

Pythia (the oracle of delphi)



**ASSIGN
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The historical figure referred to as the “ Oracle of Delphi,” in ancient writings by Aeschylus, Aristotle, Diogenes, Euripides, Herodotus, Plato, Plutarch, and Sophocles, was the “ Pythia,” or “ Priestess” of the temple of Apollo at Delphi; located in a cave on mount Parnassus, beneath the caspian Spring. The Pythia was a respectable position for a women among the ancient greeks. Several women were selected to succeed the position of Pythia over the p of the temples practice from 1, 400 BC-393 A.

D. I will be focussing on one in particular, whose experience changes the requirements of the position. The Pythia was known for her prophetic visions, said to to be inspired by the God Apollo. Ancient from all around Greece would travel to Delphi in hopes to hear a prophecy from the Pythia that be would be reflect favorable on their future. The myth was that the fumes from the Caspian Spring inspired her visions. Three male priests would accompany her, and interpret her hysterical, unintelligible babble to the visitors.

Modern historians and scientists theorize that a hallucinogenic gas from a seismic crack in the mountain intoxicated her, and was the cause of her erratic behavior. However, scientist extensive scientific research has been performed on the location and been found contradictory and inconclusive on both sides. There is no documented procedure on how they selected the Pythia, but it is assumed that she was selected upon the death of her predecessor and chosen from a guild of priestesses. She was always a young, respectable virgin, native to the area.

Once she was selected she had to leave herfamily, forfeit her personal identity, and sever allcommunicationwith those she’d previously known. The benefits were that she would receive monetary compensation, position,

attend public events, and own her property. They also appeared to select women upon aptitude rather than position in society. One Pythia could be well educated and aristocratic, and another could be from the working class. At the Height of the Temples popularity there were up to three Pythias in residents.

They would alternate between sessions, because the activity left them exhausted and delirious. It was said that the Pythias life was shortened from the strenuous occupation. After an incident where a Pythias was been attacked and killed for giving unfavorable prophecies, they increased the number. The Pythia I'm choosing served in 300AD, she was attacked and raped in the temple. Upon this incident the priests were forced to make a decision on the policy of the requirements of a priestess, because she was no longer a virgin. They changed the policy which opened the opportunity up to married women as well.

I would like to write about this incident, because she was not only violated, but in jeopardy of losing her job, being exiled, and possibly killed. Once a year the Pythia would undergo a cleansing ritual, where she would bathe in the Caspian Stream. The procedure was extremely detailed and strict. I think this would be an awesome incident to write my monologue about. The importance and specificity of the ritual makes it an important event in her life. Also bathing in the toxic spring could also present an interesting opportunity to intoxication, and visions.

The Pythias personal life, (I can only imagine) was one of deep sadness and extortion. She may have had high hopes for the position, she may not have wanted to serve at all, but it was not a position that would be socially

acceptable to refuse. Not only did she have to lose her family and her identity, but she had to forfeit any chance of getting married and having children. She was in a temple, that was essentially a converted cave, and constantly hyped up on hallucinogens. It was basically an ancient form of prostitution. The temple made money off of her “ prophecies” while her mind and body was slowly destroyed from abuse.

The danger of attack, rape and death were very real to her in everyday life. I can only imagine the state of her mind, and her misery. She was dealt a hand that appeared glamorous from the outside, but was misleading. The source of the Pythias visions remain a mystery, which I find both exciting and troubling. If it were true that the woman selected to be Pythia received divine visions from the God Apollo my conjecture about her personal life would differ greatly than if she were a drugged, captive woman who was forced to live a desolate life. I think the mystery of the Pythia, is what makes it so intriguing even to this day.