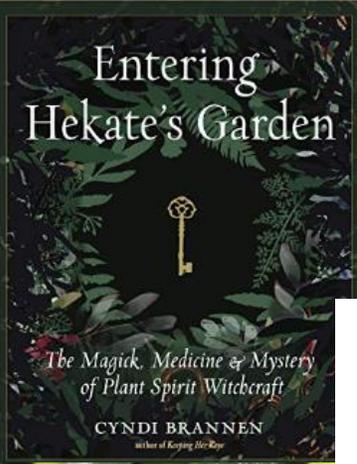


A narrow, ancient stone tunnel with a dirt path and a low wall on the left. The walls are made of large, weathered stone blocks. The path is made of dirt and leads into the distance. The lighting is dim, with some light coming from the top of the tunnel.

αἱ Σίβυλλαι

Awakening The Sibyl



Entering Hekate's Garden

The Magick, Medicine & Mystery
of Plant Spirit Witchcraft

CYNDI BRANNEN

Author of *Keeping the Keys*

X.

Sibyllika—The Prophecy

Mistress, I call forth your Sibyls.

Grant me their companionship now.

Accept my gratitude for welcoming me into their fold.

To the Sibyl of the Flame, Keeper of the Key of Visions of Fire, I summon you now.

To the Sibyl of the Breath, Keeper of the Key of Visions of Air, I summon you now.

To the Sibyl of the Ground, Keeper of the Key of Visions of Earth, I summon you now.

To the Sibyl of the Depths, Keeper of the Key of Visions of Water, I summon you now.

To the Sibyl of the Cave, Keeper of the Key of Visions of the Under World, I summon you
now.

To the Sibyl of the Garden, Keeper of the Key of Visions of the Middle World, I summon
you now.

To the Sibyl of the Starry Road, Keeper of the Key of Visions of the Upper World, I summon
you now.

I claim my place among you.

Show me the mysteries, guide me toward deeper understanding, teach me your ways.



Γοργόνιον τὴν σελήνεν διὰ τὸ ἐν αὐτῇ πρόσωπον

Plutarch. *Moralia*. with an English Translation by. Frank Cole Babbitt. Cambridge, MA. Harvard University Press. London. William Heinemann Ltd. 1936. 5.

“The face on the moon
is that of The Sibyl.”

An oracle of Pasiphae and the moon goddess Selene was active near Thalamai in Laconia. The legendary Cretan queen Pasiphae was called a daughter of the sun. Legend says that she had sex with a bull and so gave birth to the Minotaur. Like her sister Circe, Pasiphae was said to be a witch. One story claims that she cast a spell on her philandering husband Minos, the king of Knossos, that made his semen poisonous to his lovers. No stories have survived explaining how she became the fount of prophecy at Thalamai. Instead, there were attempts to conflate her with other prophetic women.

The Pythias excerpted from *Secret History of the Witches* © 2009 Max Dashu

CHAPTER 2

Why the Sibyl? Reclaiming a Female Voice of Prophecy

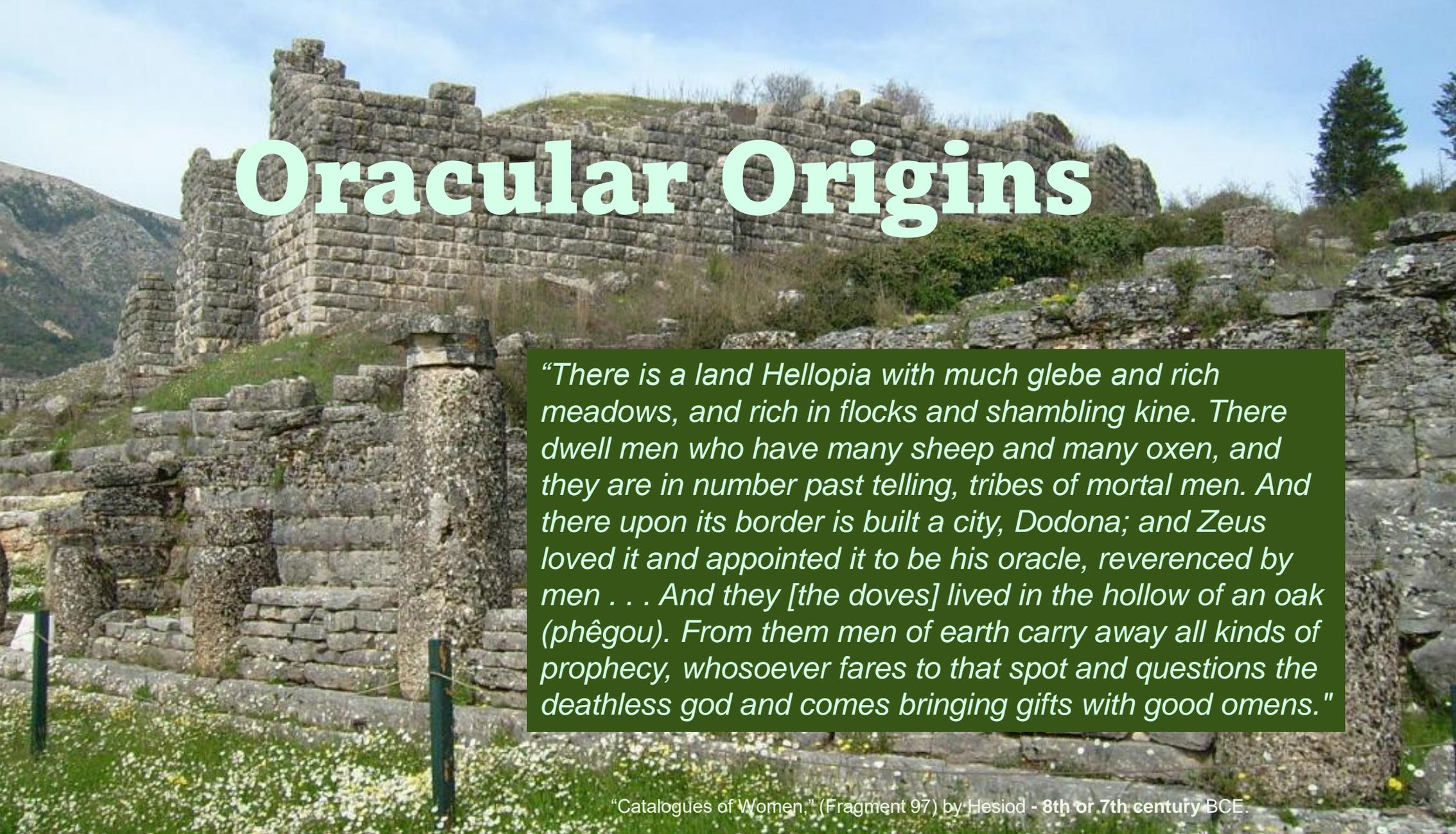
Seek not only to restore women to history and history to women but also to reconceptualize history and culture as the product and experience of both women and men.

ELISABETH SCHÜSSLER FIORENZA¹



Michelangelo: *Delphic Sibyl*

Delphic Sibyl, detail of a fresco by Michelangelo, 1508–12; in the Sistine Chapel, Vatican City.

The background image shows ancient stone ruins on a hillside. The ruins consist of several walls and a prominent column, all constructed from large, rectangular stone blocks. The site is surrounded by green grass and small white flowers in the foreground. In the background, there are more hills and a clear blue sky with some light clouds. The overall scene is a well-preserved archaeological site.

Oracular Origins

“There is a land Hellopia with much glebe and rich meadows, and rich in flocks and shambling kine. There dwell men who have many sheep and many oxen, and they are in number past telling, tribes of mortal men. And there upon its border is built a city, Dodona; and Zeus loved it and appointed it to be his oracle, revered by men . . . And they [the doves] lived in the hollow of an oak (phêgou). From them men of earth carry away all kinds of prophecy, whosoever fares to that spot and questions the deathless god and comes bringing gifts with good omens.”

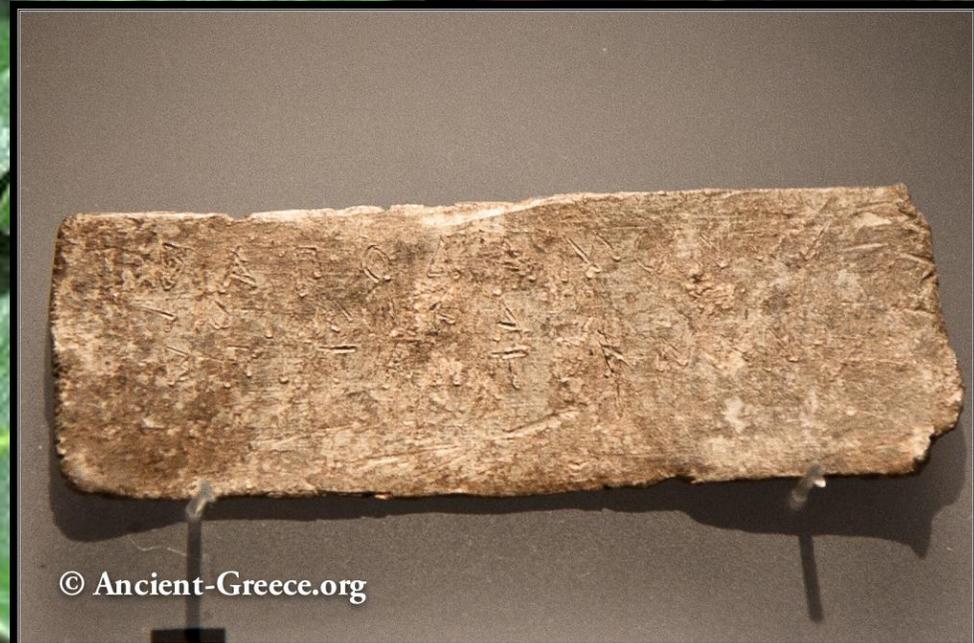
“Catalogues of Women,” (Fragment 97) by Hesiod - 8th or 7th century BCE.

“In earlier times the oracle was in the neighborhood of Scotussa, a city of Pelasgiotis; but when the tree was set on fire by certain people the oracle was transferred in accordance with an oracle which Apollo gave out at Dodona. However, he gave out the oracle, not through words, but through certain symbols, as was the case at the oracle of Zeus Ammon in Libya. Perhaps there was something exceptional about the flight of the three pigeons from which the priestesses were wont to make observations and to prophesy. It is further said that in the language of the Molossians and the Thesprotians old women are called "peliai" and old men "pelioi." And perhaps the much talked of Peleïades were not birds, but three old women who busied themselves about the temple.”

Strabo. ed. H. L. Jones, The Geography of Strabo. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press; London: William Heinemann, Ltd. 1924.

Some said that this long line of oracles originated in north Africa. A Greek tradition held that the Libyan goddess Lamia gave birth to the first Pythia, fathered by Zeus. Lamia was called "the first woman who chanted oracles, and they say that she was named Sibyl by the Libyans." [Pausanias, X, xii, in Olmsted, 67] This story accords with other Greek accounts of north African settlements and cultural influence, as well as archaeological finds of archaic Greek vessels with human figurines painted in a Libyan style. The African influence is most dramatically reflected in the tradition that "Black Doves" founded the oracular shrine of Dodona (below).

The Pythias excerpted from *Secret History of the Witches* © 2009 Max Dashu



© Ancient-Greece.org

The lead sheet pictured here reads "Ἐαποδάμον τύχοιμῖκα ἐπὶ τῶν τέχναν; (If I emigrate, will I succeed in my craft?) 5th c. BCE.

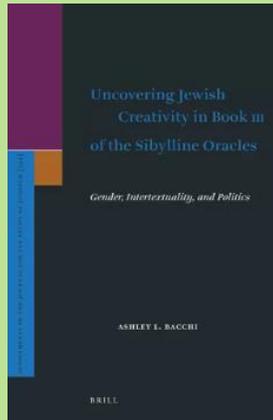


In a legend about the sibyl of **Cumae** in Italy, she accompanied Aeneas on his journey to the Underworld (Virgil's *Aeneid*, Book VI). According to **Dionysius of Halicarnassus**, a famous collection of sibylline prophecies, the **Sibylline Books**, was offered for sale to **Tarquinius Superbus**, the last of the seven kings of **Rome**, by the Cumaean sibyl. He refused to pay her price, so the sibyl burned six of the books before finally selling him the remaining three at the price she had originally asked for all nine. The books were thereafter kept in the temple of Jupiter on the Capitoline Hill, to be consulted only in emergencies. They were destroyed in the fire of 83 BC.

A Judaeian or Babylonian sibyl was credited with writing the Judeo-Christian **Sibylline Oracles** of which 14 books survive. The sibyl came thus to be regarded by some Christians as a prophetic authority comparable to the **Old Testament**. On the ceiling of the **Sistine Chapel**, **Michelangelo** alternated sibyls and prophets. In the **medieval** hymn *Dies Irae*, the sibyl is the equal of David as a prophet.

In a time and place that offered few career opportunities for women, the job of the priestess of Apollo at Delphi stands out. Her position was at the centre of one of the most powerful religious institutions of the ancient world. The competing Greek city states had few overarching authorities (political or otherwise), so the significance of her voice should not be underestimated.

Sibyl of Cumae in Johannes Opsopoeus, *Sibyllina Oracula* (Paris, 1599)



1 The Archaic Greek Sibyl: a Unique Model?

The earliest reference to the Sibyl is found in a fragment of Heraclitus of Ephesus (c. 535–475 BCE). Plutarch (46–120 CE) quotes Heraclitus: “the sibyl, with frenzied lips, uttering words mirthless, unembellished, unperfumed yet reaches to a thousand years with her voice through the god.”² Scholars have used this passage as evidence that the oracles of the Archaic Greek Sibyl were known to be exceptionally negative in nature. This negativity is highlighted as easily adaptable to Jewish eschatological themes, thus making the Sibyl a desirable pseudonym for a Judaeian author.³ Not only is there debate concerning

The oracle of Zeus at [Dodona](#) in northwestern [Greece](#) was regarded as the oldest. At Dodona the priests (later priestesses) revealed the god’s will from the whispering of the leaves on a sacred oak, from a sacred spring, and from the striking of a gong. Zeus also prophesied from his altar at Olympia, where priests divined from offerings, as well as from the [oasis](#) of Siwa in Libya, which was originally an oracle of the Egyptian god Amon.



The Libyan Sibyl by the painter Guido Cozzarelli

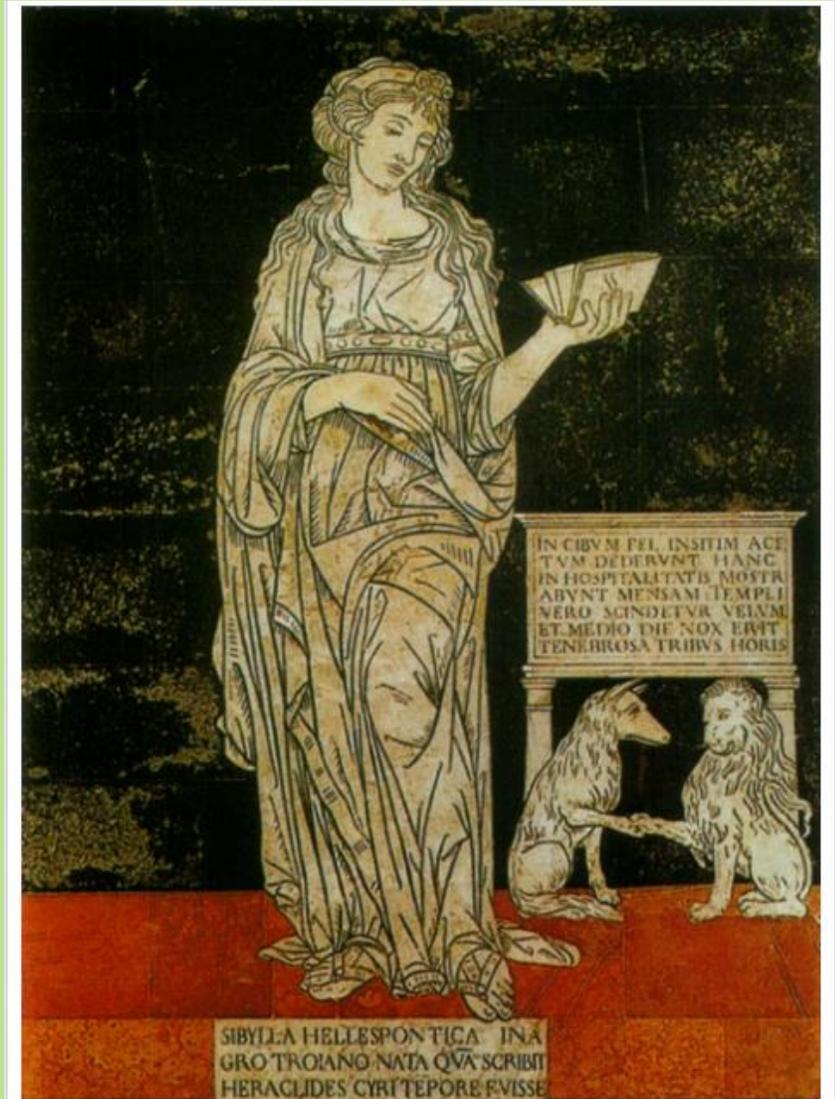


VIRGIL'S SIBYL AND THE 'MANY MOUTHS' CLICHÉ (AEN. 6.625-7)

The Sibyl of Cumae is a notoriously enigmatic figure, first pagan, then Christian, wise and deranged, clairvoyant but obscure. Her prophecies—scratched on volatile leaves, boomed through cave-openings, recorded for deciphering in hidden books—are riddles that can be read in two directions and interpreted in at least two ways.¹ Her biographical details are in question (which Cumae? Campanian or Aeolian? which name? Herophile? Amalthea? Deiphobe or Demophile?).² She is of disputed parentage, uncertain age, and ambiguous sexual experience. Virgil makes her a blend of three different Sibyls—Cumaean, Cimmerian, and Trojan—and gives her a double role: prophetess of Apollo (and forecaster of Aeneas' future) and priestess of

Hecate (and Aeneas' Underworld guide).³ Her voice, as Ovid predicted, has outlived her: Virgil's Sibyl becomes Dante's Virgil; Petronius' bottled fairy with a death wish speaks unforgettably of Neronian and twentieth-century malaise.⁴ Nothing a Sibyl says ought ever to be a straightforward cliché, yet for centuries Virgil's Sibyl of Cumae has got away with using one at a climactic moment in her Underworld tour.

After describing a selection of the torments in Tartarus, the Sibyl breaks off and tells Aeneas she can go no further in cataloguing the crimes and punishments she has witnessed. 'If I had a hundred tongues and a hundred mouths and an iron voice, I could not take in every form of crime or go through every punishment by name':



Neroccio di Bartolomeo (1447-1500)-'Hellepontine Sibyl'-mosaic

Virgil's Sibyl and the
'Many Mouths' Cliché
(Aen. 6.625-7)

Emily Gowers

The Classical
Quarterly
Vol. 55, No. 1 (May,
2005), pp. 170-182 (13
pages)
Published By:
Cambridge University
Press

The open–shut, ‘apocalypse later’ quality of the underworld tour reaches a climax in the Sibyl’s description of Tartarus, its most unspeakable region, and an invisible one too. Tartarus is a miniature version of Virgil’s Underworld as a whole in that it uneasily tacks traditional mythological elements (here Ixion, Sisyphus, and Tityus) together with specifically Roman historical ones onto a moralizing philosophical framework indebted to Orphic–Pythagorean texts.³³ It is also the most forbidden and polluted place of all: as the Sibyl says at 563, *nulli fas casto sceleratum insistere limen*. Even Aeneas, like the profane visitors shooed from the threshold of Hades (258 ‘*procul, o procul este, profani*’), is forced to stop outside the entrance and allowed to experience the place only at one remove when the Sibyl condenses the comprehensive tour she once had from her mentor Hecate: 565 *ipsa deum poenas docuit perque omnia duxit*. And even then there are questions the initiand should not ask: 614 *ne quaere doceri* ...

The narrative is structured so as to provide an internal model for Virgil’s larger-scale second-hand reporting, with Virgil the intermediary now played by the Sibyl, his more expansive sources replaced by Hecate, and the benighted reader represented by Aeneas. Hecate’s primacy in this context is boosted by the fact that Servius thought it plausible to etymologize her name from *ἑκατον*: who more capable of hundred-mouthed exposition?³⁴ The bulk of the Sibyl’s précis is an ephrasis conjuring up the horrific sights denied to her companion: 582, 585 *uidi*, 596 *cernere erat*.



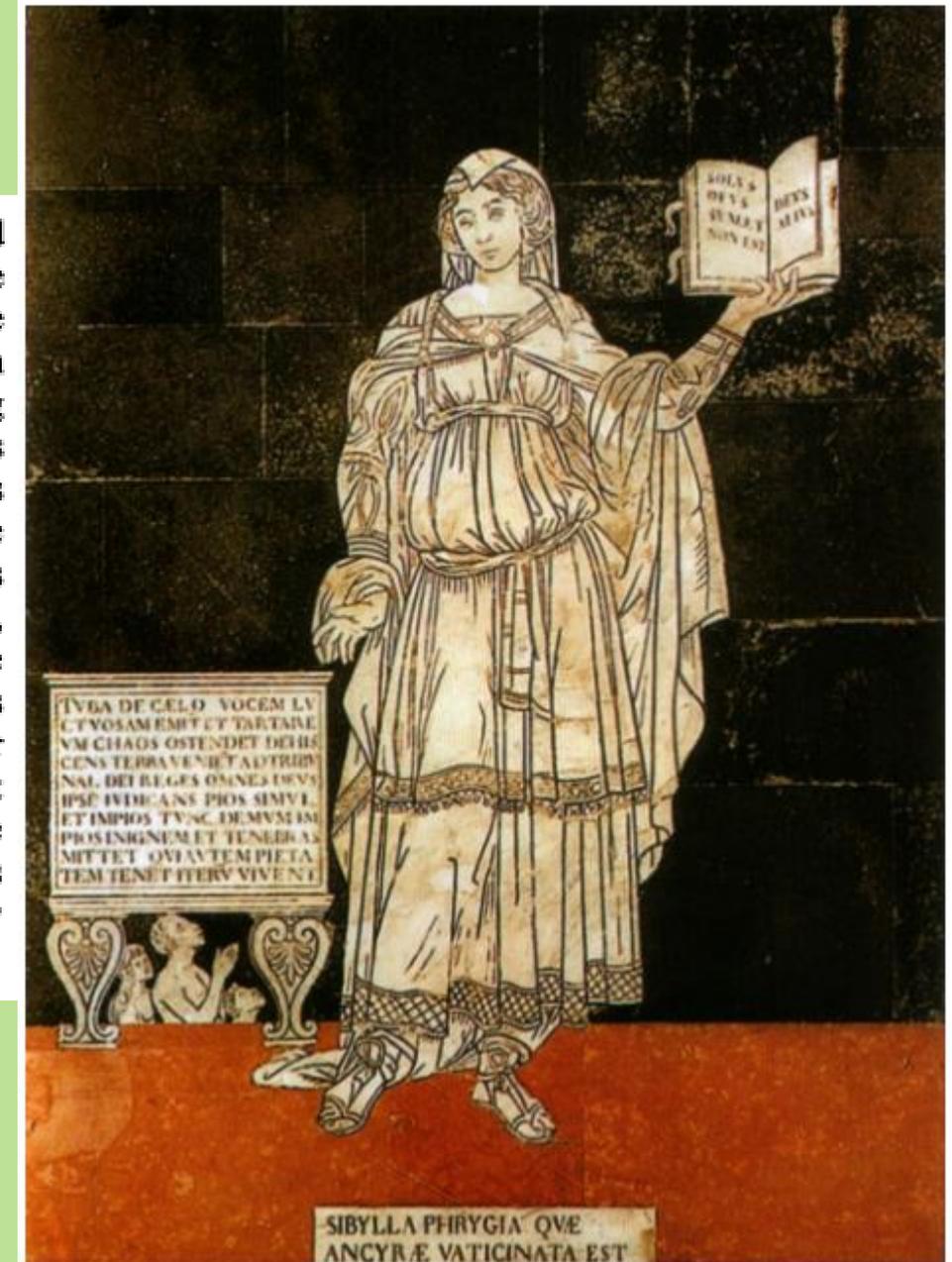
Antonio Federighi (15th century)-‘Erythraean Sibyl’-mosaic

Virgil's Sibyl and the
'Many Mouths' Cliché
(Aen. 6.625-7)

Emily Gowers

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What effect, then, does Virgil's Sibyl's conditional clause ('If I had a hundred mouths') produce, given that it is no longer exactly a conditional? Hyperbole beyond hyperbole: even a witness who does have a hundred mouths would still be incapable of describing Hell. It is questionable whether she would be allowed to in any case.⁶³ Yet by adding her version of 'many mouths' to those of the echoing multitude, the Sibyl, mystery-guide and conduit for vatic inspiration, channels herself and Virgil into the mainstream of the oral poetic tradition. Poet and priestess are suspended between brazen revelation and superstitious awe in the face of the unspeakable.⁶⁴ The old expression can now be read in two new ways. Either it is simply funny for being especially apt (the Sibyl *is* already hundred-mouthed or, more pedantically, she regrets leaving her extra mouths behind in her cave) or else it is a supreme gesture towards inexpressible immensity, which opens up a bottomless pit as deep as Tartarus itself. It is not as though a two-way reading can be ruled out for anything this prophetess says. Farrell writes: '[I]t is hard to imagine that Vergil didn't smile when he borrowed these lines [from the *Georgics*] intact to play a much more conventionally heroic role in the *Aeneid*.'⁶⁵ I would like to think the smile was directed at the new context just as much as the old one, and that it was a peculiarly sibylline smile.



Vito di Marco (15th century)-'Phrygian Sibyl'-mosaic

The Aeneid

VIRGIL



by Virgil

Translated by John Dryden

The streaming blood: a lamb to Hell and Night
(The sable wool without a streak of white)
Aeneas offers; and, by fate's decree,
A barren heifer, Proserpine, to thee,
With holocausts he Pluto's altar fills;
Sev'n brawny bulls with his own hand he kills;
Then on the broiling entrails oil he pours;
Which, ointed thus, the raging flame devours.
Late the nocturnal sacrifice begun,
Nor ended till the next returning sun.
Then earth began to bellow, trees to dance,
And howling dogs in glimm'ring light advance,
Ere Hecate came. "Far hence be souls profane!"
The Sibyl cried, "and from the grove abstain!
Now, Trojan, take the way thy fates afford;
Assume thy courage, and unsheathe thy sword."
She said, and pass'd along the gloomy space;
The prince pursued her steps with equal pace.



Vito di Marco (15th century)-'Persian Sibyl'-mosaic



John Collier, Priestess of Delphi, 1891.

Wikimedia Commons

The most famous ancient [oracle](#) was that of [Apollo at Delphi](#), located on the slopes of Mt. Parnassus above the Corinthian Gulf. Traditionally, the oracle first belonged to Mother Earth (Gaea) but later was either given to or stolen by Apollo. At Delphi the medium was a woman over fifty, known as the [Pythia](#), who lived apart from her husband and dressed in a maiden's clothes. Though the oracle, at first called Pytho, was known to Homer and was the site of a Mycenaean settlement, its fame did not become Panhellenic until the 7th and 6th centuries BC, when Apollo's advice or sanction was sought by lawmakers, colonists, and founders of cults. The Pythia's [counsel](#) was most in demand to forecast the outcome of projected wars or political actions.



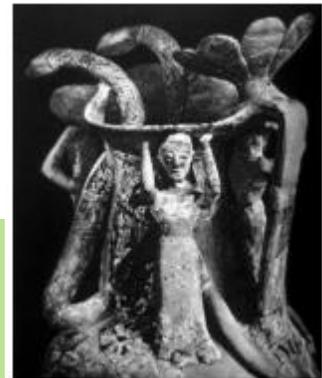
Jacek Malczewski Pythia, 1917. Wikimedia Commons

The Pythias excerpted from *Secret History of the Witches* © 2009 Max Dashu

I count the grains of sand on the beach and measure the sea
I understand the speech of the mute and hear the voiceless
—Delphic Oracle [Herodotus, I, 47]

In the center of the world, a fissure opened from the black depths of Earth, and waters flowed from a spring. The place was called Delphoi (“Womb”). In its cave sanctuary lived a shamanic priestess called the Pythia—Serpent Woman. Her prophetic power came from a she-dragon in the Castalian spring, whose waters had inspirational qualities. She sat on a tripod, breathing vapors that emerged from a deep cleft in the Earth, until she entered trance and prophesied by chanting in verse.

The shrine was sacred to the indigenous Aegean earth goddess. The Greeks called her Ge, and later Gaia. Earth was said to have been the first Delphic priestess. [Pindar, fr. 55; Euripides, *Iphigenia in Taurus*, 1234-83. This idea of Earth as the original oracle and source of prophecy was widespread. *The Eumenides* play begins with a Pythia intoning, “First in my prayer I call on Earth, primeval prophetess...” [Harrison, 385] Ancient Greek tradition held that there had once been an oracle of Earth at the Gaeion in Olympia, but it had disappeared by the 2nd century. [Pausanias, 10.5.5; Frazer on Apollodorus, note, 10] The oracular cave of Aegira, with its very old wooden image of Broad-bosomed Ge, belonged to Earth too. [Pliny, *Natural History* 28. 147; Pausanias 7, 25]



This account shows the male newcomer as totally triumphant over the chthonic female power: “And he exulted over the female dragon, and commanded that she would rot there.” [11. 340-60] (Here the poet is creating a folk etymology for Pytho, one of the names for the Delphic dragon, from *pythein*, “to rot.”) The story is reminiscent of Marduk’s killing of the dragon Tiamat—another overthrow of feminine power by a triumphant young god.

Delphic serpent confronting Apollo at Omphalos.
Attic lekythos, circa 470 BCE



The *Hymn to Apollo* contains another, related story celebrating the god’s conquest of a goddess sanctuary. Before Apollo takes over Delphi, he first comes to Telphousa and decides to build an oracular temple to himself there. The nymph of the sacred spring resists, attempting to dissuade the interloper with flattering words. She convinces him that it would be better to create a temple below Mount Parnassus, where the steep terrain would prevent horses and mules from trampling the ground. Apollo agrees, and moves on to Delphi where he slays the female dragon and creates a shrine to himself.

The Pythias excerpted from *Secret History of the Witches*



The Oracle by Camillo Miola (Biacca) (Italian (Neapolitan), 1840 - 1919)

© 2009 Max Dashu

SIBYLS

*Echoes of French Feminism in
"The Diviners" and "Lady Oracle"*

Christian Bök

Catherine Clément observes that, historically, the sibyl has often been accused of either madness or sorcery in order to defuse her threat to phallogocentric power: "the sorceress engenders without a father" (*The Newly* 56), but "the history of the sorceress . . . often ends in confinement or death" (8). Showalter observes too that, "[i]n ecstatic religions, women more frequently than men speak in tongues, a phenomenon attributed by anthropologists to their relative inarticulateness in formal religious discourse" (340); however, Showalter also observes that "unintelligible female 'languages' are scarcely cause for rejoicing; indeed, it was because witches were suspected of esoteric knowledge [. . .] that they were burned" (340). Gilbert and Gubar, on the other hand, suggest that such "terrible sorceress-goddesses" (34) are necessary opponents to patriarchy: after all, the demand for feminine self-abnegation implies that a woman can only hope to inspire subversive discourses vicariously, perhaps by playing the passive role of muse for a male artist; however, a woman cannot hope to express these subversive impulses independently without disrupting the patriarchal establishment.

Cixous, Hélène and Clément, Catherine. *The Newly Born Woman*. Trans. Betsy Wing. Minneapolis: U Minnesota P, 1975: 63-132.





Figure 1. Only surviving depiction of the Pythia from the time when the oracle was active.

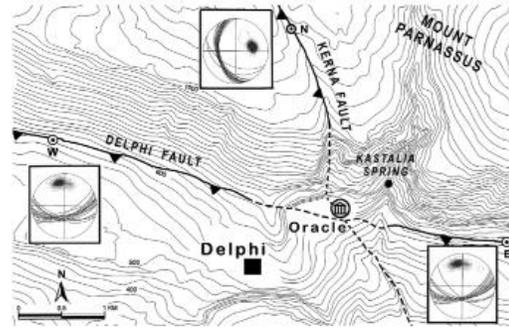


Figure 2. Intersection of the Kerna Fault and the Delphi Fault. The temple site is located directly above this intersection.

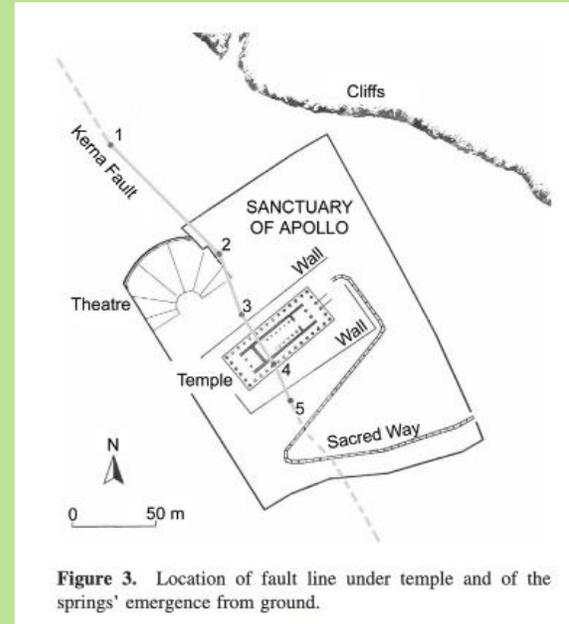


Figure 3. Location of fault line under temple and of the springs' emergence from ground.



Figure 4. Sketch of the Pythia in the *adyton*, showing fractures from which gaseous emission rose into the small, enclosed structure. Based on archeological text and findings in the temple remains.

The Delphic Oracle: A Multidisciplinary Defense of the Gaseous Vent Theory

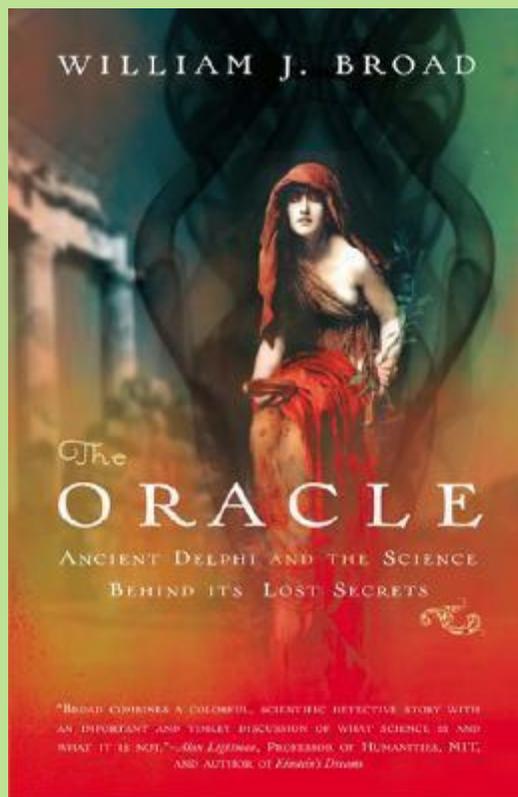
Henry A. Spiller,^{1,*} John R. Hale,² and Jelle Z. De Boer³

¹Kentucky Regional Poison Center, Louisville, Kentucky
²Department of Anthropology, University of Louisville, Louisville, Kentucky
³Department of Earth and Environmental Sciences, Wesleyan University, Middletown, Connecticut

Comparison of Historical Descriptions of Usual Response/Presentation of the Pythia with That of Mild Anesthesia via Inhalational Anesthetic Gases

Description of Pythia at Delphi from a "Normal" Mantic Session ^a	Description of Mild Anesthesia with Ethylene or Nitrous Oxide
Rapid onset of trance state	Full effects in 30 seconds to 2 minutes (Borne)
Calm response, willingly entered the <i>adyton</i> . Remained there for hours	Pleasant state of being, no sense of anxiety or asphyxiation. Happy to stay under influence of gas for long periods of time (Lockhardt)
Remain conscious	Remain conscious (Lockhardt)
Able to maintain seated position	Able to maintain seated position (James)
Can see others and hear questions	Responds to questions and write answers (James)
Tone and pattern of speech altered	Pattern of speech altered
Describe out of body experience—Feeling of being possessed by the god Apollo	Altered state—experienced religious revelations (James)
Free Association—images not obviously connected to questions	Free Association—random thought pattern not obviously connected to initial question (James)
Recovers rapidly	Complete recovery in 5–15 minutes from full operable anesthesia (Herb)
Amnesia of events while under influence	Amnesia of event while under influence (Lockhardt, James)

^a Based on evidence from Plutarch, Plato, Lucan, and other ancient authors, as well as depiction of Pythia on a vase from the fifth century.



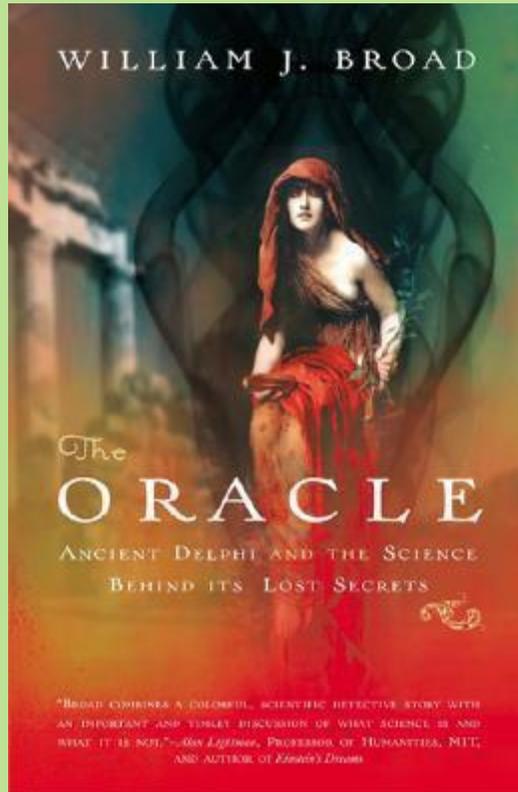
the ethylene discovery had to deal with intoxicated Oracles, not ones addled to the point of incoherence. It had to take Plutarch's "inspired maidens" at face value. It had to view Clea as a smart, accomplished woman, not a druggie in a narcotized daze.

So what did the ethylene do? Not much, according to de Boer. He faulted reductionist views of the discovery that dwelled on the narcotic angle to the exclusion of the bigger picture, as if drugs alone could explain a sisterhood of mystics that over the course of twelve centuries helped shape and sustain one of the world's great civilizations. He held that the team's real discovery said nothing about the Oracles as drugged zombies and everything about their breathing the pneuma as one of many stimuli to a deeply religious state of mind. The ancient writers got it right, he declared, while the French had erred in thinking there was no vapor at all. Now the question was how the pneuma worked with other factors to inspire the Oracles, de Boer argued, suggesting the answer was rich in subtle phenomena and behaviors, many perhaps irreducible to physical objects and properties. He held that the team's findings, if examined dispassionately, in fact showed that reduction with ethylene did little to explain or diminish the Oracle's

possibilities, even otherworldly ones.

Most notably, he argued that the team's discoveries said nothing about a range of oracular feats that were indisputably real. For instance, the chemical stimulus in no way explained the Oracle's cultural and religious power, her role as a font of knowledge, her liberation of hundreds of slaves, her encouragement of personal morality, her influence in helping the Greeks invent themselves, or—by extension—whether she really had psychic powers. Even if her prognostications were judged to have no basis in literal foreknowledge, it gave no explanation for how she reflected the underlying currents of ancient Greek society and how her utterances stood for ages as monuments of wisdom. It said nothing of how the priestess inspired Socrates or functioned as a social mirror, revealing the subconscious fears and hopes of those who sought her guidance, or of how she often worked as a catalyst, letting kings and commoners act on their dreams. In futility, the situation was like attributing masterworks of twentieth-century literature to the fact that major authors indulged in heavy drinking.

Science succeeds by focusing on questions that admit answers, by limiting itself to empirical realms.



- Typically, over 50, dressed conservatively for status and class
- Serious ablutions and purifications conducted to place her, and helpers, in appropriate mindset
- Only practiced 9 months in the year; in winter, Dionysus took over Delphi. It was among the only places where Apollo and Dionysus co-habited! (Also aligns with when ethylene would be least naturally available in year)

Numerous personal questions were also put to the oracle on matters of lovesickness, career advice, child birth, and how to get offspring. So, by all standards, this job was demanding yet also diverse and rewarding — a position powerful enough to change the course of history.

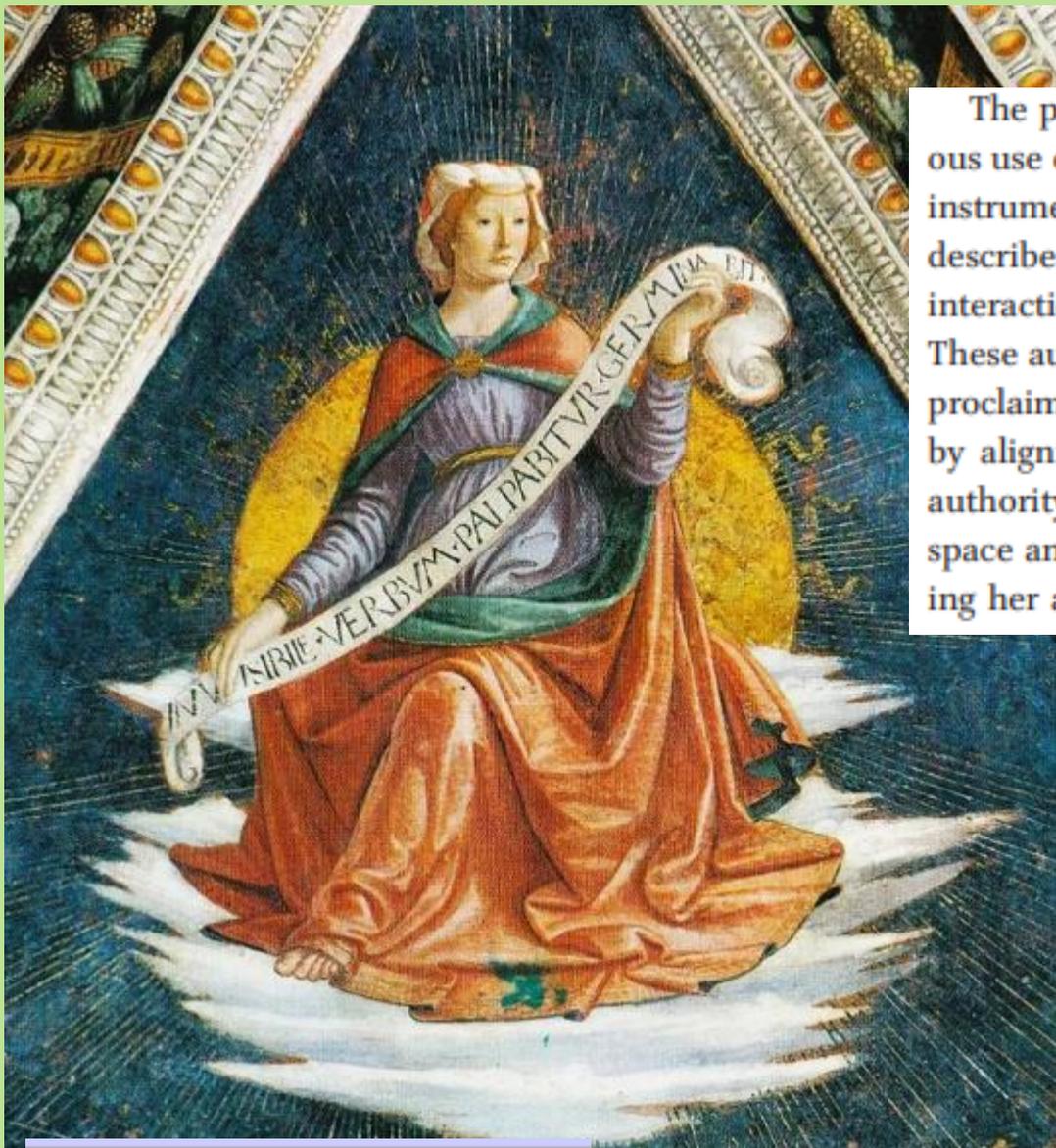
Yet right from the beginning, efforts to deprive the priestess of her power prevailed, particularly in older classical scholarship. Surely a woman, especially one in such a paternalistic society as ancient Greece, could not hold that powerful a position?

Some scholars suggested that the Pythia actually babbled unintelligible gibberish and that her words were later put into beautiful, deep, and meaningful hexameter verse — by male priests.

Yet in our ancient sources there is absolutely nothing to suggest that it was anyone other than the Pythia herself who came up with the responses. To the contrary: she is regularly named as the one and only source of the prophecies delivered at Delphi. There is no word of male priests, beyond those in purely administrative and assisting roles.



Delphic tripod. Paestan red-figured bell-krater, ca. 330 BC. Wikimedia Commons



The plot thickens, however, when we consider the selection and continuous use of the Sibyl by Jews and Christians. Here too, Nissinen's categories of instrumental and independent agency are useful. They have the potential to describe not just the interaction between the Sibyl and the deity, but also the interaction between sibylline traditions and the Jewish and Christian writers. These authors and editors take up the Sibyl as a useful authoritative voice to proclaim a message about their god, but they are careful to restrict her power by aligning her with their own traditions. They make sure to delimit her authority even while they invoke it. They do this by relocating the Sibyl in space and time, bringing her into their own authoritative stories and recasting her as a servant of their god. They firmly subjugate her and the type of

**"I Will Speak . . . with My Whole Person in Ecstasy":
Instrumentality and Independence in the
*Sibylline Oracles***

Olivia Stewart

Artist **Domenico Ghirlandaio (1448–1494)**
Basilica di Santa Trinita



Vito di Marco (15th century)-'Delphic Sibyl'-mosaic

The *Sibylline Oracles* are a collection of pseudepigraphic prophecies written over centuries by Jews and Christians in Greek hexameters and voiced by the figure of a sibyl.

The Jewish-Christian *Sibylline Oracles* blend a traditional trope of sibylline prophecies of doom with a Jewish and then Christian innovation of ethical and theological instruction. While several books of the collection bear resemblances to apocalyptic texts—with universal histories, periodizations of time, and descriptions of eschatological judgment—they are not apocalypses. Instead, the *Sibylline Oracles* are prophecy.

Stewart Lester, Olivia. *Sibylline Oracles*. e-Clavis, , : , 2020. Retrieved from Loyola eCommons, Theology: Faculty Publications and Other Works,

THE Sibyls occupy a conspicuous place in the traditions and history of ancient Greece and Rome. Their fame was spread abroad long before the beginning of the Christian era. Heraclitus of Ephesus, five centuries before Christ, compared himself to the Sibyl "who, speaking with inspired mouth, without a smile, without ornament, and without perfume, penetrates through centuries by the power of the gods." The ancient traditions vary in reporting the number and the names of these weird prophetesses, and much of what has been handed down to us is legendary. But whatever opinion one may hold respecting the various legends, there can be little doubt that a collection of Sibylline Oracles was at one time preserved at Rome. There are, moreover, various oracles, purporting to have been written by ancient Sibyls, found in the writings of Pausanias, Plutarch, Livy, and in other Greek and Latin authors. Whether any of these citations formed a portion of the Sibylline books once kept in Rome we cannot now determine; but the Roman capitol was destroyed by fire in the time of Sulla (B. C. 84), and again in the time of Vespasian (A. D. 69), and whatever books were at those dates kept therein doubtless perished in the flames. It is said by some of the ancients that a subsequent collection of oracles was made, but, if so, there is now no certainty that any fragments of them remain.

The Sibylline Oracles'

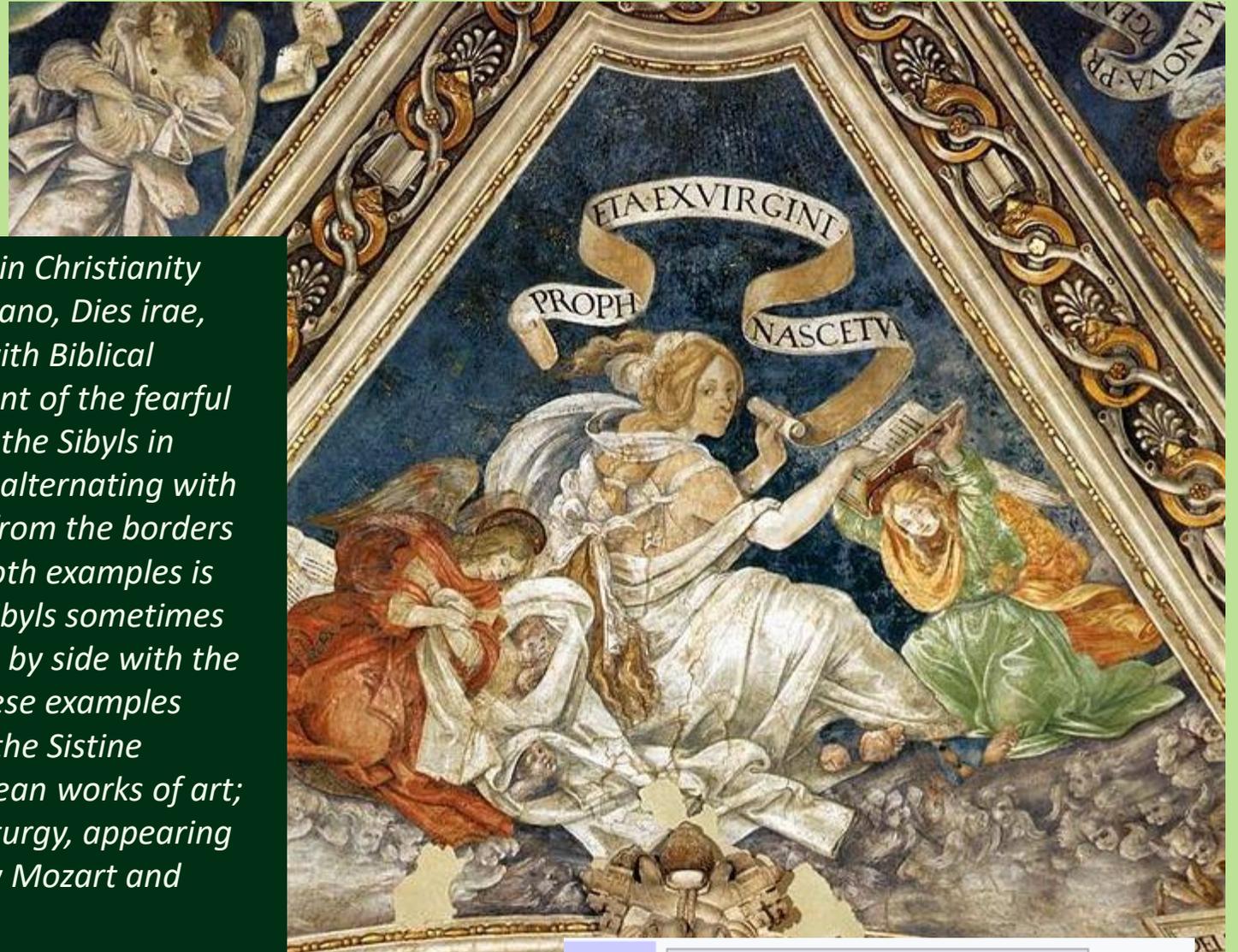


Translated from the Greek by

Milton S. Terry
1899

Dies irae, dies illa
solvet saeculum in favilla
teste David cum Sibylla...

“It is traditional to begin a study of the Sibyl's presence in Christianity with a reference to the medieval hymn by Thomas a Celano, Dies irae, which appeals prominently to the Sibyl in conjunction with Biblical sources as constituting a double authority for the account of the fearful Last Judgment. As an alternative, some refer instead to the Sibyls in Christian art: as the culmination of this tradition, Sibyls alternating with Biblical prophets, painted by Michelangelo, look down from the borders of the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel. The implication of both examples is the same: that for medieval Christendom, the Sibyl or Sibyls sometimes appear prominently as purveyors of true revelation side by side with the prophets of the Biblical tradition. Furthermore, both these examples represent very influential streams of cultural tradition: the Sistine Chapel's frescoes are among the most famous of European works of art; and the Dies irae became associated with the funeral liturgy, appearing as an element of the musical settings of the Requiem by Mozart and many others.”



Artist	Filippino Lippi (1457–1504)    
Title	Sibyl of Delphi on "The Ceiling of the Carafa Chapel"

“Hildegard of Bingen (1098-1179) was born in Germany, the tenth child of a noble family, with whom she lived until she turned eight and her family gave her to the Church, as was the custom with tenth children as they were seen as the proper tithe. As a child she often fell ill and it was during this period of her life she began experiencing mystical visions. Fearing the reaction of her elders, she initially kept these experiences to herself. Hildegard flourished in the convent environment and after learning to read the Latin Bible, with an emphasis on Psalms, she made her formal profession of virginity as a teenager. In 1141, Hildegard experienced the vision she later describes in the beginning of Scivias, the first of her visionary writings, where the Lord imparted to her knowledge of the Scriptures.

She produced numerous visionary writings, theological works, mystery and morality plays, medical writings, extensive correspondence, and musical compositions.”



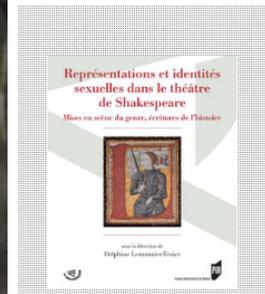
Illumination from Hildegard's Scivias (1151) showing her receiving a vision and dictating to teacher Volmar



GUERCINO, *The Libyan Sibyl* 1651
Picture Gallery, Buckingham Palace

The 1760s also see the acquisition of Sibyls by Guercino in aristocratic collections. His *Libyan Sibyl* entered the Royal Collection, while the *Samian Sibyl* and *King David* were acquired for the South wall of the Great Room at Spencer House in London. Seen as a pair, the *Samian Sibyl* and *King David* are witnesses to the promise of the arrival of Christ. The Samian Sibyl is seated, absorbed by an open book in her right hand, which the viewer cannot read, while her left elbow rests on a larger closed tome. Another book placed in a vertical position to her right is inscribed with small handwritten text that cannot be deciphered either. By contrast, to her left a putto looking at the viewer holds up a scroll inscribed in large legible capital letters with the words “SALVE CASTA | SYON PER | MULTAQUE | PASSA PVELLA | SIBYLLA SAMIA” (“Hail, chaste Sion, much suffering young woman. Samian Sibyl”.) These words are the text of the Sibyl’s prophecy: an address to the Virgin Mary,

Calè, Luisa (2020) *Modern Sibyls and sibylline media*. *Studies in Romanticism* 59 (1), pp. 45-69.



Shakespeare's Tudor Sibyl : Sibylline Discourse in the Portrayal of Queen Margaret in *Richard III*

17 The conflation of witch with sibyl is made explicit in Shakespeare's depiction of three sibyls in *Macbeth*. In this play he transforms the three sibyls from Matthew Gwinne's, *Tres Sibyllae* which Gwinne presented to King James I on a 1605 royal visit to Oxford. Gwinne's sibyls greet the King with:

FIRST SIBYL: [...] we give you greetings, you whom Scotland obeys.

SECOND SIBYL: Hail, you whom England obeys.

THIRD SIBYL: Hail, you whom Ireland obeys.

FIRST SIBYL: You whom France grants titles, all else grants lands, hail.

SECOND SIBYL: You whom previously-divided Britain worships, hail.

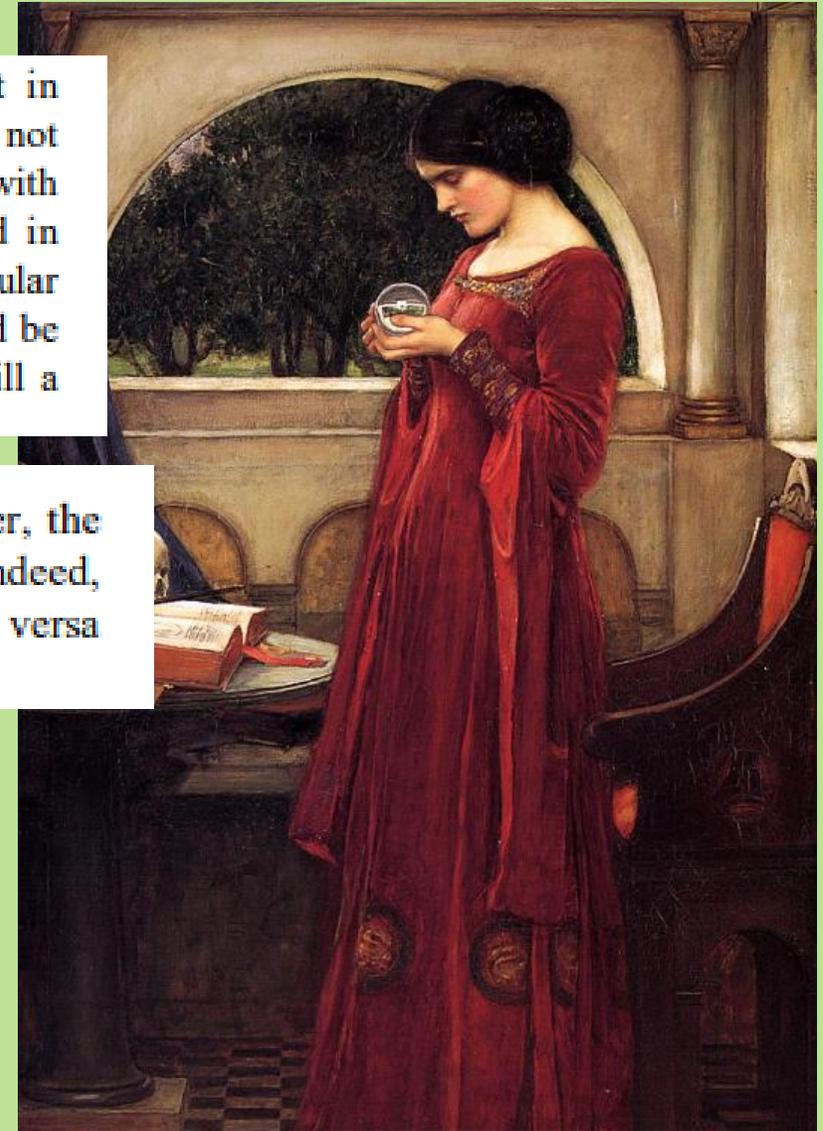
THIRD SIBYL: High British, Irish, and French monarch, hail.

“The sibyls’ prophetic understanding of the world was vast, and dealt in the momentous events in the history of humanity. Yet each, despite sharing in common the name of sibyl, also possessed a unique individuality. Some wandered the earth, while others inhabited a particular place—a cave or a rock. Some appeared at will in the air while others preferred to be sought out. At times only the sibyl’s words could be heard. Each was connected with a particular time and place while at the same time, through their prophecies, became unmoored from any particular era or locale. It was this ephemeral quality of the sibyls, along with a long established respect of sibylline prophecy concerning the fate of nations, that led to their appropriation within Roman culture. The Romans enshrined the sibyls’ position as mediators between the gods and humanity within their political system, guaranteeing their words retained an unprecedented authority. Thus, throughout the Roman world sibylline oracles flourished both through oral transmission and textual production. The most famous sibylline texts were the libri Sibyllini, a collection of sibylline books held in Rome at least by the second century BCE. These were consulted during times of Roman national crises for several hundred years...”

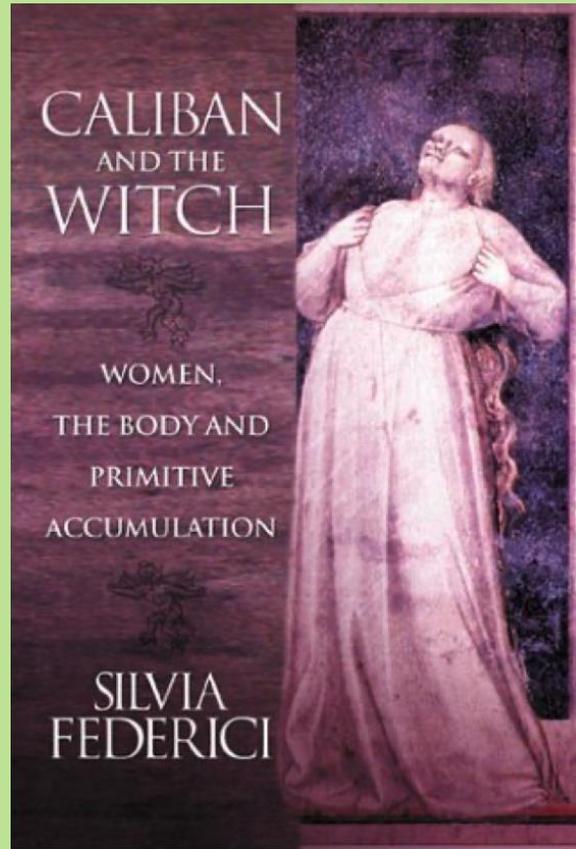
Oracular sanctuaries emerged into an existing and developing market in futures: there was already widespread use of individual seers, especially, but not only by community leaders. But use of seers was understood to be fraught with risks for both seer and client, some of which we have seen encapsulated in stories that circulated about particular *manteis*. The emergence of oracular sanctuaries may have provided a much-needed source of stability – it could be argued that, in terms of market dynamics, oracle sanctuaries emerged to fill a

gap – but rather than resulting in competition between sanctuary and seer, the evidence suggests that that they were seen as complementary offerings. Indeed, the authority that sanctuaries offered could also be ‘lent to’ seers, and vice versa – and, in these processes, both parties benefited.

3. Oracles and Oracle-Sellers. An Ancient Market in Futures.
Esther Eidinow



The Crystal Ball by John William Waterhouse (1902,

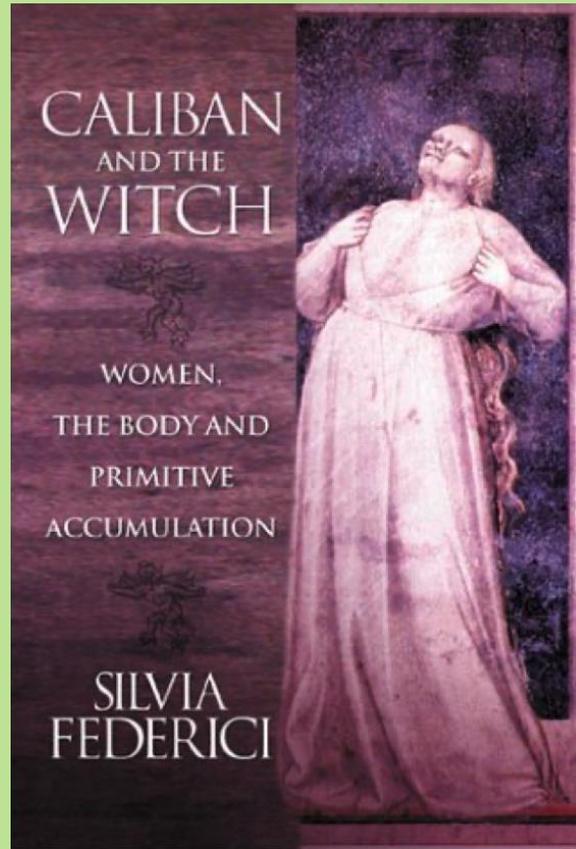


The vilification of prophecy for early capitalist interests

of struggle (Elton 1972: 142ff). Prophecies are not simply the expression of a fatalistic resignation. Historically they have been a means by which the “poor” have externalized their desires, given legitimacy to their plans, and have been spurred to action. Hobbes recognized this when he warned that “There is nothing that... so well directs men in their deliberations, as the foresight of the sequels of their actions; **prophecy** being many times the principal cause of the events foretold” (Hobbes, “Behemot,” *Works VI*: 399).

But regardless of the dangers which magic posed, the bourgeoisie had to combat its power because it undermined the principle of individual responsibility, as magic placed the determinants of social action in the realm of the stars, out of their reach and control. Thus, in the rationalization of space and time that characterized the philosophical speculation of the 16th and 17th centuries, prophecy was replaced with the *calculation of probabilities* whose advantage, from a capitalist viewpoint, is that here the future can be anticipated only insofar as the regularity and immutability of the system is assumed; that is, only insofar as it is assumed that the future will be like the past, and no major change, no revolution, will upset the coordinates of individual decision-making. Similarly, the bourgeoisie had to combat the assumption that it is possible to be in two places at the ~~same~~ time, for the *fixation of the body in space and time*, that is, the *individual's spatio-temporal identification*, is an essential condition for the regularity of the work-process.¹⁷

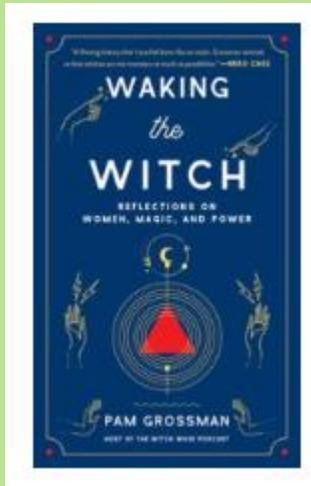
The incompatibility of magic with the capitalist work-discipline and the requirement of social control is one of the reasons why a campaign of terror was launched against it by the state — a terror applauded without reservations by many who are presently considered among the founders of scientific rationalism: Jean Bodin, Mersenne, the mechanical philosopher and member of the Royal Society Richard Boyle, and Newton's teacher, Isaac Barrow.¹⁸ Even the materialist Hobbes, while keeping his distance, gave his approval. “As for witches,” he wrote, “I think not that their witchcraft is any real power; but yet that they are justly punished, for the false belief they have that they can do such mischief, joined with their purpose to do it if they can” (*Leviathan* 1963: 67).



He added that if these superstitions were eliminated, “men would be much more fitted than they are for civil obedience” (*ibid.*). Hobbes was well advised. The stakes on which witches and other practitioners of magic died, and the chambers in which their tortures were executed, were a laboratory in which much social discipline was sedimented, and much knowledge about the body was gained. Here those irrationalities were eliminated that stood in the way of the transformation of the individual and social body into a set of predictable and controllable mechanisms. And it was here again that the scientific use of torture was born, for blood and torture were necessary to “breed an animal” capable of regular, homogeneous, and uniform behavior, indelibly marked with the memory of the new rules (Nietzsche 1965: 189–90).

A significant element in this context was the condemnation as *maleficium* of abortion and contraception, which consigned the female body — the *uterus* reduced to a machine for the reproduction of labor — into the hands of the state and the medical profession. I will return later to this point, in the chapter on the witch-hunt, where I argue that the persecution of the witches was the climax of the state intervention against the proletarian body in the modern era.

(Fun fact: Contraception is also defined as *maleficium* during this time.)



“Contact with the spiritual world was not just a hopeful pastime of the bereaved, then. Spiritualism may have been a soothing source of consolation when it began, but it morphed into an ethereal engine of confidence for many of the women who practiced it. The messages of self-worth and female independence missing in their mundane lives were found in the voices of the discarnate.”



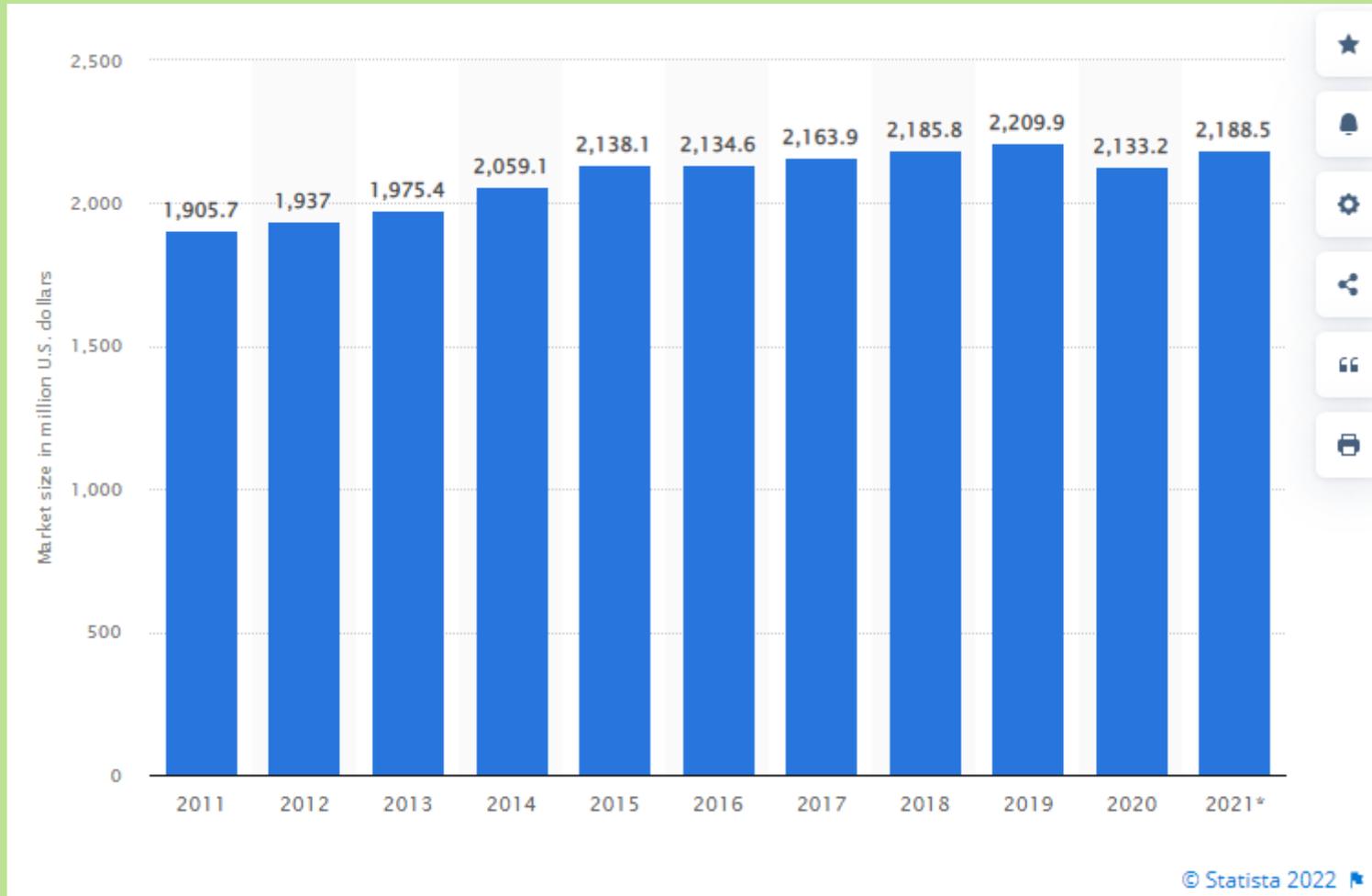
From left: Georgina Weldon, Emma Hardinge Britten, Victoria Woodhull. The Spiritualist women in Emily Midorikawa's book, "Out of the Shadows," are a colorful bunch; each one knew how to draw a crowd. From left: New York Public Library; National Film and Sound Archive; Harvard Art Museum/Fogg Museum

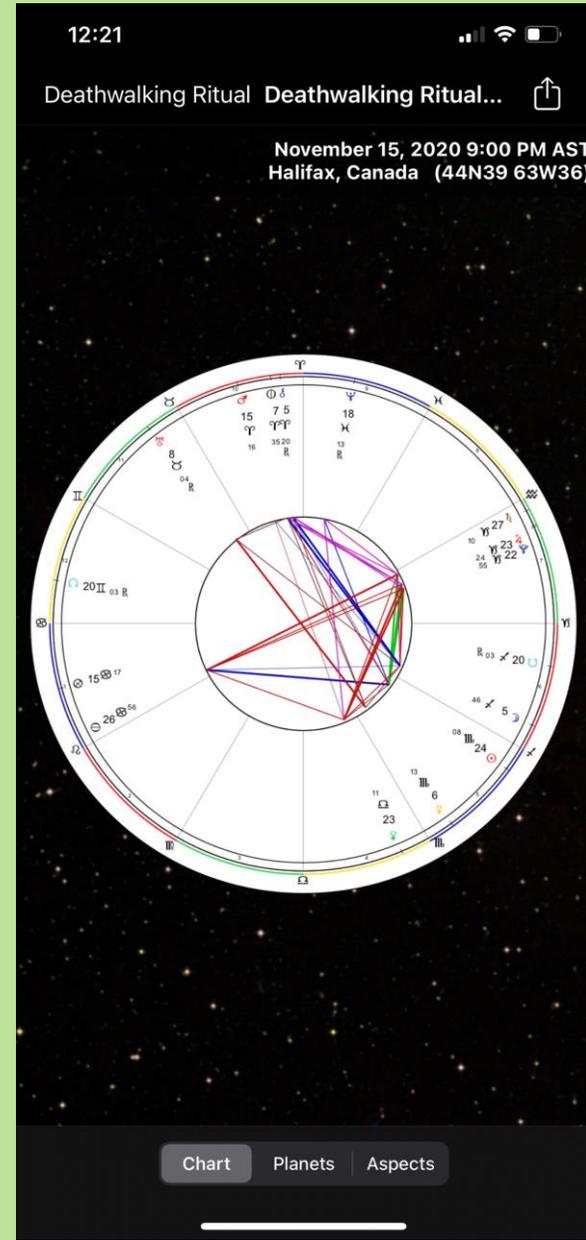
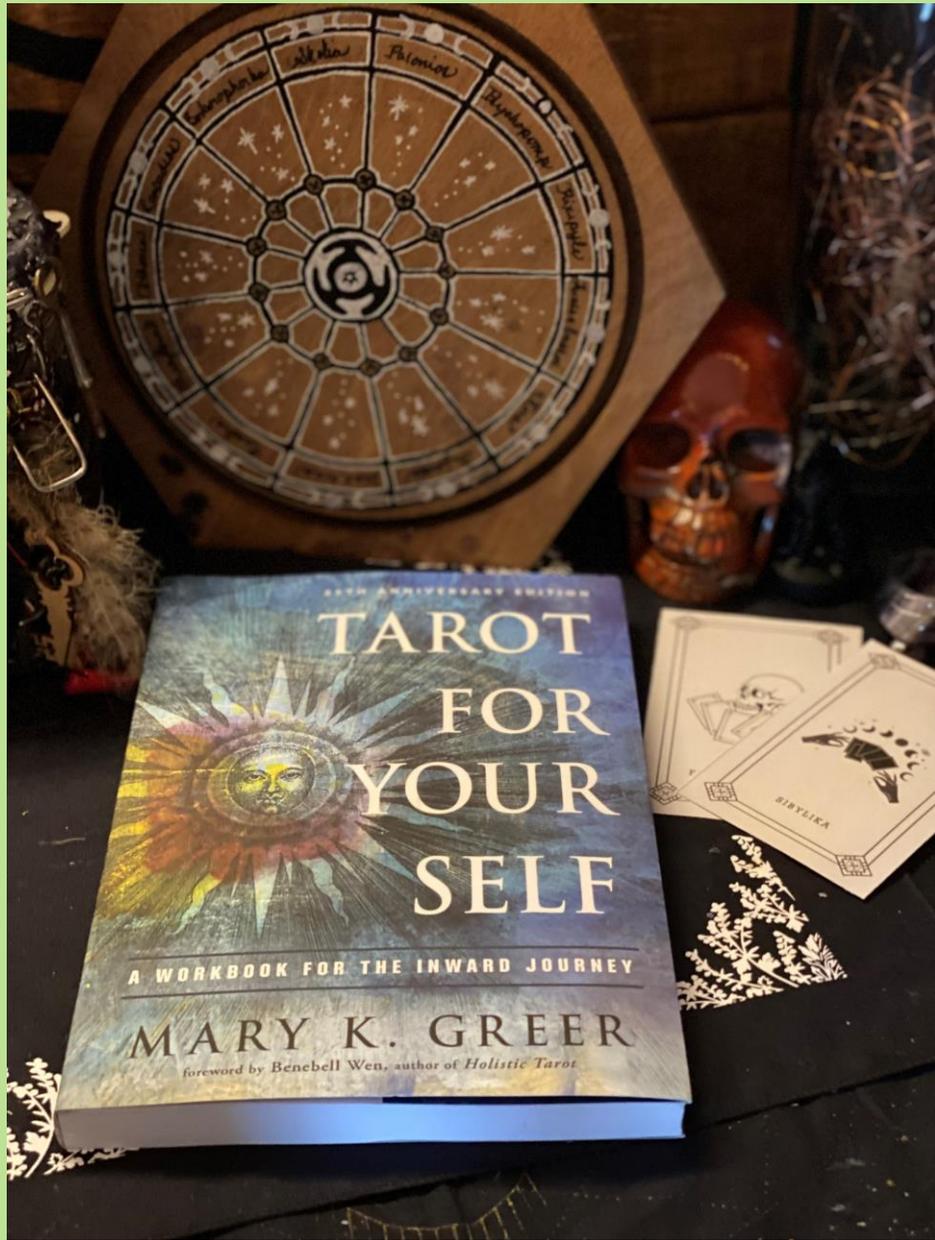
The idea that religion should be personal, not social, is encoded in our nation's DNA.

It's an utterly novel idea. Within nearly all other major religious systems in the European West and Middle East—from the civic paganism of ancient Babylon, Greece, and Rome, to the rise of Islam, to medieval Catholicism—the role of religion and the role of society (including government) were intertwined. As historian Sam Haselby writes in *Aeon* magazine, before 1788, “no other modern society had sought to separate law, politics, social life and civic institutions from the divine.”² From the rich body of Islamic sharia law—which sought to use Koranic principles to govern a disparate people—to the consistent, and consistently wielded, power of the Catholic Holy See as a political as well as religious entity, religion was by and large seen as a civic and communal, rather than private, matter.



Market size of the psychic services industry in the United States (U.S.) from 2011 to 2020 with a forecast for 2021(in million U.S. dollars)

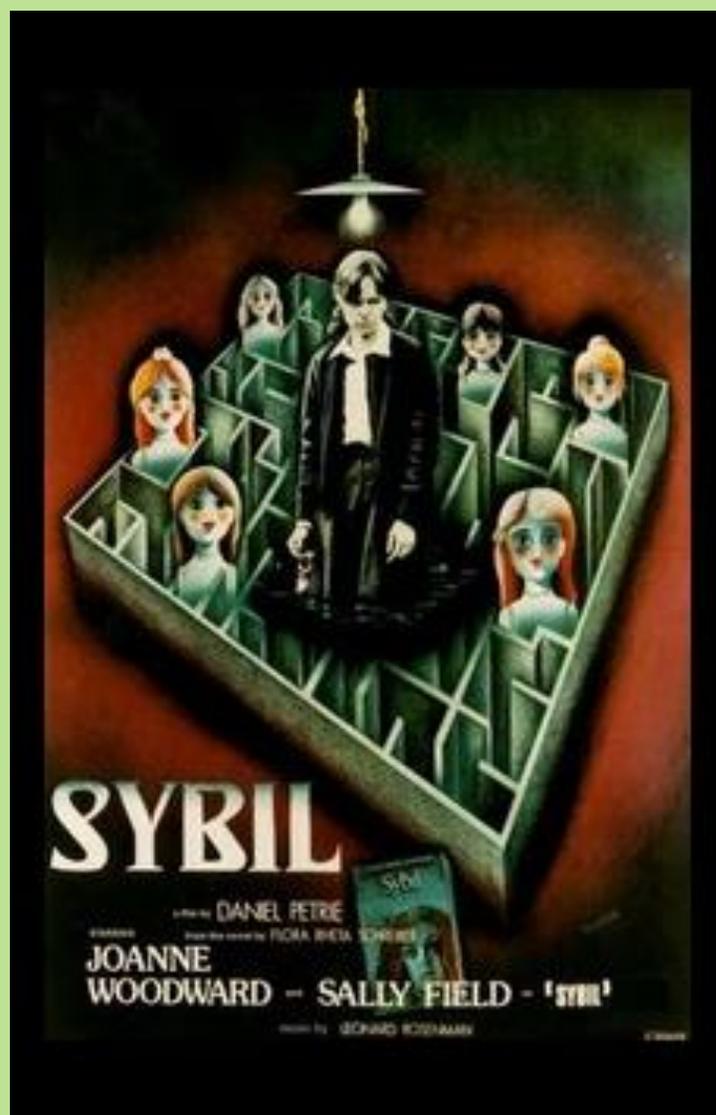


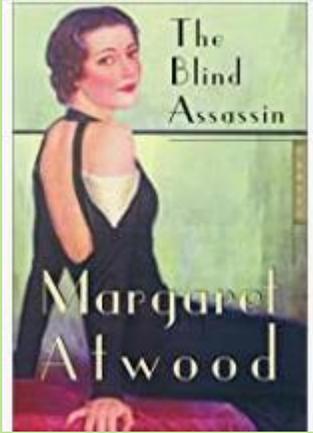


Joan Quigley



“Virtually every major move and decision the Reagans made during my time as White House Chief of Staff was cleared in advance with this woman in San Francisco who drew up horoscopes to make certain that the planets were in a favorable alignment for the enterprise,” writes Don Regan, President Reagan’s chief of staff, in his memoir, *For the Record*. Regan kept a color-coded calendar on his desk, with “good” days highlighted in green and “bad” days highlighted in red. Here’s the calendar for the first few months of 1986:





Yesterday I went to the doctor, to see about these dizzy spells. He told me that I have developed what used to be called *a heart*, as if healthy people didn't have one. It seems I will not after all keep on living forever, merely getting smaller and greyer and dustier, like the Sibyl in her bottle. Having long ago whispered *I want to die*, I now realize that this wish will indeed be fulfilled, and sooner rather than later. No matter that I've

Margaret Atwood
CC OOnt CH FRSC FRSL



Atwood in 2015

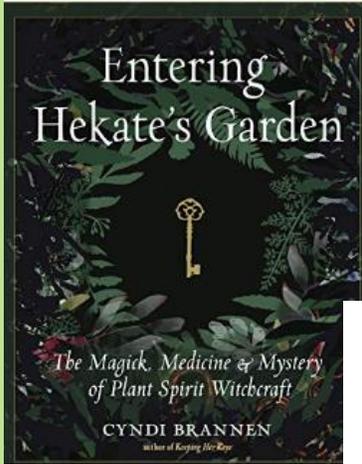
Margaret Atwood



The
Handmaid's Tale

Cover of the first edition





X.

Sibyllika—The Prophecy

Mistress, I call forth your Sibyls.

Grant me their companionship now.

Accept my gratitude for welcoming me into their fold.

To the Sibyl of the Flame, Keeper of the Key of Visions of Fire, I summon you now.

To the Sibyl of the Breath, Keeper of the Key of Visions of Air, I summon you now.

To the Sibyl of the Ground, Keeper of the Key of Visions of Earth, I summon you now.

To the Sibyl of the Depths, Keeper of the Key of Visions of Water, I summon you now.

To the Sibyl of the Cave, Keeper of the Key of Visions of the Under World, I summon you now.

To the Sibyl of the Garden, Keeper of the Key of Visions of the Middle World, I summon you now.

To the Sibyl of the Starry Road, Keeper of the Key of Visions of the Upper World, I summon you now.

I claim my place among you.

Show me the mysteries, guide me toward deeper understanding, teach me your ways.

