts are those shared with the conception story of Seleukos. Bearing in mind the early Hellenistic roots of the tale of Seleukos as the son of Apollo,⁷² the only possible explanation is that the motif of Apollo siring Octavian was borrowed from the story of Seleukos.⁷³ There is no hint in our sources of how and why this happened. Daniel Ogden tries to explain the Seleukid source of the birth story of Octavian by posing a question: "But it is also more than a little curious that Octavian-Augustus or his flatterers should have found it profitable to blend an admixture of Seleucid imagery into a birth myth so firmly based on Alexander's. Can it have constituted

⁶⁹ Divine father of Scipio in the shape of a snake: C. Opius ap. Gellius 6.1.1; Liv. 26.19.7–8; Quint. *Inst.* 2.4.19; Sil. 13.636; Aurelius Victor, *De viris* 49; D.C. 16.57.39. The same for Aratos and Aristomenes: Paus. 2.10.3, 4.4.14.7; for Galerius Aurelius Victor, *Epitome* 40.17; F. W. Walbank, *The Scipionic legend*, "PCPS" 1967, vol. 13, pp. 54–69.

⁷⁰ Just. 15.4. See K. Nawotka, *Apollo, the tutelary god of the Seleucids...*, p. 269 on Seleukos' birthmark, not intrinsically associated with Apollo.

⁷¹ D. Ogden, *Alexander, Scipio and Octavian...*, pp. 47–48.

⁷² *Ibidem*, p. 47; K. Nawotka, *Apollo, the tutelary god of the Seleucids...*

⁷³ And not the other way around as A. Mehl, *Seleukos Nikator und sein Reich*, vol. 1: *Seleukos Leben und Entwicklung seiner Machtposition*, Louvain 1986, pp. 5–6 wanted. See D. Ogden, *The legend of Seleucus. Kingship, narrative and mythmaking in the ancient world*, Cambridge 2017, p. 25.

some sort of double claim to the East?”⁷⁴ This is, however, highly speculative bearing in mind that the Seleukids had lost much of their appeal in the East, except for Syria, more than a hundred years before the story of Apollo siring Octavian was devised.

This brings us to the fifth and final item of the discussion of the putative oracle for Octavian. We do not need to assume that the birth story of Octavian originated within the immediate circle of his friends and advisors. A possible explanation is that in 40/39 BCE Didyma issued an oracle greeting Octavian as the son of Apollo, acting in the way adopted earlier with respect to other important rulers whom Miletos, the guardian of Didyma, wanted to influence, to name only Alexander the Great, Seleukos I, and perhaps Antiochos II. The Seleukid component of the story is striking, and it most likely originated in Didyma/Miletos, the places where the idea of the special protection of Apollo for Seleukos I and his dynasty was born. Apollo might proclaim Octavian his son when preparations were made in Miletos for approaching the virtual ruler of Rome entrenched in this position after the victory at Perusia, the alliance with Sextus Pompeius and the renewal of the Second Triumvirate. The putative oracle from the infallible oracular establishment might be the weapon of choice for the Milesian ambassador aiming at convincing Octavian to restore freedom to Miletos in 39/8 BCE. Miletos regained freedom and the cornerstone was laid under the special relations between Miletos and Augustus and his house in the following decades.

If this hypothesis is true, it would explain the chain of events which led to adopting Apollo by Octavian as his divine protector. Although this reconstruction of events is conjectural, in the present state of knowledge it also best explains how Miletos succeeded in having its freedom restored and acquiring the privileged position in its relations with Octavian Augustus.

⁷⁴ D. Ogden, *Alexander, Scipio and Octavian...*, pp. 47–48.

The oracle for Trajan

The case for Trajan is more clear. It rests upon a passage in Dio Chrysostomos: “I venture to state, almost one of the most illustrious in all Asia, a city possessing so great a claim upon the Emperor, inasmuch as the god they worship had prophesied and foretold his leadership to him and had been the first of all openly to proclaim him master of the world”.⁷⁵ Christopher P. Jones identified this unnamed city of Asia with Miletos, the city controlling the Oracle at Didyma.⁷⁶ This is of course conjectural but the stature of Miletos, a second-tier city of Roman Asia Minor,⁷⁷ comes much closer to Dio’s “one of the most illustrious in Asia” than that of Kolophon, a degraded small town, in whose territory the competing great Oracle of Klaros was situated.⁷⁸ Nothing illustrates better the miserable state of Kolophon in the Imperial age than its total epigraphic output of 16 inscriptions in the 1st–3rd centuries CE, not connected directly with the temple and Oracle at Klaros.⁷⁹ Miletos yielded well over 700 inscriptions

⁷⁵ D. Chr. 45.4: ἡ μᾶ πόλει, καὶ ταύτη σχεδόν τι τῶν ἔλλογιμωτάτων κατὰ τὴν Ἀσίαν καὶ τηλικούτων ἐχούση δίκαιον πρὸς τὸν αὐτοκράτορα, τοῦ θεοῦ παρ’ ἐκείνοις μαντευσαμένου καὶ προειπόντος τὴν ἡγεμονίαν αὐτῷ καὶ πρώτου πάντων ἐκείνου φανερώς αὐτὸν ἀποδείξαντος τῶν ὄλων κύριον. Quoted here after the translation by H. L. Crosby.

⁷⁶ C. P. Jones, *An oracle given to Trajan*, “Chiron” 1975, vol. 5, pp. 403–406. Contested by J. Fontenrose, *Didyma: Apollo’s Oracle...*, p. 243 but accepted by A. Busine, *Pratiques d’Apollon. Pratiques et traditions oraculaires dans l’Antiquité tardive (II^e–VI^e siècles)*, Leiden–Boston 2005, pp. 148–149.

⁷⁷ K. Nawotka, *The Nourisher of Apollo...*, pp. 115–139.

⁷⁸ C. P. Jones, *op. cit.*, pp. 403–404 convincingly rejects claims of earlier scholarship that this city, “one of the most illustrious in Asia”, was either Smyrna (H. L. Crosby, *Dio Chrysostom (Loeb) vol. IV*, London 1946, p. 210, n. 2) or Pergamon (J. J. Reiske, *Dionis Chrysostomi orationes*², vol. 2, Leipzig 1798, p. 204, n. 21) – none hosting an oracle of universal significance.

⁷⁹ K. Nawotka, *Epigraphic culture of Kolophon (with Notion and Klaros)*, in: *Epigraphic culture in Asia Minor*, eds. K. Nawotka, A. Heller, A. Wojciechowska, forthcoming.

in the same period.⁸⁰ Trajan assumed the two most prestigious Milesian magistracies: *prophetes* in Didyma and *stephanephoros* in Miletos, in the beginning and towards the end of his rule, respectively.⁸¹ Put together, these honours to the city find no parallel throughout the Empire, and they alone attest to the exceptionally close ties between the emperor and Miletos. But there is more important circumstantial evidence to the affinity between Trajan and Miletos: his dedication and sponsorship of construction works along the Sacred Way linking the Delphinion of Miletos with Didyma. The disposition of the emperor is manifest through inscriptions set up at the both termini of the Sacred Way.⁸² Although this project, allegedly of great magnitude, is known from five inscriptions, including a milestone,⁸³ no trace of it has been identified archaeologically outside of the very short paved section of the road immediately adjacent to the Didymaion.⁸⁴

Notwithstanding the real scale of construction works on the Sacred Way, what should be noticed is the early date of this endeavour in the reign of Trajan, in 101–102.⁸⁵ This, coupled with Trajan's assuming the mantle

⁸⁰ Idem, *Epigraphic curves in western Asia Minor. The case studies of Miletos, Ephesos and Pergamon*, in: *Epigraphic culture in the eastern Mediterranean in antiquity*, ed. K. Nawotka, Abingdon–New York 2020, p. 121, graph 6.1 where 627 inscriptions from this period are listed. Later publications (W. Günther, *Inschriften von Didyma* [Didyma III.7], Wiesbaden 2023; S. Akat Özenir, M. Riehl, *Some new inscriptions from the Miletus Museum*, "Gephyra" 2003, vol. 25, pp. 103–117) add 104 more inscriptions from Miletos with Didyma in the 1st–3rd centuries CE.

⁸¹ *Prophetes*: I. Didyma 318, 407; *stephanephoros*: I. Didyma 293; S. Mitchell, *Trajan and the cities of the East*, in: *Trajan und seine Städte. Colloquium Cluj-Napoca, 29. September–2. Oktober 2013*, eds. I. Piso, R. Varga, Cluj-Napoca 2014, pp. 225–232.

⁸² Milet 402 (in Miletos); similar: I. Didyma 55; N. Ehrhardt, P. Weiss, *Eine monumentale Dankesgabe: Trajans Neubau der Heiligen Straße von Milet nach Didyma*, "Chiron" 2011, vol. 41, p. 231 show that a fragmentary Latin inscription Inv. 244b does not belong to Didyma 55, thus being another attestation of Trajan's project.

⁸³ Milet 402, I. Didyma 55, 57 (milestone), SEG 61.938, Inv. 244b (from Didyma).

⁸⁴ A. Slawisch, T. C. Wilkinson, *Processions, propaganda and pixels: Reconstructing the Sacred Way between Miletos and Didyma*, "AJA" 2018, vol. 122, p. 122.

⁸⁵ N. Ehrhardt, P. Weiss, op. cit., pp. 248–249; S. Mitchell, op. cit., p. 228.

of *prophetes* at Didyma no later than 102,⁸⁶ suggests that the events at or before his accession were the driving force for Trajan's involvement with the Didymaion. Almost certainly, it was the oracle mentioned by Dio Chrysostomos. We are not told expressly if it was delivered before or after Trajan's accession. Although the rational mind would prefer the version of the oracle brought to Trajan's attention after he became emperor, the wording of Dio suggests that the oracle was pronounced *before* Trajan's accession (προειπόντος τὴν ἡγεμονίαν). We know of the Milesian ambassador M. Ulpius Sopolis who came to Trajan in 99/100.⁸⁷ Since Trajan succeeded Nerva on 27 or 28 January 98, it is extremely unlikely that the oracle delivered to him about one and a half years later would have been "the first of all openly to proclaim him master of the world" and thus able to impress the emperor. There are two possible solutions. One is that an unattested envoy from Miletos brought to Rome the oracle issued after Trajan's adoption by Nerva in October 97 but prior to Trajan's accession to the throne.⁸⁸ The second is that one might think of the oracle mentioned by Dio as of the real prophecy foretelling Trajan's rule well ahead of his accession. The most likely moment for that to happen was in 79–81 when M. Ulpius Traianus, the father of the future emperor was proconsul of Asia and his son might have accompanied him as his *legatus*.⁸⁹ Either the quick reaction of Miletos to the news of Trajan's adoption or the forethought of the Oracle at Didyma are the best explanations of the particular affinity of Emperor Trajan with Miletos some twenty years later.

⁸⁶ *Didyma* 318 and 407; S. Mitchell, op. cit., p. 228; W. Günther, *Inschriften von Milet*, vol. 4: *Eine Prosopographie (Milet VI.4)*, Berlin 2017, p. 589.

⁸⁷ Embassy of M. Ulpius Sopolis: *Milet* 1072; C. P. Jones, op. cit., pp. 403–406; S. Mitchell, op. cit., p. 229.

⁸⁸ I owe this suggestion to the anonymous Reader for the "Klio". For an overview of the circumstance surrounding the adoption of Trajan by Nerva, see W. Eck, *An Emperor is made: Senatorial politics and Trajan's adoption by Nerva in 97*, in: *Philosophy and power in the Graeco-Roman world. Essays in honour of Miriam Griffin*, eds. G. Clark, T. Rajak, Oxford 2002, pp. 211–226.

⁸⁹ C. P. Jones, op. cit., p. 405; W. Eck, *Traian – Der Weg zum Kaisertum*, in: *Traian. Ein Kaiser der Superlative am Beginn einer Umbruchzeit?*, ed. A. Nünnerich-Asmus, Mainz 2002, p. 12; N. Ehrhardt, P. Weiss, op. cit., p. 253.

The oracles for Diocletian and Licinius

Two direct accounts of oracles for emperors survive from Late Antiquity. According to Lactantius, Diocletian sent a *haruspex* to the most powerful of gods, the Milesian Apollo, i.e. to the Oracle of Didyma, and upon hearing the god's response, the emperor started the Great Persecution of Christians in the Roman Empire in 303.⁹⁰ Although *De morte persecutorum* is a highly ideological "work of anti-hagiography", there is no reason not to believe that Didyma was indeed consulted.⁹¹ A fragmentary *prophetes* inscription from Didyma, restored by Henri Grégoire, was once believed to transmit an oracle prompting Diocletian to persecute Christians.⁹² This restoration was rightfully questioned by Albert Rehm and later scholarship, so we end up with no epigraphic attestation of the prophecy for Diocletian.⁹³ According to Sozomenos, Licinius, another emperor blamed for his anti-Christian attitude, consulted Didyma prior to the war with Constantine in 323, only to receive an oracle of his defeat.⁹⁴

⁹⁰ Lactantius, *De morte persecutorum*, 11.

⁹¹ It is listed by J. Fontenrose, *Didyma: Apollo's Oracle...*, pp. 206–208 in his "Catalogue of Didymaeian Responses", among Historical Responses 33; D. S. Potter, *Prophets and emperors. Human and divine authority from Augustus to Theodosius*, Cambridge Mass. 1994, pp. 169–170; A. Busine, op. cit., pp. 229–230; M. S. Shin, *The Great Persecution. A historical re-examination*, Turnhout 2018, pp. 105–108; A.-V. Pont, *La fin de la cité grecque. Métamorphoses et disparition d'un modèle politique et institutionnel local en Asie Mineure, de Dèce à Constantin*, Geneva 2020, pp. 338–339. The quotation is from T. D. Barnes, *Early Christian hagiography and Roman history*, Tübingen 2010, p. 115.

⁹² *I. Didyma* 306. Restoration: Grégoire 1913, 81–91.

⁹³ Rehm, *I. Didyma*, pp. 202–203 (commentary to *I. Didyma* 306); see also J. Fontenrose, *Didyma: Apollo's Oracle...*, pp. 206–208.

⁹⁴ Sozomenus, *Historia ecclesiastica* 1.7.3; A. Busine, op. cit., no. 83 (p. 456) in the catalogue of oracles; J. Fontenrose, *Didyma: Apollo's Oracle...*, p. 227 quotes it among Quasi-Historical Responses 55 as non genuine.

A putative oracle for Julian

The case for Julian is tentative. It relies on interpreting a passage in the *Historia ecclesiastica* of Theodoretos of Kyrrhos and re-interpreting a passage in Georgios Kedrenos. The first one is a quite straightforward account of Julian's preparations for the war with Persia: "And sending to Delphi and Dodona and to the other Oracles, he asked the manteis whether he should take the field; and they both bid him take the field and promised him the victory".⁹⁵ The second one says that Orobasios, Julian's envoy to Delphi, received the widely acclaimed "last prophecy": "Tell the Emperor that the Daidalic hall has fallen. No longer does Phoebus have his chamber, nor mantic laurel, nor prophetic spring; and the speaking water has been silenced".⁹⁶ Since water did not serve as a source of prophetic inspiration in Delphi, scholars have argued that this passage refers in fact to another Oracle, the one at Daphne.⁹⁷ But Didyma is another possible choice – in this Oracle water from the sacred spring was the source of prophetic inspiration.⁹⁸ We know of three cases of Julian's dealings with Didyma, although their chronological sequence is unknown. Julian assumed the office of *prophetes* at Didyma,⁹⁹ and

⁹⁵ Theodoretus, *Historia ecclesiastica* 3.16.21 (CGS 44, p. 200): πέμψας δὲ εἰς Δελφοὺς καὶ Δῆλον καὶ Δωδώνην καὶ τὰ ἄλλα χρηστήρια, εἰ χρῆ στρατεῦειν ἐπηρώτα τοὺς μάντις. οἱ δὲ καὶ στρατεῦειν ἐκέλευον καὶ ὑπισχυοῦντο τὴν νίκην; transl. by J. Fontenrose.

⁹⁶ Cedrenus 532: εἶπατε τῷ βασιλεῖ, χαμαὶ πέσε δαίδαλος αὐλά./ οὐκέτι Φοῖβος ἔχει καλύβαν, οὐ μάντιδα δάφνην,/ οὐ παγὰν λαλέουσιν. ἀπέσβετο καὶ λάλον ὕδωρ.

⁹⁷ C. Vatin, *Les empereurs du IV^e siècle à Delphes*, "BCH" 1962, vol. 86, pp. 229–241; T. E. Gregory, *Julian and the last oracle at Delphi*, "GRBS" 1983, vol. 24, pp. 355–366; J. Vanderspoel, *The enigma of the last oracle*, "Topoi" 2006, Suppl. 7, pp. 53–61.

⁹⁸ Water as the sources of inspiration at Didyma: Porphyrius, *Epistula ad Anebonem*. 2.2d; Iamblichus, *De Mysteriis* 3.11; *I. Didyma* 159; P. T. Struck, *Speech acts and the stakes of Hellenism in late antiquity*, in: *Magic and ritual in the ancient world*, eds. P. Mirecki, M. Meyer, Leiden–Boston–Köln 2002, pp. 387–403; A. Lampinen, op. cit., pp. 85–86; M. Nissinen, op. cit., pp. 224–226; K. Nawotka, *The Nourisher of Apollo...*, pp. 198–199.

⁹⁹ Jul. *Ep.* 88.

he quotes a theological oracle (or oracles) from Didyma in two of his letters,¹⁰⁰ he had the Oracle purified of relics of a Christian martyr buried in the grounds of the temple to silence the Oracle.¹⁰¹ The last dealing parallels Julian's better known action in Daphne where he ordered the relics of St. Babylas to be removed from the temple of Apollo.¹⁰² Bearing in mind his penchant for ancient pagan religious sites, it would have been extraordinary had he not asked Apollo of Didyma for an oracular response or responses.¹⁰³ Hence, Didyma most probably was among the "other Oracles" mentioned by Theodoretos, or possibly Δωδώνην is even a spelling error for Διδύμην.¹⁰⁴ The passage in Kedrenos might also convey a distorted reference to an oracle sought by Julian.

Oracles of Didyma in context

This survey lists nine or more oracles, not all considered genuine by previous scholarship. It may seem a small number, especially since these cases are spread over almost seven hundred years of the attested activity of the Oracle in Hellenistic and Roman times, from Alexander the Great to Emperor Julian. Nine or more oracles for seven to ten major kings and emperors fall on average once every 70–77 years or approximately once every three generations. Almost certainly, more were issued of which we have no knowledge. This number is still significant, especially when compared with number of authentic Delphic responses for major pow-

¹⁰⁰ Jul. *Ep.* 88, 89b; J. Fontenrose, *Didyma: Apollo's Oracle...*, pp. 225–226 (Quasi-Historical Responses 52, 53) considers these oracles not genuine.

¹⁰¹ Sozomenus, *Historia Ecclesiastica* 5.20.7.

¹⁰² *Ibidem.* Julian refers to it in the *Misopogon* 10.10–19, 33; T. E. Gregory, *op. cit.*, p. 358; A. Busine, *op. cit.*, p. 231; C. C. Shepardson, *Controlling contested places. Late antique Antioch and the Spatial politics of religious controversy*, Berkeley 2014, pp. 60–67; C. Saliou, *Written sources. A survey*, in: *Antioch on the Orontes. History, society, ecology, and visual culture*, ed. A. U. De Giorgi, Cambridge 2024, pp. 14–15.

¹⁰³ J. Fontenrose, *Didyma: Apollo's Oracle...*, p. 227.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibidem.*, pp. 227–228 (Quasi-Historical Responses 56).

ers in the same age, one for the Roman republic,¹⁰⁵ one for Hadrian,¹⁰⁶ perhaps authentic responses for Perseus,¹⁰⁷ for the Roman republic and its generals,¹⁰⁸ and for Emperor Julian.¹⁰⁹ The total number of oracles, from the Archaic to the Late Roman age, genuine or not, listed in the most commonly used modern compendium of Didyma is 82,¹¹⁰ to which 10 more should be added, preserved wholly or partially on inscriptions edited by Wolfgang Günther.¹¹¹ When we subtract all responses from the Archaic age and inauthentic later responses, we come up with approximately 70 items between Alexander and Julian. Most oracles known from inscriptions were delivered to individuals, mostly from Miletos, to the city of Miletos and to neighbouring communities.¹¹² It should not come as a surprise considering that Didyma was a rare case of a first-class Oracle operating within a major polis as its extraurban sanctuary, unlike two other Apollonic great Oracles, Delphi and Klaros, whose host-communities were small towns whose elite generated little demand for responses. Neighbouring cities and some lesser royalty in Asia Minor, like Nikomedes II, belonged to the network of worshippers regularly sending gifts to Apollo and looking to Didyma as the primary place to enquire for an oracle.¹¹³ But mighty Seleukid kings and the leading Ro-

¹⁰⁵ J. Fontenrose, *The Delphic Oracle. Its responses and operations, with a catalogue of responses*, Berkeley 1978, H48.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibidem*, H 65.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibidem*, Q244.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibidem*, Q236 and 237.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibidem*, Q262.

¹¹⁰ J. Fontenrose, *Didyma: Apollo's Oracle....*

¹¹¹ *I. Didyma* 746, 748, 750, 751, 752, T5 (= SEG 40.956), T11 (= Milet 1353), T13 (= Milet 1354), T14 (= Milet 1355), T15 (= Milet 1356).

¹¹² J. Fontenrose, *Didyma: Apollo's Oracle...*, pp. 104–105; C. Morgan, *Divination and society at Delphi and Didyma*, “Hermathena” 1989, vol. 147, pp. 17–42; K. Nawotka, *The Nourisher of Apollo...*, pp. 202–203.

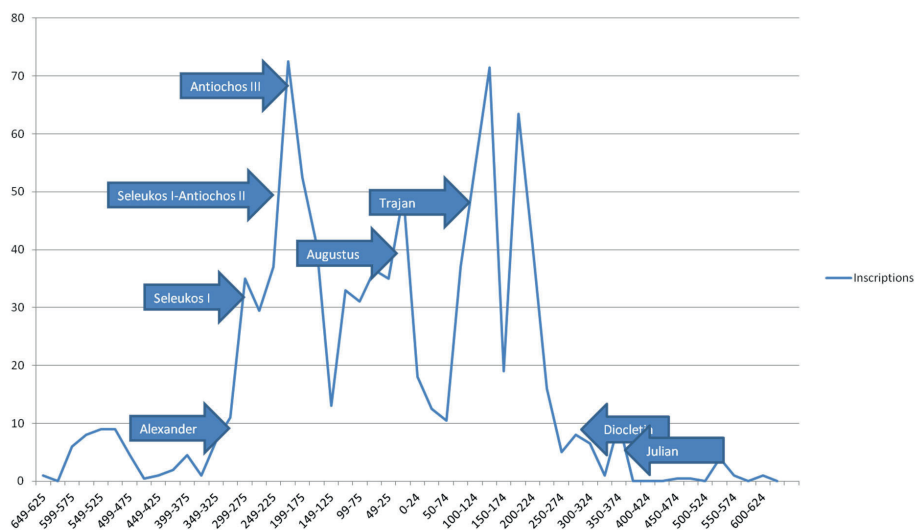
¹¹³ Milesian networks in the Hellenistic age, mostly in south-western Asian Minor and on the islands: O. Debord, *Aspects sociaux et économiques de la vie religieuse dans l'Anatolie gréco-romaine*, Leiden 1982, p. 19; A. Lampinen, *op. cit.*, p. 50; K. Nawotka, *The Nourisher of Apollo...*, pp. 74–76, 80–83.

mans operated on a much wider stage and oracular responses issued for them go far beyond the well-defined circle of communication between Didyma and its network of worshipers of Apollo Didymeus in western Asia Minor. Nine or more oracles issued to Seleukid kings and Roman emperors constitute approximately 14% of all authentic responses from Didyma between Alexander and Julian, a very high proportion indeed. One can surmise that this type of response was perhaps more likely to be preserved in the literary sources than responses to commoners, while epigraphic evidence attests two to three responses to major kings and emperors only. Surely oracles to other kings and emperors were issued too – one might think in the first place of Antiochos IV, a patron of the New Bouleuterion in Miletos and of Gaius (Caligula), a *synnaos* of Apollo of Didyma.¹¹⁴ But these putative oracles left no trace in our sources and further discussion of them would be speculative.

Oracles for kings and emperors and the epigraphic culture of Miletos

Graph 1 shows the position of oracles for major kings and emperors superimposed on the epigraphic curve of Miletos illustrating the frequency of inscribing in this polis. Epigraphic activity, in turn, resulted from a variety of factors of shifting importance between the Hellenistic and Imperial age: economic prosperity, nature of constitution of the polis, its freedom of operation in international politics. When more free, more democratic and more prosperous, the city tended to inscribe more.

¹¹⁴ Antiochos IV and the New Bouleuterion: *Milet 1 and 2*; H. Schaaf, *Untersuchungen zu Gebäudestiftungen in hellenistischer Zeit*, Köln 1992, p. 37, n. 236; K. Nawotka, *The Nourisher of Apollo...*, pp. 69–71. Gaius as Apollo's *synnaos* in Didyma: B. Haus-soullier, *Caligula et le temple d'Apollon Didyméen*, "RPh" 1899, vol. 23, pp. 126–127; D. Steuernagel, *Der Apollontempel von Didyma und das Orakel in der römischen Kaiserzeit: Stätte und Medium religiöser Kommunikation*, in: *Medien religiöser Kommunikation im Imperium Romanum*, eds. G. Schörner, D. Šterbenc Erker, Stuttgart 2008, pp. 123–140.



Graph 1. Oracles to kings and emperors along the epigraphic curve for Miletos*

The moments when oracles were delivered for major monarchs are significant on the epigraphic curve: those for Alexander, Seleukos, Augustus and Trajan, mark the inception or early stage of the upturn of the curve. The oracles for Alexander and Seleukos date to the period when the liberation of Greek cities in western Asia Minor and the reintroduction of the “ancestral constitution”, as democracy was called in the political parlour of the day, resulted in the tremendous surge in inscriptions after the long period of stagnation in the classical age.¹¹⁵ It continued into the third and early-2nd century BCE, the age of the relative economic prosperity of Miletos, able to protect its independence largely by skilfully navigating among major powers of the high Hellenistic age. The putative oracle for Octavian belongs to the period when Miletos and the rest of the region was emerging from the turbulent years of Mithridatic Wars and the chaos

* This epigraphic curve is based on the data used for graph 6.2 in K. Nawotka, *Epigraphic curves in western Asia Minor...*, p. 122.

¹¹⁵ Idem, *Freedom of Greek cities in Asia Minor in the age of Alexander the Great*, “Klio” 2003, vol. 85, pp. 15–41.

of the end of the Republic.¹¹⁶ Finally, the reign of Trajan brought the beginning of the rapid growth of epigraphic activity in Miletos until the zenith reached under Hadrian.¹¹⁷

The Late-Antique oracles mark the horizon of local epigraphic maxima. Low as they are in absolute terms, these epigraphic peaks stand out against the depressed epigraphic curve in the post-250 age. In both cases, this was not only a temporal coincidence. The last attested acts of the imperial patronage in Didyma belong to the age of Diocletian. The emperors Diocletian and Maximinian dedicated a well-house protecting the new spring within the Didymaion and a *bathron* supporting the statues of Zeus, Leto, Artemis and Apollo. The inscriptions associated with these foundations are at the core of the local epigraphic peak.¹¹⁸ The epigraphic peak around the age of Emperor Julian is telling, too. Three out of ten inscriptions of this time are connected directly with Julian, one being the last securely dated *titulus honorarius* commissioned in the name of “the splendid metropolis of the Milesians and the nourisher of Apollo Didymeus”.¹¹⁹ Five more attest to the restoration of various buildings by notables associated with Julian:¹²⁰ one is a dedication to Apollo¹²¹ while another speaks about an oracle of Apollo, the last one attested in stone.¹²² Miletos (with Didyma) provides one of the strongest sets of evidence of the positive reception of Julian’s policy of religious restoration, in general well-received by local elites in Asia Minor.¹²³

¹¹⁶ See *idem*, *Epigraphic curves in western Asia Minor...*, pp. 122–130 and graphs 6.2, 6.6 for epigraphic curves in Miletos and Ephesos rising under Augustus.

¹¹⁷ *Ibidem*, pp. 122–125.

¹¹⁸ *I. Didyma* 89, 90, 159; K. Nawotka, *The Nourisher of Apollo...*, pp. 192–193.

¹¹⁹ *Milet* 1112: ἡ λαμπρὰ τῶν Μιλησίων μητρόπολις καὶ τροφὸς τοῦ Διδυμέου Ἀπόλλωνος. The other two are milestones: *Milet* 1387d and *I. Didyma* 60.

¹²⁰ *Milet* 339a–d, 340.

¹²¹ *I. Didyma* 83 with Rehm’s commentary.

¹²² *Milet* 191.

¹²³ H.-U. Wiemer, *Revival and reform. The religious policy of Julian*, in: *A Companion to Julian the Apostate*, eds. S. Rebenich, H.-U. Wiemer, Leiden–Boston 2020, pp. 218–219.

Conclusions

There is little doubt that we only have knowledge of a small minority of the oracles ever delivered by Apollo at Didyma, no matter to kings, cities or commoners. Paradoxically, the oracles pronounced in response to questions asked by commoners were more likely to be committed to stone than those delivered to monarchs since it always was the interested party who commissioned an inscription. As it happens, no king or emperor thought it worth committing the oracle he received to stone, even if two or three oracles delivered to Seleukid kings are referred to in inscriptions. No obvious reason for this can be stated with any certainty. As I try to state below, the impression one may receive is that in the majority of cases a response was more important to the city whose Oracle delivered it than to the king or emperor who received it. Thus, kings and emperors had little incentive to have a response inscribed.

The oracles for kings and emperors we know of are not distributed chronologically in a random manner. Oracles attested by ancient or Byzantine authors or referred to by Hellenistic inscriptions correlate strongly with periods of vigorous inscribing in Miletos (with Didyma). Incidentally, no oracle belongs to a downturn on the epigraphic curve. Sometimes Apollo quite obviously acted on behalf of his city and shrine, proclaiming important monarchs sons of gods or predicting their rise to power, well ahead of their accession to the throne. We know of situations in which an oracle set off a chain of events leading to material and political gains for Miletos, although this was not always a simple exchange of the god's words for profit to his city. Immaterial gains, such as kinship with (*syngeneia*) mighty kings or listing emperors among *prophetai* and *stephanephoroi*, counted too in building Miletos' prestige. This is best attested in the case of oracles for early Seleukids, noted patrons of Didyma and monarchs for whom the Oracle spoke most often. Much the same can be argued for Octavian Augustus and Trajan. We can be quite sure that Didyma's prophesizing for kings and emperors contributed enormously towards building Miletos' prestige and position in the Hellenis-

tic and Roman age, until the end of the pagan world. In all of these cases, prosperity built thanks to decisions of imperial actors and the enhanced prestige of Didyma seem to have been important factors influencing increased epigraphic activity throughout the whole polis of the Milesians when measured on a mid-term (quarter century) basis, as illustrated by graph 1. The Late Antique oracles belong to the period of ideological wars between pagans and Christians, conflicts in which Didyma was deeply embroiled.¹²⁴ The moments when they were issued coincide with the reign of anti-Christian emperors whose ideological position was much appreciated by the Milesian elite of the late-3rd and the 4th century.

A modern historian would inevitably ask questions pertaining to manipulating the Oracle to make the god issue responses which served the earthly needs of Miletos. Questions of this kind, anchored in modern ideals – not practice – of impartiality expected of public authority and a strict separation between the Church and state, would not have been understood in antiquity in the same way a modern historian might have in mind. They are anachronistic in more than one way as they look at the Oracle as if it had been an abstract entity conducting its life in dissociation with the surrounding world, while in fact it was an integral part of the polis. Throughout the Hellenistic age and Early Empire, Miletos conducted vigorous diplomacy, making frequent contact with the leading powers of the age, unlike the host communities of two other major Apollonian Oracles, Delphi and Kolophon, small towns on the backwaters of power politics. Didyma with its temples and Oracle was, among other things, a tool in international policy of Miletos. This was a deciding factor contributing to much greater number of attested Didymaian than Delphic responses to kings and emperors. In Antiquity, one expected Apollonian oracles to be truthful, never to be impartial lest they might be detrimental to the well-being of Miletos, “the nourisher of Apollo Didymeus”. All mantic and other officials known to us from Didyma belonged to top elite families of Miletos, the very people who governed the polis and formu-

¹²⁴ K. Nawotka, *The Nourisher of Apollo...*, pp. 148–150.

lated its policy goals.¹²⁵ To understand them, no *prophetes* who ran the Oracle or *prophetis/promantis* who transmitted the words of the god had to be manipulated. In practical terms Didyma's oracles on more than one occasion contributed to raising the standing of Miletos, a mid-size city in Hellenistic and Roman times, well above its actual position measured in terms of population, economy, or military potential.

¹²⁵ Idem, *Prophetes, prophetis and the epigraphic culture of Miletos*, with a list of all (226) *prophetai* and all prophetesses (S) of Didyma known by name.