

PART II: CHASING AN IDEA

In the project I originally meant to use acoustic measurements to recontextualize the sound of specific places. Instead I have turned more towards conceptual impulse response which, although it does not use measurements, puts our cognition to the test. The approach increases awareness of the meaning of the context and the significance of our cognition for how we sense and how we create stimuli. The project is a kind of metaphorical impulse response that makes us attentive to biases; not in order to strive for neutrality, but to clarify positions.

Impulse response

Impulse response is a method of measuring a system. In all simplicity it is about sending out an impulse and measuring the response. In acoustics the method is used to measure the sound qualities in a room, a hall or out in a habitat. The impulse that is sent out may be a strong sweep of white noise over the whole frequency range, or a short burst of white noise, an impulse, such as a pistol shot. With microphones you record the response, that is the sound, and how it plays out in terms of amplitude (which is the quantity of energy – that is volume) and frequency over time. Then you have made a sound imprint. You make sure you know the raw data for the impulse and measure the response against the source. The result can be used as reverberation in post-production in all kinds of audio processing.

In fact, I travelled to Greece with a starting pistol in my luggage because I had intended to measure the sound in the two ancient theatres in Epidauros and Delphi. This chapter comprises a travel log ‘The holy mountain’ and an essay ‘Delphi in fumes’ with thoughts on an extreme situation which has inscribed itself in the history of the place.

Einschub: starting pistol

I am not used to weapons. In Norway no licence is required to own and use a starting pistol, so I bought one and used it in Røyken and Mjølkedalen.

In my simplicity I imagined that Norway in general had stricter rules in such an area than other countries. At Oslo Airport Gardermoen the check-in staff were uncertain about this so of course we marked the checked-in luggage regardless with the clear orange label saying that it contained a firearm. At the airport in Thessaloniki in Greece the luggage was naturally enough taken aside. I had to show a document saying that I had the right to carry it. I must admit that it was not that simple to explain what the purpose of the weapon was: to explain the project and the impulse response measurement where it was the sound that was the point, to make a sound imprint. The customs officer was very friendly, culturally interested, had himself been to Athos, thought the project sounded interesting but had to insist that starting pistols did indeed require a weapon licence in Greece. It had to be confiscated. However, I had a scheduled domestic flight to Athens a few days later, and they could keep it for me until then, and gave me the phone number of a higher-ranking customs official whom I could call during office hours the next day.

On the way to Athos I called the Norwegian police to ask for a short letter that explained that one was not issued with any papers in Norway granting the right to own the starting pistol, since there was no such requirement, and I sent this on to the customs officer. It is difficult to document a right that is not explicitly written down. The Greek senior customs official on the telephone was considerably less patient and declared that the starting pistol unfortunately had to be confiscated and destroyed. Oh well....

The backup solution, too, with large, specially bought balloons, had a poor reception from the museum custodians in Epidauros. They were not having me measuring acoustics: it might damage the ruins (!), but they had no problems with other tourists bellowing, shouting and acting up. It probably required considerably more energy than these balloons could muster if any sound waves were to damage these ruins, so this was probably just a standard excuse to reject me.

THE HOLY MOUNTAIN

This is a travel log and reflections from a trip to Athos and Delphi in Greece, 11-18 April 2016. Athos is a peninsula in northern Greece. It is a separate territorial entity (polity) within Greece, also called “The Holy Mountain of Athos”. This polity is an autonomous, theocratic, monastic state. Women and children have no access to the theocratic state, and only a few men can come every day.

The log explains the origins of an idea and how the context of creation is important, in this instance for what actually becomes or does not become a musical work. The journey to Athos enabled thoughts of long lines, unbroken traditions, absence, focus, concentration, cognitive priming and more. The incitement to go there, as it turned out, did not lead in the end to a concrete work. Although I was intrigued by the idea of following up on this, my judgement was that it would have to involve a stronger artistic emphasis on religiosity than I wanted to explore. However, the trip was an important prerequisite for choosing to travel to Mirny in Siberia. This, in turn, led to a concrete work.

THE QUEST

In January 2016 my 6-year-old son asked me what ‘speech song’ was. I guess he had heard some hiphop or rap with some friends and somebody at school maybe called it speech song. I said something about hiphop, *Sprechgesang* and recitative being used in churches for more than a thousand years, and now it was time to go play instead. A week later I sat in my studio, totally worn out from lack of sleep. My head felt like a ball of cotton wool, muffled, indistinct. Not a creative day. I wasted time surfing the web for used cabins, particularly poorly maintained shacks. They have potential, they represent an emptiness, not filled or pimped by someone else’s taste. It got me thinking of ruins. How do we know what we know about ruins? And I wondered about early speech song as musical ruins.

GREGORIAN CHANT

I researched *Sprechgesang* and recitative, song close to speech, using one or a few notes, in western music based on Italian monody. The concept of monody was developed in the 1580s by the Florentiner Camerata in their attempt to restore ancient Greek ideals. It meant “one person singing alone”, but could include a sparse accompaniment, such as basso continuo or bourdon. The ideals were filtered through the early medieval church and its Gregorian chant.

The associative research on this muddled day went on. Pope Gregory I the Great collected liturgical melodies from a variety of churches, so that his chants could be more consistent and uniform. He was a Roman by birth and lived c. 540 – 604 CE. The old melodies were probably transfigured during this process of assimilation. The reinterpretation spread over the entire Latin church.

What were these times like? They were difficult. The centre of gravity had moved east, the Western Roman Empire had collapsed in 476 CE. Crops were poor. Migrating peoples had destroyed large parts of Italy when the Eastern Empire attacked the Western Empire in 535 CE, beginning a twenty-year war, coinciding with a devastating plague in the 540s. Rome was left in ruins: only a few thousand people were left in the former centre of the world. These were Gregory’s boyhood years.

In the tradition of Gregorian chant from the late first millennium, the rhythm follows the textual rhythm, the melody follows one of the modal scales. These were not transposed. Frequencies or tones were thus fixed. Melody moved stepwise. It was therefore unnecessary to write down rhythm or melody. But one needed to know the relative melodic change of direction on each stave as long as the mode was given.

Song was monodic, in one part. A second supporting part, the organum, was first described around 895 in *Musica Enchiriadis*, the first known book on music. Notation was at first in neumes – simple dots and streaks suggesting melodic direction or an ornament.

The Church had come to cultivate asceticism and completely rejected the use of instruments in the 400-500s. In order to become a Christian a musician was obliged to give up his profession. “Instrumental music risked the kind of sensual beauty that could spur one into committing every conceivable sin.”¹²⁵ Music was perceived as

having the potential to influence or actually manipulate people into thinking otherwise than prescribed by the spiritual and religious framework.

THE GREAT CANON OF REPENTANCE

The advertisements for cabin shacks had me thinking. I didn't know very much about early medieval music, and listened to and read about church music from the first millennium. I quickly found and was intrigued by the *Great Canon of Repentance* – Megistis Kanon – the longest existing canon.

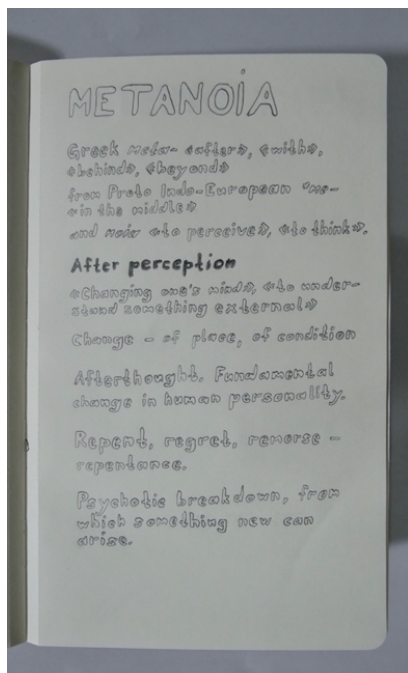
The Great Canon is still in use during lent as part of the liturgy in the Orthodox Church. Lent is the 40 weekdays from Ash Wednesday to Easter observed by the Roman Catholic, Eastern, and some Protestant churches as a period of penitence and fasting. I wanted to attend the Canon in an authentic context. What then, is authentic? The context of its creation is an uncertain period; the political weight had shifted significantly, the Western Roman Empire had collapsed, plagues haunted the towns, the Migration Period destabilized many areas (a Bond Cooling Event may have contributed to this). Systems were not maintained, a new order evolved with Islam, and we know historically less about this time than both before and after. Who maintained the stories? Whose view is communicated?

The Great Canon was written by Saint Andrew of Crete¹²⁶, who lived c. 660-740 CE. He was born into a Christian family in Damascus, Syria. When he was born, the country had been primarily Muslim for thirty years, after a fairly swift Islamic expansion in the early 600s CE. When I read about this, Syria was in the middle of a gruesome civil war. One of the belligerent parties – the Islamic State in Syria and the Levant (ISIL) – had conquered and meticulously blasted parts of the ruined ancient city of Palmyra. They saw their Salafist version of Islam as the only authentic and valid one. Non-Islamic and pre-Islamic cultural memories had to be destroyed, since they told another story. History was to be adapted to fit their worldview.

Canon is Greek and means guideline, model, rule. The Great Canon consists of 250 verses, a brief review of the Old and New Testament, and takes hours to sing. It is still used in the Orthodox Church at Easter and during Lent, which is a time of fasting, quietness and thoughtfulness, absence and asceticism, *to clear a space for reflection*. Repentance, or regret, remorse, is 'reflecting in hindsight', taking another position, and implies trying to change. To do things better this time. In the Canon, Andrew writes about the deepest remorse and sin. The ultimate repentance is *metanoia*. *Meta* means after, with, or outside, and *noia* is perception, thought and sensing.

After or outside perception.

Thus, *metanoia* means changing one's mind, a fundamental change of mind.



Metanoia

Greek *meta*- "after", "with", "behind", "beyond".

From Proto Indo-European **me*- "in the middle" and *noia* "to perceive", "to think".

After perception

"Changing one's mind", "to understand something external".

Afterthought. Fundamental change of mind. Fundamental change in human personality.

Repent, regret, remorse – repentance.

Psychotic breakdown, from which something new can arise.

ATTENDING THE CANON IN ATHOS

I asked Stig-Ragnvald Frøyshov, a professor of theology at the University in Oslo, and himself an Orthodox Christian, for advice on the various traditions. We talked about different traditions, valuing the degree of musical traditions versus the degree of authentic traditions. The most authentic would be Athos. I have been preoccupied with ruins, abandoned structures, remains, derelict places, and emptiness as a kind of blank canvas. Hence, Athos would probably best reflect such conditions.

The monastic state of Athos in Greece is a medieval remnant, with an authentic, closed Christian tradition surviving from the era of the Byzantine Empire. The whole idea underlying the monastic life is to be isolated from the outside world, focused and concentrated, and Athos stands as a closed territory which will keep itself as much as possible outside the secular, concrete, pulsating surrounding world in an inward concentration on one thing. The focus is inward, upward, to the divine.

It is exclusive, in that only 100 Orthodox and ten non-Orthodox men can enter every day. Women and children are excluded. In fact, female animals are also excluded. As far as I know Athos is the only territory in the world that so consistently keeps the gender gap open.

I decided to go there to hear the Canon in as authentic a context as possible.

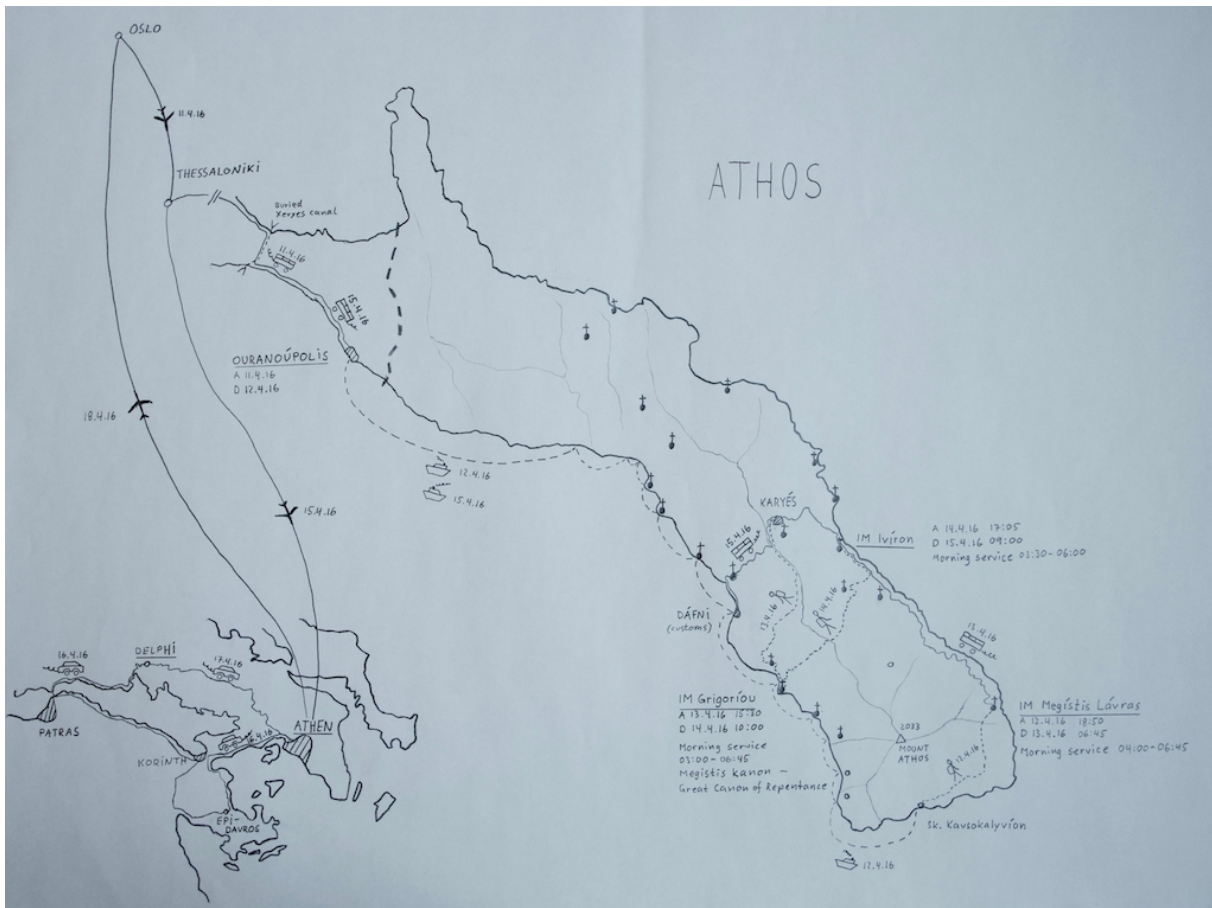


Photo of drawing of the route to Athos, Athens, Epidauros and Delphi.

Dáfni, 12.4.2016 – 12:00

Dáfni is the small port of Athos. All transfers take place here, apart from a boat service on the eastern shore. It has been difficult to plan a route. Roads are few. Only trucks and local buses are allowed. Some monasteries are only accessible by foot along ancient paths. I want to walk, but asking for reservations is difficult. I've tried for weeks to call. Phones are not picked up. There is no official information for the monasteries, only a very helpful private web page¹²⁷ with some phone numbers reported by visitors. Most monasteries still use fax, and keep their e-mail addresses quiet. This has made planning a route difficult. Response from several monasteries has been non-existent or negative, and the response I have received restricts me to an awkward route.

The southern boat, 12.4.2016 – 14:24

I am at the southern boat, planning to get off at the next and last stop, Arsanás Katounakíon. I don't know how far it is to Megístis Lávra, nor if I can get shelter there. I take food for several days as well as recording and photo equipment, adequate clothes etc. for summer trekking in the mountains, including my later visit to Epidauros and Delphi. The technical equipment is heavy. The backpack was probably the heaviest in Dáfni, 30 kg. Far more than recommended for just trekking.

Only men are around. There is something suspect about it. It feels awkward, abnormal. I am outside what these men have in common.

The main Orthodox Christian countries are Greece, Russia, Ukraine, Belarus, Bulgaria, Serbia and Romania. Most of the pilgrims and monks come from these countries, although men travel from all over the world.

South slope, 12.4.2016 – 16:46

At the peak of Mount Athos (2033 m above sea level), there is a chapel called Metamorfosis Sotiros – a reference to the Transfiguration of Christ on Mount Tabor, Israel.

Snow covers the peak for a good part of the year, and it is often covered in cloud resulting from humid air squeezed up into cooler air and condensing.

Eastern slope, 12.4.2016 – early evening

I had a break in the hillside above Skíti Timíou Prodrómou. The two men I had seen behind me caught up with me. They were pilgrims from Cluj Napoca in Romania, and recommended me to call IM Vatopedíou, but I have already tried for four weeks to get in touch with them. I asked what they thought about the Avaton – they were twenty-something. They expressed joy, a sense of liberation, a wonderful feeling of freedom, freedom from temptation, saying that it was easier to concentrate here. And that men are men – we can't help being tempted by women.

Avaton

Avaton is Greek for "what may not be set foot upon". As a term it describes a taboo, something forbidden, restricted and sacred – what must be avoided. In this context, it has come to mean prohibition of women.

Between 539 and 1046 CE a number of regulations helped to define the 'Avaton' that is still being practiced at Athos. In 1046 a Golden Bull (Chrysobull) was issued by the Emperor Constantine IX Monomachos "[...] *forbidding access to ... All women, female creatures, all eunuchs and all glamorous youngsters.*"¹⁹²⁸ This formally settled the terms of the Avaton. The reason was to make celibacy easier, and because the Virgin Mary allegedly said so. According to this, men feeling the presence of women alter their social and sexual dynamic. In 1989 the EEC (the present EU) accepted that the rule on free movement of persons does not apply to Athos. Hence only ten non-Orthodox men are admitted daily to Athos. Women and children are never admitted.

Athos is a monastic, theocratic autonomous polity within Greece. After the Eastern Roman Empire with its capital Constantinople (also referred to as Byzantium, now Istanbul), not far away by sea, was ultimately defeated by the Ottomans in 1453 CE, Athos has survived shifting times as a remnant, a conceptually standing medieval ruin, of the Byzantine Empire. The 20 monasteries are still under the direct jurisdiction of the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople.

The polity, or state, consist of a peninsula some 40 km long and 5-8 km wide. It has a customs border with Greece. No road crosses the border. Access is restricted and is by sea only. A council of four men functions as the government, with its seat in the only village, Karyes. The main idea of Athos is segregation and asceticism. Monks have lived on Athos since around 300 CE.

Holy mountains

In Greek mythology there were three main holy mountains: Olympus, Parnassus (just north of Delphi) and Athos. Just think of the idea of holy mountains (striving towards the sky, 'impregnable', unchangeable, unreachable (people didn't use to climb mountains as we do nowadays), up there in the wind and the clouds, 'near' the sun (sun god)).

One tradition says that the Giant Athos threw a rock at Poseidon during the Battle of Gods and Giants. This rock is said to have landed where the peninsula of Athos is today. Another tradition says quite the opposite – Poseidon was the one to throw a huge rock at Athos, crushing him where the mountain presides over the sea today. This rock-throwing recurs in the myth of how Delphi was located. Old customs are most often carried over as far as possible into new customs, where they may have to be recontextualized. The now-Christian hegemony required a new myth to explain the sacred place.

The Christian story is that as an old woman Mary, the mother of Jesus, 30-40 years after his death, was invited to Cyprus to visit Lazarus. She sailed with St. John the Theologian. A storm arose and they drifted off course,

presumably along the Anatolian shores and passed all the Aegean islands in the north, arriving at the shores of Athos, where IM Ivíron is now located. Mary disembarked, and it is said that Jesus spoke to her from the sky:

“Whatever you ask and pray for, O my Mother, is Yours always, if they keep my commandments! From now on this place will be Your share and Your garden and Paradise, and a haven of salvation for those who desire to be saved, but also a recourse and refuge and unshaken haven of repentance for those who are weighed down with many sins.”¹²⁹

Custom

Customs are fixed when they are enshrined in scripture and explained as something that must remain intact, preserved permanently and in their entirety as holy archetypes. Or as timeless. Custom – cult – culture are all just a pattern.

Custom is not meant to be fixed. A dismantling of imagined barriers is necessary.

Customs must be customized for a society that changes through time.

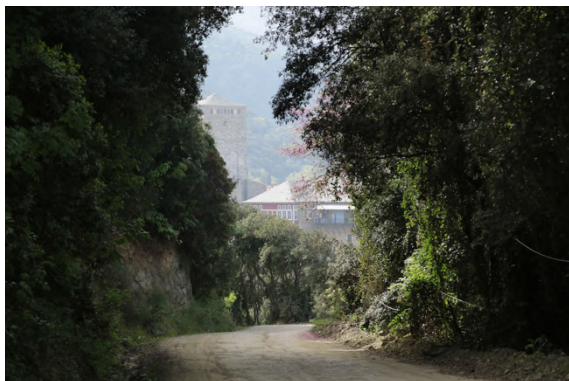
“The remembrance of custom is fundamentally flexible – memory is a marvellous instrument of elimination and transformation.”¹³⁰



1.



2.



3.

1. Along the path between Sk. Timíou Prodrómou and IM Mégistis Lávras

3. Approaching IM Ivíron from the south



4.

2. Old path between between Sk. Timíou Prodrómou and IM Megistis Lávras

4. Along the path between Karyés and IM Símonos Pétras, looking north to the hills just west of Karyés



5.



6.



7.



8.



9.



10.

5. Pilgrim's map of Mount Athos

7. Heremite cabins near Mikrá Ag. Anna, seen from the sea

9. IM Simonos Pétras to the left and the goal for the day, IM Osiou Grigoriou by the sea to the right. Mount Athos in the middle.

6. Crossing the helipad at IM Mégistis Lávras

8. Approaching IM Simonos Pétras

10. The Central square in Karyes

Hesychasm

Hesychasm is a mystical tradition of prayer that is important in Athos. It is a process of inward focus, repetition and solemn silence, until one ceases to register the senses, so as to achieve an experience of God. The specific prayer is a short sentence repeated over and over again while sitting still for hours. This is a kind of focus and concentration where one ceases to be aware of one's bodily appearance, becoming a mental stalagmite, gradually appearing, slowly adding presence, a kind of anaesthesia, a not-sensing.

A sense of floating may be felt when one sits completely still for a certain time, as the fluid in the organ of balance in the inner ear has fallen still and the nerves stop transmitting positional information to the brain. This is one possible physical effect of solemn, focused concentration. As soon as the head is moved, the motion again stimulates the nerves, again firing signals to the brain. Prolonged minimal stimulus has the effect of sensory deprivation evoking hallucinations including flashes of light and colours, which may turn into complex scenes.

IM Megístis Lávras, 12.4.2016 – 20:55

IM Megístis Lávras in the remote south east is the oldest monastery still standing, from 963 CE. I passed a heliport just outside and arrived at this medieval castle through a heavy gate at 19:10. No men around. It's huge.

I got a bed at the dorm, and had no time to change or wash if I wanted dinner. I was stinking of sweat. Sunset will be soon, when the gates close and no more visitors are accepted. A group of middle-aged Russians waited outside the dining hall. Doors were opened. I had no idea what I was supposed to do, whether there was some particular ritual or something, so I waited and observed. The large hall was decorated with icons everywhere. Benches around round tables. Plates for 7-8 at each table. Some black-clad monks (I presumed from the clothing) sat gravely around one table. The host stood smiling and showed me with a gesture where I could take a seat. I thanked him.

There we sat, a group of men, at the oldest monastery, in the April evening. Nobody said anything. There was bread and cold soup in some plates, potatoes on some others. A man in full-length flowing black robes sitting next to me was clearly dissatisfied with the food in front of him. Nobody ate. After a while the host seemed to say a short prayer, and everybody crossed themselves. I had to make a quick decision, as the crossing ritual was already in progress. Not being religious, I have never crossed myself, so I don't know exactly how to do it. I chose to adapt and do as the others did: crossed myself as best I could, attracting as little attention as possible. I offered to swap plates with the discontented man next to me if he preferred the food in front of me. He accepted in a brusque, dismissive way and started eating.

A man dressed in colourful trousers and a worn-out T-shirt at our table fiddled with his phone. He was abruptly accosted by a monk who walked over to him, seized his collar, pulled him up and simply threw him out of the dining hall. This was clearly a serious offence, and since I had read there was a general reluctance towards photos, and video cameras were prohibited, I chose to be on the respectful side.

The monastery runs on Byzantine time, starting the day at sunset, while the liturgical day starts in the afternoon, and operates according to the Julian calendar¹³¹ and is therefore thirteen days behind the outside world.

Morning office IM Megístis Lávras, 13.4.2016 – 06:42

I attended the morning office (*orthros*). A bell rang at 03:25. There was complete silence in this unmechanized medieval environment. After a while there were isolated sounds of doors creaking. The ceiling lamp in the seven-bed dorm had been on for the few hours of potential sleep. The service started at 04:00.

From outside in the dark morning I saw a man going in through a door at the side corner of the main church. Hoping that this was the main entrance, I followed after him into a long, narrow, empty room with *stacidia* chairs along the walls. Immediately to the left there was a door behind a red curtain to a small dark room with a large box containing some relics. All the walls were covered with icons. To the right there was a larger room with chairs along all the walls, and a small door in the middle led to the innermost chamber, also with *stacidia*, where the reading took place. There were three main rooms in the church, representing the Holy Trinity. It seemed like a blend of a transept and aisle church with the altar more or less in the middle, and a main dome above the transept intersection. The model for this church was the second Hagia Sofia in Constantinople, which was set on fire and destroyed in the Nika riots of 532 CE. The third Hagia Sofia was immediately erected and is the one that still stands in Istanbul.

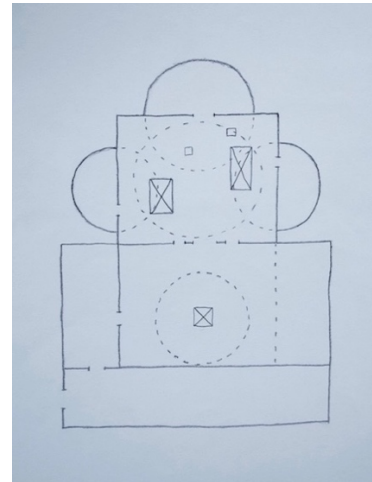
The service mainly consisted of text recited in Greek, of which I understand nothing, lasting two and a half hours. The church was dimly lit by just a few candles and paraffin lamps, judging from the smell. The air was heavy, but at the same time chilly and rather raw. Priests and monks took turns on reading from different positions. Everyone came and went in no particular pattern. Attending the beginning did not seem to be compulsory, nor did the end, so the service was not a collective performance from A to Z, formally presented, that everyone had to attend. Instead, visiting pilgrims walked around in their Adidas outfits and golden necklaces. Gradually, more men arrived. Monks shambled around all the time, shifting position, resting at new spots, in the high-armed *stacidia* chairs all

around the walls. The armrests are high enough to support someone standing. One is supposed to stand before God, but the chairs had a flip-down seat. After all, men do get tired. A man walked around a couple of times with small bells and incense, as if a little too quickly, with slightly clumsy, over-long steps, and thus apparently recklessly. Monks walked around lighting and blowing out candles, setting out and removing reading tables, opening books for someone else to read. There were no instruments. No organ, no accompaniment. Barely any sound other than shambling steps and sometimes exaltations from the congregation. Everyone manoeuvred around in a pattern they felt was suited to the day, and there was no rush. The office takes time, a long time. This establishes a ritual space. The result is at the same time a more static and more vivid performance, which makes the service more personal. It also seems more inclusive (for the included), more participatory, than the Protestant service lasting 40 minutes, with people submissively sitting in one position on hard benches, receiving the word of the priest.

All monks have a full beard, black floor-length flowing robes (a cassock), a stiff black hat with cloth attached over the back (*kamilavka* and *epanokamelavkion*). The absence of women accentuates the sexual. Consequently, each man here is accentuated as a dangling penis.



Sketch of morning service IM Megistis Lávras, after memory.



Sketch of floor plan of the main church in IM Megistis Lávras, after memory.

On holiness – hiking from Karyes to Grigoriou, 13.4.2016 – 09:20

All these monks have grown up in different places in the world with assorted backgrounds, and now take part in this rehearsed theatre – a huge, encompassing, truly immersive spectacle.

Almost all aspects of life here at Athos are part of a construct meant to shape this context. Everything is a part of this continuous play. And once it starts to play, it just keeps rolling. Stopping it is almost impossible.

What constitutes ‘holy’?

In modern art, art becomes art when someone, preferably the artist, declares it to be art. Art is art because someone says so. In religion something becomes holy because it is declared so by someone. The nature of the ‘holy’ is determining, setting up the scene, deciding. The action shapes a context, creates a story.

What makes something so important that it has to be surrounded by a holy taboo, that it cannot be questioned? That it has to be declared holy, exempted from scrutiny, from questioning? The religious culture shapes context. An abstract god is instigated as creator, as an incomprehensible, impregnable, unreachable zone.

Who were these entities?

What could the first god-like idea have been?

When did someone start to conceptualize such an idea?

The idea of deities was probably developed with society, its needs and opportunities through tens of thousands of years – as explanations, as guidance, as someone to refer the validity of the law to, as models to structure life around, as constructs to bridge the knowledge gaps. It is about learning, repetition, creating memories and new patterns in our brains, to make us behave and react in certain ways.

Lead and mislead.

One is led to do something. Or beguiled? The path is shaped to follow. It makes choices easier. I think of incense used in churches and the fumes of ethylene that Pythia in Delphi breathed, which intoxicated her and made her hallucinate. “And lead us not into temptation” is part of the famous Lord’s prayer (Matthew 6:13), with the prior instruction, “This, then, is how you should pray”. A pattern, a ritual is presented, where one is told (how) to express one’s *belief*, what one should think. However, what religion does, is precisely temptation in the shape of a promise. It tempts you with paradise, eternal salvation, a life after death, the idea that everything will be better, will be all right, that you will achieve peace – splendid comfort in a dismaying, complex, merciless, arbitrary world. It tempts you with order, simple structure and mild happiness.

IM Osiou Grigoríou, 2016-04-13, 15:03

My shoulders are sore. I walked from Karyes over the hills, passed through IM Símonos Pétras.

The concierge at the guest house stared at my visa (*diamonitirion*):

– Hm. Protestant?

– Yes.

– .

He stared, moderately disapproving, into the air ahead of him for a second, before he wrote something in his papers. As if I wasn’t welcome, though nothing was said.

The twenty-something Father Hieronym from Florida was the interpreter when I talked to the Abbot, who is the spiritual and worldly leader of the monastery. The morning office starts tomorrow at 03:00 with an hour of prayers, then the Great Canon is recited until about 06:30. The Abbot will not allow me to record the Canon. However, they have a recorder and will record themselves, and I can get a copy. I had of course asked about this by fax when I enquired about hospitality (the only medium of contact I could find), only to get a one-sentence answer:

Your request has been accepted only for
one day, for ^{the} Wednesday 13 of April.
 Monk Porfyrios - 6-4-2016

2016-04-14, 02:45

The first wake-up was by a faint, distant bell ringing somewhere in the courtyard. Then came the woodblock, a *talanton* (which means balance, weight, and is the origin of the word ‘talent’). It has the sonorous sound of a quite large stick hitting a hollow wooden block or box. It is hit at two spots, so one sounds higher pitched than the other. The rhythm symbolizes the two natures of Christ as God and Man in the Holy Trinity.

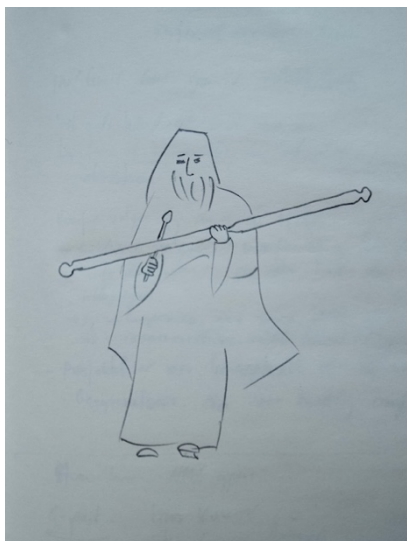


Figure: Talanton being played

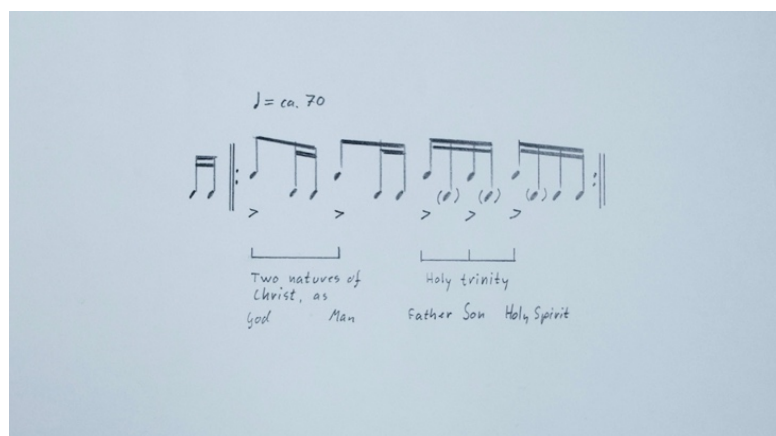


Figure: What was played on the Talanton

Somebody walks around the passages and courtyards of the monastery to wake up everyone, playing the talanton. The sound is distant, growing and resounding differently according to the shape of the space the player is passing through.

The Canon is extremely monotonous, the text is recited with indifference, verse after verse, sometimes with repetitions of a single word perhaps 40 times. After a week with four or less hours of sleep every night I fall asleep in my *stacidia* during the Canon. Dark men move around like dark shadows. It is sung with nasal voices. Intonation is clearly not important. It is partly sung homophonic in unison, but not much of a unison. Yesterday I was asked why I wanted to attend the Canon when I didn't understand Greek. I wanted to listen to the singing, I said. Now I understand the question better. Apparently, the *musical* tradition at IM Vatopediou is far stronger.

The Byzantine song tradition is extremely conservative in the Athos monasteries. Instruments are completely banned. What I heard was a subdued, almost rushed, mumbling singing style. Not only instruments, but music as a concept is considered to have an obscuring effect, as something sensual, tempting, obstructing the words, occupying the available space for reflection. The almost total absence of music accentuates what is left of it.

There is no radio, no TV, absolutely no advertising, no illustrations. There are no chain stores in the small village of Karyes, merely a few cafés and a small grocery and souvenir shop. The monasteries are silent places. No voices are raised, there is only quiet speaking from time to time. There is almost no one around, apart from an occasional pilgrim, a monk watering some flowers or crossing the courtyard.

IM Ivíron, 2016.04.14 – 17:26

Ivíron. Dinner is apparently in 5 minutes. I am drenched in sweat and dust. I just bumped into the Dutchman I met in the hills yesterday. Everyone wonders why I carry such a heavy backpack. I reply that as a Protestant I have to suffer in order to enjoy. At least people find that amusing and give a short snorting, but friendly laugh. I find no reason to stir up the social situation by adding that my status as a Protestant is only formal. Today's walk was 21.54 km. It took me seven hours.

I get the impression that many men here have a literal belief in miracles. This is a strange tradition from which conscious, critical, comprehensive interpretation has been removed. The filters of interpretation have been cleaned, the ambiguity of poetry is gone, depth of language (or the many layers of music) are also just gone. The concept of symbolism is... I don't know exactly... not present perhaps, or just ignored. This is most peculiar. A thought pattern, a belief with its origin in texts so full of symbolic language, analogies, metaphors... How is it possible to interpret things literally in such a context?

In dogmatic literalism interpretation is set aside. A mental shift towards dogmatic literalism would be a most unfortunate setback, were it to gain territory in humankind as a whole.

Mary

"It is 'unlawful for any man to bring forward, or to write, or to compose a different Faith as a rival to that established by the holy Fathers assembled with the Holy Ghost in Nicæa.' They confirmed the Nicene creed that Mary should be referred to as Theotokos (Birth giver of God) and saying anything else was heresy."
(Schaff, 1890, referring to Council in Ephesus 431 CE)

What happens when dogmatism is coupled with misleading translation? To both Catholics and the Orthodox, Mary, the mother of Jesus, is perceived as absolutely perfect, pure and incapable of error. This is strongly interpreted as not having had sex, being a virgin, not having been touched, being forbidden, holy.

In the Old Testament, collected and written in Hebrew from 6-700 BCE onward¹³², Isaiah 7:14 is perceived as a prophecy of the Messiah: "The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel." The word used of the woman is the Hebrew *almah*, and is rarely used. It describes a) a woman, who b) is young, and c) has not (yet) born a child. Whether or not the young woman has yet had sex with a man is not conveyed by this word. If that is important to state, i.e. that a woman has in fact not yet had sex, there is the Hebrew word *betulah*, and this word is frequently used in the Hebrew Bible.

These texts were translated into Greek during the second century BCE. At that time Judea had been ruled by Greece for quite some time, at the height of ancient Greek culture. This was the 'Septuagint' translation. The Hebrew word *almah* is translated as Greek *parthenos* in this particular verse. *Parthenos* has the meaning of a woman who has not yet had sex – thus our present conception of the "virgin". In other places, however, *almah* is translated



Photo of CD-R with the recording of the Canon (Megistis Kanon) the monastery gave me. It is dated 1 April 2016 because Athos observe the tradition with the Julian calendar. At kosunde.no the recording of the Canon from IM Osiou Grigriou and the Canon as text is presented.

as Greek *neanis*, which simply means young woman. Isaiah 7:14 is in fact the only place *almah* is translated as *parthenos*¹³³.

The interpretation and choice made by the translators have had tremendous consequences. This interpretation grew stronger, since Matthew the Evangelist wrote in Greek and quoted the Greek Septuagint Bible. He is the only Evangelist to claim that Mary was made pregnant by the Holy Spirit (Matthew 1:18-22). Luke the Evangelist describes an angel telling Mary that she will become pregnant¹³⁴, John the Evangelist says that Jesus is the son of Joseph, while Mark the Evangelist refers to Jesus as the Son of God without being more specific.¹³⁵ This translation has had huge consequences for later societies, including a very probable influence on gender gaps past and present.

Karyes, 15.4.2016 – 10:29

I spoke with two men more or less my age in Karyes – Panos and Yannis – while waiting for the bus to take us to Dáfni. The crowd of men forced, pushed and elbowed their way to get on the bus. The mood was clearly irritable and aggressive with yelling, pushing and ill temper. Panos was grumpy, he did not appreciate such behaviour. I was grumpy, and couldn't resist noting that here, at this presumptively holy place, raw egoism ruled among the visitors. Then Yannis got grumpy.

Yannis lectured me on the alleged impossibility of surviving winter at Athos without God's benevolence. When he got up at 03:00 that morning he had also seen the Milky Way so clearly, thanks only to God, and the wonder of a beautiful male community, where everybody (!) was welcome. Everyone = men. Women are excluded from this "everyone". What does that imply about males thinking of women? Everyone becomes a term that does not include everyone. Yannis exclaimed that he was pleased, so sincerely happy that there were no women around. That he felt free.

Einschub: Homo Sacer

That made me think of the Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben (b. 1942) and his thinking on power and law – exclusion as a prerequisite for inclusion – in the light of the old Roman law about a "Homo Sacer", a person who could be killed, but not sacrificed, and was outside the law, so the killer could not be punished, as the person was not regarded as a proper person protected by the law.¹³⁶

Dáfni, 15.4.2016 – 12:17

"It is a human error, a human flaw, that we are so obsessed by memory," Yannis exclaimed. "We shouldn't look back, we shouldn't *save* so much. We should rather *create*, move on – in the belief, security and faith that new opportunities will come to us," he said, now in Dáfni, waiting for the boat to take us back to the secular world. "Reproduction, actually just the potential for reproduction, has spoiled parts of our ability to perceive, to sense, and to experience the moment, the present. In recent times, especially in the social media," he said. "Pictures are central to this flawed attention. They lead to a focus on the documentation of life, on saving, remembering, archiving. This leads to a focus on memories, a nostalgia, a kind of erroneous attention to what has been, to backward thinking rather than thinking about what *is* and what *will come*." These were sensible notions.

"That seems true," I said. "But everything boils down to our cognitive structures and context. We know only what we know, we do as our habits and learning have led us to do, we interpret on the basis of internalized knowledge, already 'known' information."

"The fundamental errors of the human mind, such as our obsession with memory, are in the cognitive structures," he said.

"Well, errors and errors, but yes, they are."

"I am a devoted believer," he said, "and God will always look after me. I don't need to look back, all I need is to believe."

- ¹²⁵ Bush, 2006, p. 327.
¹²⁶ Odden, 2006.
¹²⁷ The Friends of Mount Athos.
¹²⁸ Denizeau, 2014.
¹²⁹ Agioi_Anargyroi (alias), 2010.
¹³⁰ Olwig, 2002, p.52
¹³¹ Holy Trinity Russian Orthodox Church. (n.d.).
¹³² Solevåg, n.d.
¹³³ Aschim, Aasgaard, Berge & Mørk, 2008
¹³⁴ Although: “How will this be’, Mary asked the angel, ‘since I am a virgin?’ ” (New International Version). Luke formulates the next verse as an echo of Isaiah 7:14 in Septuaginta translation. The tradition influences new ways of formulating events. (Aschim et al., 2008.)
¹³⁵ Aschim et al., 2008.
¹³⁶ Agamben, 2010.

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DELPHI IN FUMES

After leaving Athos I travelled to Athens, hired a car and drove to the ancient theatre in Epidaurus, then on to the small village Delphi up on a steep mountainside late in the evening of the same day. The following is an essay on extreme siting. This shaping of context has inscribed itself not only in the memory of the place, but to an entire culture and through history.

Delphi is one of the most famous ancient sanctuaries in Greece. The small town overlooks the Pleistos river running from east to west down a quite steep southward slope. The settlement is from the Late Bronze Age, about 1600 BCE. To the north there are steep cliffs, with the terrain rising into the mountains and Mount Parnassus. Not far to the south is the Bay of Corinth. The shrines and monuments are gathered on the hillside just outside and above the town. Athens is – as the crow flies – some 120 km to the east, the city of Mycenae about 85 km to the south, the city of Patras some 70 km to the west and the strategic city of Lamia 50 km to the north – all substantial ancient cities.

TECTONICS OF GEOLOGY

Motion between the African, Anatolian and Eurasian tectonic plates hold Greece in a vice. The Corinth Rift Zone has two crossing faults below Delphi¹³⁷, leading to recurring earthquakes. In ancient times, long before our present knowledge of geology, evolution and atoms, earthquakes must have been perceived as an immersively frightening phenomenon. The entire ground shook as if it was alive, pottery and furniture rattled or was crushed, some houses collapsed, perhaps there were even some landslides in steep terrain. And imagine the sound. The roar, the noise of bedrock clashing (this is geophony), louder and stranger than any manmade sound, or the normally occurring sounds in such a soundscape.

When the archaeological site of Delphi was excavated a century ago, archaeologists found no trace of a chasm or vapours. They rejected the old stories about the oracle of Delphi inhaling vapours as a mere myth. However, more recent research has revealed that one fault – the Kerna Fault – is precisely below the Temple of Apollo. Another – the Delphi Fault – crosses east to west. Its precise location is difficult to determine, but projections suggest it is below the Temple of Apollo, putting the intersection below the temple. This geological situation is in a quite steep slope, where many rock slides over the years have formed this natural amphitheatre in the hillside. The bedrock of the area consists of sandstone, limestone and strata of bitumen. This porous ground is heated by the seismic activity, and gases are formed: carbon monoxide, methane, ethane and ethylene have been detected in springs in the faults.

NARCOTIC EFFECT

As a gas, ethylene was identified scientifically in 1865. Ethylene has a sweet smell. It was used as a surgical anaesthetic. It affects the central nervous system. Low concentrations of ethylene give a sensation of floating or disembodied euphoria, with a reduced sense of inhibition, of presence. Delirium and hallucination may occur. In high concentrations, the anaesthetic effect is complete, with unconsciousness or death as a result.

Aesthesia is Greek for *capacity for sensation or feeling, sensitivity*.

Anaesthesia is the opposite, an *inability to sense*. In medical terminology it means the *soothing of pain, relief of suffering, thus the removal of feeling, of the ability to sense*.

The effect of inhaling the identified gases matches the ancient description of the prophetic vapours.

The Adython, upon which no one was permitted to set foot, was a basement chamber, as we recall. It was small and enclosed. For weeks or months, it was closed off, so that the chamber was gradually filled with the fumes, as the temple was constructed directly above the chasm. Only Pythia had access, and she only entered occasionally. She

was then intoxicated by the gases, affected by drugs, with a euphoric and delirious appearance and inconsistent utterances as a result. The theatrical impact was effective, and apparently established a credible canvas for the priests next door to state their ‘interpretation’ and thus give advice.

POLITICS OF ANCIENT GREECE

The Bronze Age Collapse was severe in the Eastern Mediterranean and Middle East. It happened over about a century from 1250 BCE, and the causes were diffuse, probably complex. However, the Bond Event 2¹³⁸ (recurring climatic fluctuations effecting temperature drops primarily in the North Atlantic Region) is associated with this collapse, with its two peaks around 3200 and 2800 years ago, quickly causing severe drought in the Eastern Mediterranean.

A series of invasions and wars ruined almost all the cities from Greece via Anatolia and Israel to Egypt. Trade routes were ruined. Severe cultural collapse disrupted societies during this period. Literacy declined. Several centuries of decline followed, with depopulation and almost no written records. What was left was often isolated villages with little contact and trade.

The Trojan War may have been part of this collapse. Ancient Greeks saw the war as a historical event around 1200 BCE. Oral traditions about previous heroic activities surviving as records of war events seem to have been transmitted during the dark centuries following the collapse. Then a new era came. The isolated villages of Greece grew stronger, grew into city states with territories surrounding the cities providing food and mining resources, and materials for tools and construction. A reconstruction of the past began, with a cultural revival and epic poems. Homer is symbolizing this, having lived around 800 BCE, passing on the old tales, enshrining them as scripture. The golden age of ancient Greece lasted from about 750 BCE to 27 BCE.

Until the mid-1800s CE the Trojan War was widely seen as mythical. This changed when ruins of the city of Troy were discovered and excavated from 1870 near Hissarlik in Turkey.¹³⁹ The city states shared a common Greek culture, but had no common political unity. They were all independent, members of a variety of alliances against their adversaries. This was the Iron Age.

SITING THE MYTH

Greek mythology appears to us today as a strange and complex wonderland. The cast of characters is complicated, full of overlapping, variants and contradictions due to different storytellers and traditions over time in changing societies. The characters are presented with heroic qualities, and in general as models, as an explanation or way of understanding the world that emerged.

The characters are presented as having been born, and they may have children; they look like humans, but they do not die – they are exalted. In this system all the qualities of human creatures are given to them, although in name they are gods or deities. The deities mix with the humans. The deities are heroes and leaders, taking care of different sectors of society, nature, phenomena and life. Humans often challenged the gods and went to fight them, and if successful humans could transcend mortality and enter the sphere of the gods as mixed – born as humans, later to become gods or demigods. This could happen in particular after honourable and heroic actions or achievements, as in politics or sports – meaning saving someone or taking charge in a critical situation, and thus becoming a person people could count on, perhaps seek advice from. This suggests that a god was someone to look up to, to learn from, to be inspired by, to get advice from – not some paternal spirit to obey.

The conception of Zeus can be traced back to the Proto-Indo-European religion, from which stories with similar characteristics have come down to different cultures. We know little from this time, but Indo-European wanderers seem to have entered and settled Greece from the north east. A recurring concept in the Proto-Indo-European religion is a Sky Father – Proto-Indo-European **Dyēus Ph₂tér* – Greek *Zeus*, Etruscan and later Latin *Jupiter*.¹⁴⁰ Try to pronounce it! Proto Indo-European may have been spoken as one language as late as 5500 years ago. This figure was seen as the father of a pantheon (a number of gods), perhaps a sun god (or simply the sun) with a counterpart in Mother Earth (Gaia).

No one stood guard over the right way of to believe. There was no orthodox dogmatism. Much of what we know about Greek mythology is from Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey*. What would later become heresies were thus not heretical, just variants of the stories. Priests and prophets therefore interpreted and guided people to a greater extent, helping them to make choices. Prophets had an important function in Delphi – they had the role of interpreting the “divine will” – and thus also had a say in important decisions regarding the State.

To legitimize Delphi as a holy place for rituals, worship and advice, it must have been important to explain it as the centre of the (known) world. This need was fulfilled by shaping a context. A myth explains the localization

of Delphi. It starts with Zeus, who in order to establish the centre of the world (Mother Gaia) sent out two golden eagles, one in each direction. Where they met, he was to throw a rock to see where it fell. It supposedly fell in Delphi. The Omphalos (a pillar statue) in Delphi (in Greek ‘navel’, as in the navel of the Earth) represents this rock. Then the god Apollo slew the serpent *Python*, which was here to protect the navel of (opening into) Earth/Gaia, and built his temple at this exact site.

Speculation

My speculation is that only priests, prophets and dignitaries were allowed to raise their voices in the sanctuary area. It is at least possible to imagine that only a few were allowed to do this, to use the acoustics of the place. Probably before and for a long time up to our own times, lowering the voice was a sign of respect, submissiveness and humility. Delphi was the supreme sanctuary in Greece, located on a steep hill. Certain spots in the sanctuary can produce a sublime acoustic effect. Perhaps the acoustic use of the place was reserved for special authorities.

DISCOVERY OF THE ORACLE

From at least 1600 BCE there was prophetic activity at this site. According to Diodorus Siculus the first to discover it was a shepherd¹⁴¹, who noticed his goats behaved strangely when near a chasm in the ground. When he got close he hallucinated and began to see future events. Now word spread and eventually it was decided that only one person at a time should be the prophet, sitting safely above the chasm on a tripod. Only later did Homer write about how the site was appropriated? by Apollo, the god of music, truth and prophecy and more.

From around 600 BCE the Oracle was rededicated, or recontextualized, in the first Temple of Apollo, and now served as a place of worship for the Apollo figure. Every month or a few times a year it was possible to seek advice from the Oracle.

PYTHIA IN HER ADYTHON

Visitors seeking advice first sacrificed, then were led to a chamber adjacent to the Pythia priestess, which was a role filled by different local women. Her role was to be a medium through which Apollo spoke his oracles – in tales and messages. She sat in a closed chamber in the basement of the Apollo temple, on her special Tripod. This chamber was the Adyathon, a place where one may not set foot upon, a forbidden place with no entry for ordinary people. Only the priestess had access. The visitor asked for advice. Pythia was in a state of delirium and trance, uttering inarticulate speech in a daze. This was then ‘translated’ by priests in a chamber next door into verse in comprehensible language. The old stories say Pythia sat over an opening in the ground, a small chasm. Fumes – *pneuma* – are said to have emerged. This was explained by Apollo having fought and killed the snake Python there. Python was supposed to have fallen into the chasm as Apollo slew it, and the gases came from its decaying, rotten corpse. People took advice on any important decisions, including engaging in wars.

Plutarch was a priest at the temple in the first century CE. He noted that gases evaporating in the Adyathon had a sweet smell like perfume and that the underlying rock might have had a vein of vital essences that produced the gas. Around 361 CE Pythia claimed that she could give no more oracles because the temple had collapsed and the spring had fallen silent.¹⁴²



John Collier: Priestess of Delphi (1891)

AFTERMATH

Roman hegemony increased during the last 100 years BCE and Greece was absorbed in 27 BCE into the realm of the Roman emperor Augustus. Delphi lost its position as a meeting place, sanctuary and centre for managing truths and treasures. Its significance was reduced since it could no longer play a prominent role of intervention in political developments, since the city states of Greece were no longer politically independent. The people in charge were not operating in accordance with the culture of Delphi. Important decisions were now being made in Rome.

Nor must we forget the seismic activity in the area and the way the ground shifted slightly from time to time, which meant that the fumes either did not pour out as much as before or stopped altogether, pouring out elsewhere instead. And Christianity spread fast during the first centuries of the new millennium. After first having been persecuted by the Romans, Christianity was decriminalized in the Roman Empire in 313 CE and made the state religion – indeed the only permitted religion (except for Judaism) in 380 CE. The oracle of Delphi was ultimately closed down in 381¹⁴³ or 392¹⁴⁴. The old Greek mythology with its polytheism, which had been holy, was now to be forgotten and hidden away behind the new pattern of omniscient truth and holy thought. Nevertheless, many of the old ideas were transmitted to the new faith.

A very potent symbol is the tripod. The tripod is an ancient symbol of balance and stability, as it is quite simply physically stable, right there before our eyes. Pythia's tripod was the most famous throughout ancient Greece. This symbol continued with the Christian Holy Trinity, a balanced and stable way of combining the old polytheistic custom with the new monotheistic ideas by joining three deities in one. Polytheism also survived through Christianity's pluralistic cast of characters – the saints, who took care of separate territorial areas or phenomena in life, with roles not entirely unlike those of the different deities in Greek, Roman, Norse, Arab (etc.) mythology. The mythological idea of sacred landscapes was also transferred.



Tripod. N38°27'02.02" E022°52'47.95". Photo: Knut Olaf Sunde

IN-SPIRE

Pneuma is a Greek word meaning *breath, wind, air in motion*. Air in motion includes smoke, vapours, fumes and wind. In the Stoic philosophy, *pneuma* is the concept of the *breath of life*. It is the material that sustains consciousness in a body, and constitutes the human soul as part of the *pneuma* which is the soul of Zeus. The human soul, as air, was also linked by the ancient Greeks with the *pneuma* encompassing the entire world. All this is quite understandable and straightforward, and good explanations and concepts, considering that they did not possess all the scientific knowledge we do today. On the other hand, the reality surrounding them 2700 years ago was much the same as it is today.

The Pythia of the Oracle breathed in fumes – vapours of ethylene. These filled her and transformed her personality: she could be understood as *inspired*, apparently in contact with the gods able to utter their prophecies. The Greek concept of a connection between life/mind/spirit/soul and air is not surprising. After all, air is necessary for us to breathe, to give and sustain (animal) life. This concept was also translated into Christianity with the Holy Spirit (or Holy Ghost), from Latin *spiritus*.

The Holy Spirit fills everything, is everywhere, and does not have the shape of a human body (as the other two deities do). *Inspire* (from the Latin *inspirare*) has the same root, meaning to breathe into, stimulate, animate, give rise to. The Old Testament was written in Hebrew. The Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible (Old Testament), called the Septuagint, translates the Hebrew term *ruach* as *pneuma*, meaning *breath, air*, thus spirit and inspiration. *Pneuma* is what is used throughout the New Testament, which was originally written in Greek, and where the figure of the Holy Spirit is introduced¹⁴⁵. Our language today, and our concept of how we conceive ideas, are influenced, *inspired*, by previous concepts, customs and practices long gone, but still persisting in time by way of regeneration and adaptation. The specific institution of the Oracle was closed down and allowed to go back to nature, and the site became ruins in the future, but the ideas found ways to sustain themselves through recontextualization.

SOMEBODY KNEW

What is ingenious in this whole process is the combination of the knowledge of the hallucinatory effect of the narcotic vapours with the use of the terrain, the erection of a temple and sacred site, and the entire explanation, story or mythologization of the area, its patterns of why and how and to whom. But most importantly, how it was used to exert power; to control leaders and important people, and to advise them in their decisions. In other words, the entire use of the place with its incredible influence on both concrete actions and later cultural ideas and customs. Its contextualization.

This is an example of extreme site awareness and the construction of a controlled spectacle; a complete performative theatre meant to shape and maintain the illusion. This was done by someone who understood its effect. Someone saw an opportunity to make an impact, to exert power. Human beings want to hear some kind of truth. To fill their knowledge gaps. They want to make connections, so they can believe they understand.

¹³⁷ de Boer, Hale, Chanton, 2001; Piccardi, 2000.

¹³⁸ Bond et al, 1999; Wanner et al. (2008).

¹³⁹ Sande, 2009.

¹⁴⁰ Mallory & Adams, 2006, p.408-9, 431; Proto-Indo-European Religion. (n.d.); Kraggerud, 2009; Sky Father, 2016.

¹⁴¹ Nevins, n.d.

¹⁴² de Boer et al, 2001.

¹⁴³ de Boer et al, 2001.

¹⁴⁴ Piccardi, 2000.

¹⁴⁵ Levend Water, n.d.

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