CHAPTER 7

Master of Clarity: The Utterances of Zeus Dodonaios in Fifth-Century Tragedy

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The experience of consulting the oracle of Dodona is documented in literary and epigraphic evidence. The lead oracular lamellae unearthed within the sacred *temenos* preserved a good number of the questions, dating not earlier than the end of the sixth century BCE, addressed by private and public consultants, as well as a few answers delivered by the oracle.[1] Beyond the specific contents of the tablets, which have recently fed the debate on the issues on which the god was consulted and ancient divination practiced in the oracular shrine of Zeus Dodonaios,[2] one thing leaps out at the observer: the extreme brevity and straightforwardness of all the questions and (supposed) answers attested epigraphically. This feature is very much in evidence in the oracular story-telling concerning Dodona contained in historical narratives and in the fictional accounts in Athenian drama, which have so often been excluded from critical analysis. These, however, form an interesting cluster of evidence, as they not only cast light on playwrights' thoughts about the oracular shrine but also allow us to assess the perceptions and expectations of the audience attending the performance.[3]

Most fifth-century BCE Attic plays, conveying and handing down models of thinking and patterns of behaviour, drew on stories taken from Greek mythology.[4] In the tragedies, significant space was given to oracles, oracular consultations, and oracular shrines, often providing reasons for characters' actions and reactions. As the great majority of these references concern Delphi, modern scholarship has largely focused on this sanctuary, highlighting its role in contemporary society.[5] Other oracles appearing in ancient drama – among them Dodona – have been

[1] Lhôte 2006, Eidinow 2007, and DVC. [2] Parker 2016.
[3] Easterling 1997: 21, Parker 1997: esp. 145–148, Létoublon 2014: 560–562, 560.
[4] Although the audience did not know what variant the playwright had used – and this was one the great pleasures of attending a performance – it was aware of the 'general plot' of the story (Taplin 1983: esp. 4–6).
[5] Cavalli 1992: 49, Vogt 1998, Giuliani 2001.

investigated to a lesser degree and almost exclusively in the light of the research carried out on Delphi.[6] Most of these contributions, differing in scope and extent, share a common feature: they focus mainly on the reason(s) behind the inclusion of these oracular centres and prophecies in Greek tragedies. They regard this as the reflection of contemporary events, of the increasing fame of certain oracles and/or of the location and exoticness of certain others.

All the passages relating to the involvement of Dodona in Greek literary sources were first gathered by Parke, who supplied a very useful collection, but did not provide an in-depth analysis of the tragic plays. He explained the references to Zeus' oracle in these works either by the convenient location of the oracle in northwestern Greece, if this fitted the geography of the tragedy, or by Dodona's alleged primitiveness and exoticness. As a result Parke dismissed these mentions as merely incidental.[7] Equally dismissive is the opinion of Jouanna, who, in a long article on divination in Sophocles, does not identify differences between the use of one oracle and another. Dodona and Delphi, in particular, appear to him as essentially interchangeable and Sophocles' choice is regarded as depending largely on the exploitation of these oracular centres in ancient and contemporary authors, namely Homer and Herodotus.[8]

More recently, Marotta argues that the increasing presence of Dodona in ancient sources, especially in tragedies, was a reflection of Athenian interregional politics: as soon as Athens expanded its political, economic and territorial influence outside the borders of Attica, literary sources started to incorporate in historical and fictional accounts more distant and exotic places such as the Epirote shrine.[9] The implications of this latter hypothesis need to be assessed. Athenian politics in the fifth century were more focused on the Aegean Sea than on the northwest, where Dodona lies: thus, according to Marotta's line of reasoning, other religious and oracular centres should have found more space in Athenian drama, but they did not. Moreover, the references to Dodona, either as an oracular centre or as a geographical location, are limited in number, and Delphic Apollo, along with the prophets inspired by him, still plays a major role. Finally, the recourse to the oracle of Zeus Dodonaios seems not to be casual but weighted, and its oracular prophecies are rather well characterized, especially in Aeschylus' and Sophocles' plays.

[6] Marotta 2001–2002. [7] Parke 1967: 51, 60–62. [8] Jouanna 1997: esp. 283–300.
[9] Marotta 2001–2002.

In the last few years a shift of perspective in considering oracles, oracular consultations and oracular sanctuaries has been pursued by some modern scholars, who focus not on why an oracle was preferred to another by a certain author but how it was exploited, pointing to the nature and competences of the god(s) and the perception of certain oracular deities. For Dodona and fifth-century BCE tragedians, this type of investigation has been carried out by Greta Castrucci, who has approached the topic by comparing the shrines of Zeus Dodonaios and Delphic Apollo.[10] Through an examination of all the passages in ancient drama, she has pointed out the main difference between the treatment of Delphic Apollo and that of Zeus Dodonaios by Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides. While Apollo is primarily brought into play when the main character has to find the final resolution of her/his troubles, often suggesting in his prophecies detachments, departures and separation from the household,[11] Zeus tends to indicate the way to return home, and to concentrate on the safety of the family, and on the attachment to one's origins and roots. This fascinating reading, however, does not fully explain why in some cases Delphi and Dodona appeared to be consulted for the same issue.[12]

More recently, an article by Heinz-Günther Nesselrath has further developed this angle of analysis, examining how Delphic divine intervention was exploited in Aeschylus' and Sophocles' plays about the myths of the Atreidae and of Oedipus and in Euripides' *Ion*.[13] Each tragedian had his own way of approaching and portraying the divine, which went beyond the specific topic of the question addressed to the oracle. He concludes that whereas in Aeschylus, Apollo gives precise and clear instructions to the characters, in Sophocles, the god forecasts the inevitable tragic fate, in Nesselrath's words *die Konstatierungen des Unausweichlichen*, of the protagonist(s).[14] The case of Euripides' *Ion* is rather different as, in this tragedy, the authority of Apollo is totally questioned.[15] Although limited to the example of Delphi, Nesselrath's thought-provoking observations could be applied to other oracles, which, to different extents, are involved in the plots of Athenian tragedies.

This essay will take advantage of both Nesselrath's and Castrucci's approaches, but will focus on a further issue, that is, the way in which

[10] Castrucci 2012, followed by Heineman 2021: 263–264.
[11] Castrucci relates this aspect with the role of Delphic Apollo in colonization (Castrucci 2012: 16).
[12] In tragedy, Aesch. *PV* 658, Soph. *Odysseus Akanthoplex* F 460, but double consultations, not many, are attested also in other literary evidence, e.g., Ar. *Av.* 618, Xen. *Vect.* 6, etc. (see Bonnechere 2013, Eidinow 2018, Piccinini 2018).
[13] Nesselrath 2021. [14] Nesselrath 2021: 329–346, 350–351. [15] Nesselrath 2021: 347–352.

oracular utterances from Dodona, as attested in ancient drama, were worded. In antiquity Delphi's cryptic wording and obscurity were proverbial, to the extent that they were allegedly responsible for one of the epithets of Apollo at Delphi, that is, Loxias 'the Oblique'.[16] Were Dodonaean responses characterized by the same lack of clarity? Did Zeus' utterances diverge from those of Apollo?

Wholly Dodonaean Tragedies

Sophocles built two of his plays to a large extent around a plot line provided by the oracle of Dodona:[17] of these two, *Trachiniae* has been transmitted fully, while *Odysseus Akanthoplex* is lost and only very few fragments have survived.[18]

In *Trachiniae*, prophecies are used extensively from the beginning to the end as a means of creating the atmosphere of an overpowering fate, which neither Deianeira nor Herakles can escape. To a certain extent, *Trachiniae* may be defined as the drama of 'a death foretold' as, from the very beginning of the play, Deianeira, in expressing her concerns and grounded fears about Herakles' welfare, foretells, as an oracle did, his death:[19]

> σχεδὸν δ' ἐπίσταμαί τι πῆμ' ἔχοντά νιν·
> χρόνον γὰρ οὐχὶ βαιόν, ἀλλ' ἤδη δέκα
> μῆνας πρὸς ἄλλοις πέντ' ἀκήρυκτος μένει.
> κἄστιν τι δεινὸν πῆμα· τοιαύτην ἐμοὶ
> δέλτον λιπὼν ἔστειχε· τὴν ἐγὼ θαμὰ
> θεοῖς ἀρῶμαι πημονῆς ἄτερ λαβεῖν.
>
> And I am almost certain that he is suffering from some trouble, for we have had no news of him for no small lapse of time, but for fifteen months now.

[16] Roescher 1890–1897, s.v. *Loxias*, coll. 2144–2146; no instance of the epiclesis is in the epigraphic evidence relating to the Apolline cult. The earliest poetic attestations are in Pindar (*Pae*. 3.29, 11.5, *Isthm*. 7.49) and Bacchylides (13.115), both referring to Delphic Apollo. According to the most common etymology, the epithet derives from the adjective 'oblique, elliptic' and refers to the obscure and indirect language of the god (Cornutus *Theol.* 67.32, Ps.-Nonnus *ad Greg. Naz. Or.* 4.122); but the hypotheses of the origin of the epiclesis are numerous. Among them is the story that Loxias came from Loxo, a woman who was said to be among the Hyperborians (Callim. *Hymn* 4.292); Plutarch (*De garr.* 17) ties Apollo's epiclesis to his lack of loquacity, and preference for obscurity and compendious utterances etc. See further, Burkert 1985: 148, Maurizio 1995: 81–82 and Alan and Potter 2014: 1–4, 22–25.

[17] Parke 1967: 59–60, Cavalli 1992: 49. On the use of the oracles and prophecies in Sophocles, see Jouanna 1997: 283–320.

[18] Soph. *Odysseus Akanthoplex* F 455, 456, 460, 461 (Pearson 1917 = Radt 1999).

[19] Soph. *Trach*. 43–48. Bowman 1999: 335–350.

And it is some grave trouble; such is the tablet that he left for me when he went; often I pray to the gods that my receiving it did not mean disaster.[20]

Deianeira is 'almost certain'[21] (*schedon d'epistamai*) that something terrible must have happened as the husband has been away for fifteen months without any news. Her apprehension is not irrational as it comes from a divine message inscribed on a tablet that Herakles left before his departure.[22] The contents are now suddenly linked with his absence.[23] In motivating their son Hyllos to look for Herakles, Deianeira vaguely refers to the tablet mentioned earlier[24] and to 'to-be-believed oracles' (*manteia pista*),[25] mentioning the country where Herakles ought to be at that moment:[26]

Δη. ἆρ' οἶσθα δῆτ', ὦ τέκνον, ὡς ἔλειπέ μοι
μαντεῖα πιστὰ τῆσδε τῆς χρείας πέρι;
Υλ. τὰ ποῖα, μῆτερ; τὸν λόγον γὰρ ἀγνοῶ.
Δη. ὡς ἢ τελευτὴν τοῦ βίου μέλλει τελεῖν,
ἢ τοῦτον ἄρας ἄθλον εἰς τό γ' ὕστερον
τὸν λοιπὸν ἤδη βίοτον εὐαίων' ἔχειν.
ἐν οὖν ῥοπῇ τοιᾷδε κειμένῳ, τέκνον,
οὐκ εἶ ξυνέρξων, ἡνίκ' ἢ σεσώμεθα
[ἢ πίπτομεν σοῦ πατρὸς ἐξολωλότος]
κείνου βίον σώσαντος, ἢ οἰχόμεσθ' ἅμα;
Υλ. ἀλλ' εἶμι, μῆτερ· εἰ δὲ θεσφάτων ἐγὼ
βάξιν κατῄδη τῶνδε, κἂν πάλαι παρῆ.
ἀλλ' ὁ ξυνήθης πότμος οὐκ εἴα πατρὸς
ἡμᾶς προταρβεῖν οὐδὲ δειμαίνειν ἄγαν.
νῦν δ' ὡς ξυνίημ', οὐδὲν ἐλλείψω τὸ μὴ
πᾶσαν πυθέσθαι τῶνδ' ἀλήθειαν πέρι.

DEIANEIRA: Do you know, my son, that he left me prophecies we can trust regarding this hour of need?
HYLLUS: What are they, mother? I do not know the story.
DEIANEIRA: That either he is about to come to the end of his life, or he will accomplish this ordeal and for the future live from now on happily. So since he stands at such a crisis, my son, will you not go and help him, since either we are saved if he has saved his life or we are gone with him?
HYLLUS: Why, I will go, mother! If I had known the import of these prophecies, I would have been there long since. But his accustomed fate did not allow us

[20] Trans. Lloyd-Jones 1994. [21] Soph. *Trach.* 43: σχεδὸν δ' ἐπίσταμαί.
[22] Soph. *Trach.* 46–47: τοιαύτην ἐμοὶ δέλτον λιπὼν ἔστειχε.
[23] Soph. *Trach.* 44–49, referring to 164–168. [24] Soph. *Trach.* 46–47.
[25] Soph. *Trach.* 77: μαντεῖα πιστὰ. [26] Soph. *Trach.* 76–91.

> to fear for my father or to be too much alarmed. Bu now that I understand, I will leave nothing undone to learn the whole truth about these matters.[27]

According to the tablet and the oracle(s), Herakles 'either is about to come to the end of his life, or he will accomplish this ordeal and for the future live from now on happily'(ὡς ἢ τελευτὴν τοῦ βίου μέλλει τελεῖν,/ ἢ τοῦτον ἄρας ἆθλον εἰς τό γ' ὕστερον/ τὸν λοιπὸν ἤδη βίοτον εὐαίων' ἔχειν).[28] Herakles had long spared Deianeira knowledge of the prophecy before his departure,[29] and even after the revelation of the oracular utterance, its contents are underestimated until Herakles' long absence become worrying:[30] the oracular response, for long kept secret – first by Herakles from his wife and, then, by Deianeira from their son – immediately alarms Hyllos, so much so that he claims that if he had known it, he would have set off after his father long ago.[31]

Only later does Deianeira explain that Herakles received these prophecies concerning his labours from Dodona:[32]

> ὁδὸν γὰρ ἦμος τὴν τελευταίαν ἄναξ
> ὡρμᾶτ' ἀπ' οἴκων Ἡρακλῆς, τότ' ἐν δόμοις
> λείπει παλαιὰν δέλτον ἐγγεγραμμένην
> ξυνθήμαθ', ἁμοὶ πρόσθεν οὐκ ἔτλη ποτέ,
> πολλοὺς ἀγῶνας ἐξιών, οὕτω φράσαι,
> ἀλλ' ὥς τι δράσων εἶρπε κοὐ θανούμενος.
> νῦν δ' ὡς ἔτ' οὐκ ὢν εἶπε μὲν λέχους ὅ τι
> χρείη μ' ἑλέσθαι κτῆσιν, εἶπε δ' ἢν τέκνοις
> μοῖραν πατρῴας γῆς διαίρετον νέμοι,
> χρόνον προτάξας ὡς τρίμηνος ἡνίκ' ἂν
> χώρας ἀπείη κἀνιαύσιος βεβώς,
> τότ' ἢ θανεῖν χρείη σφε τῷδε τῷ χρόνῳ,
> ἢ τοῦθ' ὑπεκδραμόντα τοῦ χρόνου τέλος
> τὸ λοιπὸν ἤδη ζῆν ἀλυπήτῳ βίῳ.
> τοιαῦτ' ἔφραζε πρὸς θεῶν εἱμαρμένα
> τῶν Ἡρακλείων ἐκτελευτᾶσθαι πόνων,
> ὡς τὴν παλαιὰν φηγὸν αὐδῆσαί ποτε
> Δωδῶνι δισσῶν ἐκ πελειάδων ἔφη

> When lord Herakles was setting out from home on his last journey, he left in the house an ancient tablet, inscribed with signs which he had never before brought himself to explain to me when going out on one of his many labours. He had always departed as if to conquer, not to

[27] Trans. Lloyd-Jones 1994. [28] Soph. *Trach*. 76–81. [29] Also Soph. *Trach*. 158.
[30] Also Soph. *Trach*. 78.
[31] Also Soph. *Trach*. 86–8: εἰ δὲ θεσφάτων ἐγὼ/ βάξιν κατῄδη τῶνδε, κἂν πάλαι παρῆ.
[32] Soph. *Trach*. 155–172.

> die. But now, as if he were a doomed man, he told me what I should take for my marriage portion, and what share of their father's land he wished divided for his children. And he fixed the time for the division, saying that, when he had been gone from our land for a year and three months, he was fated either to die at that time, or by escaping the end of the period to live thereafter an untroubled life. That, he explained, was the fate ordained by the gods to be the end of the labours of Herakles just as, he said, the ancient oak at Dodona had once told him through the mouths of the two Peleiades.[33]

More specifically she says that Herakles left in the house an 'ancient tablet, inscribed with signs which he had never before brought himself to explain to me when going out on one of his many labours' (παλαιὰν δέλτον ἐγγεγραμμένην/ ξυνθήμαθ', ἁμοὶ πρόσθεν οὐκ ἔτλη ποτέ,/ πολλοὺς ἀγῶνας ἐξιών).[34] Before leaving, Herakles gave Deianeira testamentary directions on how to divide his properties after his death, as well as the response of the oracle,[35] according to which 'when he had been gone from our land for a year and three months, he was fated either to die at that time, or by escaping the end of the period to live thereafter an untroubled life' (χρόνον προτάξας ὡς τρίμηνος ἡνίκ' ἂν/ χώρας ἀπείη κἀνιαύσιος βεβώς,/ τότ' ἢ θανεῖν χρείη σφε τῷδε τῷ χρόνῳ,/ ἢ τοῦθ' ὑπεκδραμόντα τοῦ χρόνου τέλος/ τὸ λοιπὸν ἤδη ζῆν ἀλυπήτῳ βίῳ).[36] That was what 'the ancient oak at Dodona had once told him through the mouths of the two Peleiades'(ὡς τὴν παλαιὰν φηγὸν αὐδῆσαί ποτε/ Δωδῶνι δισσῶν ἐκ πελειάδων ἔφη).[37]

Later, the chorus specifies that this prophecy happened earlier,[38] and Herakles himself, before dying, refers to his consultation at Dodona, where his father in the past predicted to him that he would have died 'by no creature that had the breath of life, but by one already dead, a dweller with

[33] Trans. Lloyd-Jones 1994.

[34] Soph. *Trach*. 157–159. Here the word *xunthēmata* recalls the Homeric *sēmata lygra* (Hom. *Il.* 6.168), indicating some alphabetic and syllabic writing and which later acquired the meaning of 'ciphers'. There is possibly a touch of deliberate archaism in the poet's phrase: he may have felt that it suited the heroic age to speak of writing as a mystery. This is more likely than that he thought of Herakles as using secret symbols (Jebb 1892: 28, followed by Longo 1968: 84, Davies 1991: 93).

[35] Soph. *Trach*. 169.

[36] Soph. *Trach*. 164–168: Herakles seems to have left his instructions written on a *deltion* for Deianeira. Some commentaries (Kamerbeek 1959: 61, Easterling 1982: 95–96, Rodrighiero 2004: 161) on the passage interpret the 'ancient *deltion*' left by Herakles as one of the lead tablets which were used at Dodona for the oracular consultation; however, Sophocles' words are not clear enough to show whether the *deltion*, mentioned here, contains only Herakles' instructions to Deianeira or those of the oracle of Dodona, too.

[37] Soph. *Trach*. 171–172.

[38] Soph. *Trach*. 822–823.

Hades' (πρὸς τῶν πνεόντων μηδενὸς θανεῖν ποτε,/ ἀλλ' ὅστις Ἅιδου φθίμενος οἰκήτωρ πέλοι):[39]

ἐμοὶ γὰρ ἦν πρόφαντον ἐκ πατρὸς πάλαι,
πρὸς τῶν πνεόντων μηδενὸς θανεῖν ποτε,
ἀλλ' ὅστις Ἅιδου φθίμενος οἰκήτωρ πέλοι.
ὅδ' οὖν ὁ θὴρ Κένταυρος, ὡς τὸ θεῖον ἦν
πρόφαντον, οὕτω ζῶντά μ' ἔκτεινεν θανών
φανῶ δ' ἐγὼ τούτοισι συμβαίνοντ' ἴσα
μαντεῖα καινά, τοῖς πάλαι ξυνήγορα,
ἃ τῶν ὀρείων καὶ χαμαικοιτῶν ἐγὼ
Σελλῶν ἐσελθὼν ἄλσος ἐξεγραψάμην
πρὸς τῆς πατρῴας καὶ πολυγλώσσου δρυός,
ἥ μοι χρόνῳ τῷ ζῶντι καὶ παρόντι νῦν
ἔφασκε μόχθων τῶν ἐφεστώτων ἐμοὶ
λύσιν τελεῖσθαι· κἀδόκουν πράξειν καλῶς.
τὸ δ' ἦν ἄρ' οὐδὲν ἄλλο πλὴν θανεῖν ἐμέ·

It was predicted to me by my father long ago that I should never die at the hand of any of the living, but at that of one who was dead and lived in Hades. So this monster the Centaur, as the divine prophecy had foretold, has killed me, I being alive and he dead. And I shall reveal new prophecies that fit with these, saying the same as the prophecies of old, that when I entered the grove of the *Selloi* who live in the mountains and sleep upon the ground I wrote down at the dictation of the ancestral oak with many voices. It said that that time that is now alive and present my release from the labours that stood over me should be accomplished; and I thought I should be happy. But it meant no more that I should die.[40]

The oracular response is ambiguous, and Heracles misunderstands Zeus' words, but the oracle's language and phrasing are plain and straightforward.

Further prophecies from Dodona followed, 'the new ones aligning with the old' (*manteia kaina, tois palai xunēgora*).[41] These responses were written down by Herakles 'at the dictation of the ancestral oak with many voices' (*exegrapsamēn/pros tēs patrōias kai polyglōssou druos*).[42] Thus, the two oracles

[39] Soph. *Trach.* 1160–1161. [40] Trans. Lloyd-Jones 1994.
[41] Soph. *Trach.* 1165: μαντεῖα καινά, τοῖς πάλαι ξυνήγορα.
[42] Soph. *Trach.* 1167–1168: ἐξεγραψάμην/ πρὸς τῆς πατρῴας καὶ πολυγλώσσου δρυός. Easterling (1982: 219) sees that as a clear reference to the lead tablets used for oracular consultation at Dodona; but, if so, it would represent the only mention of the oracular tablets in literature (Soph. *Trach.* 157; Jebb 1892: 28, Piccinini 2013: 67–69). Herakles might have simply written down the oracle, in order to remember Zeus' words properly, on something other than a lead tablet; moreover, since the mantic procedure at Dodona is a very controversial issue and there is no clarity on who wrote the questions and/or answers on the tablets, one cannot assume that Herakles is reflecting actual practice at the oracle.

received at Dodona, at different times, predicted the time and the cause of Herakles' death: his final rest would come at the end of the twelfth year due to a creature already dead.[43] Somehow, as stressed in the tragedy, the two oracles agree,[44] because each verifies the other.

The choice of the oracle of Dodona for a tragedy set in Trachis, west of Thermopylae, north of Delphi, is rather odd. The Epirote shrine was more difficult, though not impossible, to reach and rather distant from Trachis. Certainly, as Easterling rightly points out,[45] the choice of Dodona rather than Delphi might be explained by reference to the oracular god worshipped there, Zeus, that is, Herakles's father.[46] If the *Trachiniae* dated to the early years of the Peloponnesian war, when Euripides shows a distinct hostility to the Pythian Apollo, one might wonder if Sophocles had also felt a wish to give credit for prophecy to some centre other than Delphi.[47]

But, according to Parke, it is more likely that 'there is some dramatic motive' behind the choice of Dodona: perhaps the 'strange and outlandish' nature of the Epirote oracle, which is in line with the 'curiously inhuman and savage' attitude of Herakles in the play.[48] It would have been more 'convenient' to go to Apollo Pythios, especially considering that all other sources mentioning an oracular response concerning Herakles' immorality after the labours refer to a Delphic oracle, not one from Dodona.[49]

The immortality achieved either after twelve years and ten labours or after twelve years as foretold by Delphic Apollo was also in Apollodorus and Diodorus Siculus.[50] It is not possible to state whether Sophocles embraced an alternative tradition, not elsewhere attested, or whether he altered the myth to fully focus the tragedy around Dodona, but certainly the choice was not 'incidental': Dodona may have meant something specific for him and the audience.

In this respect, the recourse to Zeus Dodonaios in a drama concerning mostly family issues and the ultimate and inevitable journey of Herakles fits into Castrucci's and Nesselrath's hypotheses. What is here relevant is the reputation of the shrine of Zeus at Dodona, delivering 'to-be-believed oracles',[51] which do not contradict each other, that is, 'the new fitting with the old'.[52] This is the reason for the fear that has been present since the first verses: Deianeira is not panicking irrationally, but she is 'almost certain'

[43] Jebb 1892: 168, Longo 1968: 384. [44] Soph. *Trach.* 1165. [45] Easterling 1982: 98.
[46] Parke 1967: 59–64. [47] Parke 1967: 62, Giuliani 2000. [48] Parke 1967: 62.
[49] Apollod. 2.4.12, Diod. Sic. 4.10.7. The oracle of Delphi features frequently in the myths of Herakles, see further Heineman 2021.
[50] Apollod. 2.4.12, Diod. Sic. 4.10.7. [51] Soph. *Trach.* 77: *manteia pista.*
[52] Soph. *Trach.* 1165: *manteia kaina, tois palai xunēgora.*

that something has happened.[53] This is clearly because her source of information is Dodona, not just any oracle, but the centre that (always) delivers to-be-believed responses. In a *crescendo* of dramatic tension and self-awareness, which involves first Deianeira, then her son Hyllos and the chorus, the fear of Herakles' inescapable downfall, which has been present since the first verses, is caused by responses pronounced by Zeus Dodonaios, to which Deianeira constantly refers as a further proof.[54]

But before any of the characters realize this, the audience becomes immediately aware of the inescapable end. The spectators knew the myth before attending the performance and easily connected the two oracular answers: there was no expectation of a surprise ending and Deianeira's and Herakles' words, describing the responses of the oracle, emphasize it. The responses were delivered according to the usual sibylline manner – the oracle never fails – but worded straightforwardly and precisely. The continuous reference to the prophecies from Dodona also seems to imply that until that moment, unaccountably, they all underestimated those oracles, and their distress is heightened by the realization that they should have known that the divine plan would be fulfilled as it came from Dodona. This also suggests that it is likely that the oracles delivered by Zeus Dodonaios were commonly taken at face value and were rather intelligible.

Sophocles also mentions Dodona in his lost tragedy *Odysseus Akanthoplex*. Although only a very few fragments of the play survive, it seems that it turned on an oracular response from Zeus Dodonaios:[55]

F 455: Δωδῶνι ναίων Ζεὺς ὁ Νάιος βροτῶν.
F 456: τὰς θεσπιῳδοὺς ἱερέας Δωδωνίδας.
F 460: νῦν δ' οὔτε μ' ἐκ Δωδῶνος οὔτε Πυθικῶν γυ[άλων] τις ἂν πείσειεν.
F 461: καὶ τὸν ἐν Δωδῶνι παῦσον δαίμον' εὐλογούμενον.

Zeus living at Dodona, whom mortals call Naios.
the prophetic priestesses of Dodona.
Now no one from Dodona nor from the clefts of Delphi would persuade me.
Make the god at Dodona to lose his praises.

Odysseus, after returning from his wanderings, receives a prophecy that he will die by the hand of his son. With a typical oracular equivocation, this does not mean Telemachus, but Telegonus, Odysseus' son by Circe, who arrives unrecognized and kills his father without having identified him.[56]

[53] Soph. *Trach.* 43: *schedon d'epistamai*. [54] Soph. *Trach.* 44–49, 77–82, 155–172, 822–823.
[55] Soph. *Odysseus Akanthoplex* F 455, 456, 460 and 461 (Pearson 1917 = Radt 1999). Translation Lloyd-Jones 1996.
[56] Parke 1967: 63.

Not much else can be said about the plot, but in the few surviving fragments from the play, four verses certainly refer to Dodona.

According to Parke, who followed Pearson, these fragments belong to the beginning of the play, before the recognition scene.[57] He argues that, because of the mention of Dodona and the familiarity of Odysseus' with the Epirote oracle,[58] the crucial prophecy of the death of the hero was likely a response from Zeus Dodonaios.[59] However, we cannot exclude the possibility that more oracular centres were consulted by Odysseus, according to a practice well-attested in ancient drama, and especially given the double mention of Dodona and Delphi in fr. 460: 'Now no one from Dodona nor from the clefts of Delphi would persuade me.'[60] Whether Odysseus or someone else pronounces these verses cannot be established, but for the present discussion it is worth noting both the use of the verb πείθομαι 'be persuaded, trust, obey', which stresses the high reputation of the oracle, and the tragic reproach of the speaker to the god at Dodona, attested in fr. 461: 'Make the god at Dodona to lose his praises'.[61] In other words, Zeus at Dodona, until that moment worthy to be honoured, has been found guilty of an unspecified fault by the speaker. These words do not necessarily mean loss of confidence in the oracle's responses: an oracular response, not understood immediately but then fulfilled, could also have caused the anger of the consultant.

'Incidental' Dodonaen Consultations

Oracular consultations at Dodona are also mentioned in other fifth-century tragedies, specifically Aeschylus' *Prometheus Vinctus* and Euripides' *Phoenissae* and *Archelaos*, but in these cases the questions addressed to Dodona do not represent the crucial events around which the play revolves. In the *Prometheus Vinctus* Aeschylus refers to two oracular enquiries[62] related to Io's myth, which is at the core of the play:[63]

[57] Pearson 1917: 107–109, Parke 1967: 63–64. [58] Hom. *Od.* 14.327–330 (=19.296–299).

[59] In a way typical of Sophocles, and well exemplified by *Oedipus Rex*, the action was evidently developed so that up to a certain point it seemed clear that the oracle had been proven false. Odysseus had been smitten, not by Telemachus but by a stranger. Then a sudden recognition of Telegonus brought about the tragic *peripeteia*.

[60] Soph. *Odysseus Akanthoplex* F 460 (Pearson 1917 = Radt 1999): νῦν δ' οὔτε μ' ἐκ Δωδῶνος οὔτε Πυθικῶν/ γυ[άλων] τις ἂν πείσειεν.

[61] Soph. *Odysseus Akanthoplex* F 461 (Pearson 1917 = Radt 1999): *kai ton en Dōdōni pauson daimon, eulogoumenon*.

[62] Aesch. *PV* 659–663 and 829–835. *Prometheus Vinctus*' authorship and date are still unresolved issues (Griffith 1997, Taplin 1977, West 1979: 130–148, Pattoni 1987, Hernández Munoz 2003: 149–157, Collard 2008: xlix).

[63] Aesch. *PV* 561–886.

a double consultation of oracles, when Delphi and Dodona are consulted by Inachus, Io's father, to learn the reason for his daughter's frightening dreams (addressed below), and a single consultation of Zeus Dodonaios, which happened before the action narrated in the play and about which Prometheus reminds Io:[64]

> ἐπεὶ γὰρ ἦλθες πρὸς Μολοσσὰ γάπεδα
> τὴν αἰπύνωτόν τ᾽ ἀμφὶ Δωδώνην, ἵνα 830
> μαντεῖα θᾶκός τ᾽ ἐστὶ Θεσπρωτοῦ Διὸς
> τέρας τ᾽ ἄπιστον, αἱ προσήγοροι δρύες,
> ὑφ᾽ ὧν σὺ λαμπρῶς κοὐδὲν αἰνικτηρίως
> προσηγορεύθης ἡ Διὸς κλεινὴ δάμαρ
> μέλλουσ᾽ ἔσεσθαι· τῶνδε προσσαίνει σέ τι; 835
>
> For, when you reach the Molossians plains and the sheer ridge around Dodona, where lies the prophetic seat of Thesprotian Zeus and an incredible marvel, the Talking Oaks, by which you were told clearly and not in riddles, that you were to be the glorious partner of Zeus (does aught of this tale appeal to you?).[65]

The Talking Oaks,[66] 'an incredible marvel',[67] at some point in the past addressed Io 'clearly and not in riddles'[68] as she was to become the famous wife of Zeus. This 'first' crucial response that generates Io's misfortune fits with both Castrucci's assumption that the god to consult for family issues was Zeus Dodonaios and Nesselrath's inference that prophecies in Aeschylus' drama mainly predict upcoming events, not necessarily bearing negative consequences. It also matches what we have so far observed, that is, that Zeus' responses were concise and expressed in plain words.

That Zeus Dodonaios was consulted primarily for matters concerning the security of the household and its members is also highlighted in Euripides' tragedies. The dramatist refers to the shrine of Dodona in several tragedies.[69] In *Phoenissae*, a possible consultation is planned by Menoikeus, Kreon's son:[70]

> {Με.}ποῖ δῆτα φεύγω; τίνα πόλιν; τίνα ξένων; (977)
> {Κρ.} ὅπου χθονὸς τῆσδ᾽ ἐκποδὼν μάλιστ᾽ ἔσηι.

[64] Aesch. *PV* 829–835. [65] Trans. Smyth 1922, adapted by the author.
[66] It is the only case in which, weirdly, the oak at Dodona is in the plural (Parke 1967: 52).
[67] Aesch. *PV* 832: *teras t'apiston*. [68] Aesch. *PV* 833: *lamprōs kouden ainiktēriōs*.
[69] Eur. *Andr*. 883–890, *Phoen*. 977–985, Eur. *Arch*. F 228a, *Erect*. F 368 and F 1021 (*TrGF*). In *Andromache*, Orestes, after giving a self-description, affirms that he is on the way to consult the Epirote oracle. Consultation of the oracle of Dodona in a play set in Epirus is not striking and the context does not enhance our understanding.
[70] Eur. *Phoen*. 977–985. Euripides places the oracle in Thesprotia, and not in Molossia, perhaps in an attempt to recreate a past dimension. For a similar deliberate allusion, see Aesch. *PV* 829–841.

{Με.} οὔκουν σὲ φράζειν εἰκός, ἐκπονεῖν δ' ἐμέ;
{Κρ.} Δελφοὺς περάσας . . . {Με.} ποῖ με χρή, πάτερ, μολεῖν; (980)
{Κρ.} Αἰτωλίδ' ἐς γῆν. {Με.} ἐκ δὲ τῆσδε ποῖ περᾶν;
{Κρ.} Θεσπρωτὸν οὖδας. {Με.} σεμνὰ Δωδώνης βάθρα;
{Κρ.} ἔγνως. {Με.} τί δὴ τόδ' ἔρυμά μοι γενήσεται;
{Κρ.} πόμπιμος ὁ δαίμων. {Με.} χρημάτων δὲ τίς πόρος;
{Κρ.} ἐγὼ πορεύσω χρυσόν. {Με.} εὖ λέγεις, πάτερ. (985)

MENOIKEUS: Where can I escape? To what city? To which of our guest-friends?
KREON: Where you will be furthest removed from this land.
MENOIKEUS: It is for you to name a place, for me to carry out your bidding.
KREON: After passing Delphi – Menoikeus: Where must I go, father?
KREON: To Aetolia. Menoikeus: And where must I go from there?
KREON: To the land of Thesprotia. Menoikeus: To Dodona's holy threshold?
KREON: You understand. Menoikeus: What protection will I find there?
KREON: The god will guide you. Menoikeus: How shall I supply my need?
KREON: I will find gold. Menoikeus: Well said, father'.[71]

Kreon is attempting to avoid sacrificing his son to save Thebes and suggests Menoikeus go far away, to the end of the known Greek world, where Dodona is. Delphi might be a more suitable destination, both in terms of geographical proximity and in terms of mythical connections with the Theban saga:[72] so why go to Dodona? Presumably because, as Kreon says, it was one of the most remote places in the known world, as well as being a sacred place which could guarantee the safety of Menoikeus, who has been told he has to die. Moreover, it should be remembered that Euripides was aware of the myth connecting the Boeotians, and in particular the Thebans, with Dodona. In this sense Dodona belonged to the cultural heritage of Boiotia and would not represent an odd choice. Menoikeus asks

[71] Trans. Coleridge 1938, adapted by the author.

[72] Eur. *Erect*. F 368: *miasma druos* 'the pollution of the tree'. The fragment refers to the contamination of the sacred oak, standing in this case as *pars pro toto* for the sanctuary of Dodona, committed by the Thebans. The full account is in a fragment of Ephorus (*FGrHist* 70 F 119 = Strabo 9.2.4), according to which the sacrilege happened sixty years after the Trojan war, at the time of the Aeolian migration from Aulis to Asia, when the Boeotians attempted to return to their homeland in Boeotia from Thessaly, where the Thracians and Pelasgians had previously driven them. Both the Pelasgians and the Boeotians went to consult the oracle of Dodona. The prophetess told the Boeotians that they 'would prosper if they committed a sacrilege'. The Boeotian messengers suspected that the oracle was favourable to the Pelasgians, so they seized the woman and threw her upon a burning pyre. In consequence, from that moment onwards, at Dodona, prophecies to Boeotians were uttered by men only; moreover, the surviving prophetess explain to them the real meaning of the oracle – that it was instructing them to steal tripods and send one of them to Dodona every year. Thus, the account in Ephorus works as a double *aition*, giving a reason, on the one hand, for the annual ritual of the Boeotian tripod procession to Dodona (*tripodēphoria*), and on the other for the custom of delivering oracles to the Boeotians by priests, and not priestesses. On the ties between Boeotians and Dodona, see Moscati Castelnuovo 2017, Piccinini 2017: 101–111.

his father how the god will help him, and Kreon replies, 'the god will guide you';[73] nothing more is said, so in this case, it is not possible to determine what guidance Zeus provided for the journey.

A different case is a fragment from *Archelaos*;[74] Euripides reports the consultation of the oracle by Temenos. According to the myth,[75] Temenos, son of Aristomachos and descended from Herakles,[76] having conquered the Peloponnese with his brothers, then conquered Argos. His sons were forced to leave the country:

> ἀπαιδίαι δὲ χρώμενος πατὴρ ἐμὸς
> Τήμενος ἐς ἀγυι̯ᾶς ἦλθε Δωδώνης πτύχας (20)
> τέκνων ἔρωτι· τῆς δ' ὁμωνύμου Διὸς
> πρόπο̣[λ]ος Διώνης εἶπε Τημένωι τάδε·
> "ὦ παῖ πεφυκὼς ἐκ γονῶν Ἡρακλέους,
> Ζεύς σ[οι] δίδωσι παῖδ', ἐγὼ μαντεύομαι,
> ὃν Ἀρχ[έλ]α̣ον χρὴ καλεῖν . . . α[].[.].[
>
> Having no children my father Temenos went to the folds of the holy Dodona out of desire for children; the temple-servant of Dione, who has the same name as Zeus, said to him these things: 'O son, descended from the offspring of Heracles, Zeus will give you a child, who should be named Archelaos, I prophecy', [. . .].

Here, one of the sons of Temenos, likely, but not necessarily Archelaos, tells the story. The fragment, despite its shortness, is valuable for our purposes in several ways. First, Temenos from Argos in the Peloponnese consults the oracle of Dodona despite the 'inconvenient' location. This could be explained as being because Temenos, as a descendant of Herakles, preferred consulting Zeus' oracle rather than Apollo's.[77] Secondly, the question put to the oracle concerns a private matter, specifically regarding his future descendants. This question seems to be one of the usual topics among the questions put to the oracle of Dodona.[78] Finally, Euripides mentions a priestess working in the shrine as a temple-servant to Dione (*propolos Diōnēs*), who reports the prophecy in clear and straightforward terms: the future birth of a male child with a 'speaking name': Archelaos, 'leading the people'.

[73] Eur. *Phoen*. 986: *pompimos ho daimon*.
[74] Eur. *Arch*. F 228a (*TrGF*), Harder 1985: 155, 190–206.
[75] Hdt. 8.137–138, Paus. 8.24.10.
[76] The usual genealogy is Hyllos-Kleodaios-Aristomachos-Temenos (e.g. Hdt. 6.52.1, Hyg. *Fab.* 124).
[77] Likewise, Herakles in Sophocles' *Trachinae*, seen above.
[78] See for instance, Eidinow 2007, Lhôte 2006, no. 41–52, and DVC; on questions concerning children Piccinini 2015 and Laes 2020.

Thus, the straightforward nature of Zeus Dodonaios' utterances emerges in Euripides' *Archelaos* too: Temenos obtains a clear answer; that is, 'Zeus will give you a son'.[79]

The Exception to the Rule?

To this picture in which ancient tragedians agree in depicting Zeus Dodonaios's answers as clear, self-evident concise, and straightforward, the double consultation of Delphi and Dodona in Aeschylus' *Prometheus Vinctus* seems to represent an exception. The consultation is part of the empathic dialogue between Prometheus and Io, fortuitously arrived in the remote place where the Titan is chained to the rock as punishment by Zeus:[80]

ὁ δ' ἔς τε Πυθὼ κἀπὶ Δωδώνην πυκνοὺς
θεοπρόπους ἴαλλεν, ὡς μάθοι τί χρὴ
δρῶντ' ἢ λέγοντα δαίμοσιν πράσσειν φίλα.
ἦκον δ' ἀναγγέλλοντες αἰολοστόμους
χρησμούς, ἀσήμους δυσκρίτως τ' εἰρημένους.
τέλος δ' ἐναργὴς βάξις ἦλθεν Ἰνάχωι
σαφῶς ἐπισκήπτουσα καὶ μυθουμένη
ἔξω δόμων τε καὶ πάτρας ὠθεῖν ἐμὲ
ἄφετον ἀλᾶσθαι γῆς ἐπ' ἐσχάτοις ὅροις·
κεἰ μὴ θέλοι, πυρωπὸν ἐκ Διὸς μολεῖν
κεραυνὸν ὃς πᾶν ἐξαϊστώσοι γένος.
τοιοῖσδε πεισθεὶς Λοξίου μαντεύμασιν
ἐξήλασέν με κἀπέκλησε δωμάτων
ἄκουσαν ἄκων· ἀλλ' ἐπηνάγκαζέ νιν
Διὸς χαλινὸς πρὸς βίαν πράσσειν τάδε.

> And he sent frequent sacred envoys to Pytho and Dodona, to learn what he should do or say to please the gods. They kept coming to report riddling, obscure, and dark-worded oracles; but finally, a clear word came to Inachus, charging and commanding him to thrust me outside home and native land, to be let loose to wander over earth's furthest boundaries; and should he not be willing, fiery lightning would come from Zeus to obliterate his whole line. Persuaded by such prophecies from Loxias, he drove and shut me out of the house against my will too; but Zeus' curb compelled him to do this forcibly.[81]

This first exchange between the two emphasizes Io's desperate intention to tap Prometheus' prophetic knowledge of her future after being turned into

[79] Eur. *Arch.* F 228a (*TrGF*): *Zeus soi didōsi paid'*. [80] Aesch. *PV* 658–672.
[81] Trans. Collard 2008, adapted by the author.

a heifer to escape Hera's jealousy. Before learning her fate, which is finally revealed by Prometheus,[82] the chorus invites Io to recount the reason for her wanderings. In this context Io describes Zeus' passion and her suffering caused by Hera's jealousy from which Zeus failed to protect her. Since she was tormented by frightening dreams, messengers were sent by her father Inachus to both Delphi and Dodona to learn what he should do or say to please the gods. According to Aeschylus the oracles were consulted many times[83] and the *theopropoi* returned 'reporting riddling, obscure, and dark worded oracles'.[84] 'Finally, a clear response came to Inachus',[85] explicitly commanding him to drive Io away from her home and country and to let her loose to roam to the ends of the earth.[86] Should Inachus refuse, a fiery bolt would come from Zeus to annihilate the whole family. Persuaded by these oracles of Apollo Loxias,[87] Inachus obeys and Io, turned into a heifer, immediately starts her wandering.

The need to have comprehensible prophecies is indeed a crucial and recurring aspect in Aeschylus' *Prometheus Vinctus*. This is illustrated when Hermes invites Prometheus to describe everything about the marriage that would cost Zeus' power: the god encourages him to speak, literally, 'not in any riddling way'.[88] Moreover, ironically, he warns Prometheus not to let him make the same road twice,[89] alluding to the possibility that Prometheus' response might have been obscure (like that of Apollo Loxias?) and also to Greeks habits of consulting oracles several times about the same issue. This statement acquires meaning when we consider that the person demanding clarity is Hermes, the herald of an oracular god, Zeus, who, as affirmed in the play, speaks 'clearly and not in any riddling way'.[90] In other words, Hermes is saying, 'behave and speak clearly as does Zeus, not as Apollo'. The clarity of Zeus, who does not deceive, is further emphasized by Hermes in the attempt to persuade the stubborn Prometheus to reveal his secrets in order to be free at the end of the play:[91]

πρὸς ταῦτα βούλευ', ὡς ὅδ' οὐ πεπλασμένος
ὁ κόμπος ἀλλ' εὖ καὶ λίαν εἰρημένος·
ψευδηγορεῖν γὰρ οὐκ ἐπίσταται στόμα
τὸ Δῖον, ἀλλὰ πᾶν ἔπος τελεῖ.

[82] A descendant of Io will also free Prometheus physically from his fetters (Aesch. *PV* 578–581, 599–601).
[83] Aesch. *PV* 658–659.
[84] Aesch. *PV* 661–662: *anangellontes aiolostomous/ chrēsmous, asēmous, duskritōs t'eirēmenous.*
[85] Aesch. *PV* 663: *telos d'enargēs baxis ēlthen Inachoi.* [86] Aesch. *PV* 667–668.
[87] Aesch. *PV* 669. [88] Aesch. *PV* 949: *mēden ainiktēriōs.* [89] Aesch. *PV* 950–951.
[90] Aesch. *PV* 833. [91] Aesch. *PV* 1030–1033.

> Therefore, be advised, since this is no counterfeited vaunting but utter truth; for the mouth of Zeus does not know how to utter falsehood but will bring to pass every word.[92]

The legend of Io was exploited not only in Aeschylus' tragedies but also in other literary sources.[93] Zeus Dodonaios, however, does not appear in other evidence for the myth. For this reason, Parke assumed that the whole episode was quite probably Aeschylus' own invention, not derived from any other source[94] and dismissed all the references to the Epirote oracle in the tragedy as 'incidental'.[95] Mitchell, on the contrary, highlights the 'leading role' of Dodona over Delphi[96] as Dodona in the play is the first port of call in Io's wanderings[97] and, most importantly, the Epirote shrine foretold to her that she was meant to be the bride of Zeus.[98] Mitchell argues that the involvement of Dodona in Io's myth was a device to foster Euboean ties in northwestern Greece.[99] This hypothesis, however, does not fully explain the choice of Aeschylus, who assigns to Dodona the crucial role of triggering Io's personal drama, that is, the response from the Talking Oaks to become the wife of Zeus,[100] which chronologically preceded the double consultation by Inachus.[101] Seemingly, Aeschylus had no interest in nurturing the ties between Euboeans and the northwest.

Although there is no need to over-emphasize the role of Dodona in the plot or in the eyes of the viewer, let alone to argue that it was portrayed as being 'superior' to Delphi, it might be possible to agree, at least in part, with Castrucci that Dodona was perceived as different from Delphi because Zeus was the god of *oikos*.[102] But the need for Inachus to have a double consultation is not in line with this assumption: Why did the situation require more divine authorities?

[92] Trans. Smyth 1922, adapted by the author.

[93] Hes. *Eoai*. F 124–126 (Merkelbach and West), Aesch. *Suppl*. 291–324, 531–589, Hdt. 1.1, 2.41, Akusilaos *FGrH* 2 F 26–27, Pherekydes *FGrH* 3 F 67, Apollod. 2.1.3, Paus. 1.25.1, 2.16.1 (likely also Sophocles' lost tragedies *Inachus*); *cf.* Burkert 1983: 164, n. 14.

[94] Parke 1967: 52.

[95] Exceptions are the allusion to the 'Dodonaean mountains' (Aesch. *Suppl*. 256–259: *orē te Dōdōnaia*) and the reference to Zeus at Dodona as 'Thesprotian' (Aesch. *PV* 829–841: *manteia thakos te Thesprōtou Dios*) with the purpose of giving, on the one hand, a clear geographical reference to localize the kingdom of Pelasgus, and on the other, an ancient flavour to the play, by recalling the old history of the region.

[96] Mitchell 2001: 341. [97] Aesch. *PV* 834–835. [98] Aesch. *PV* 829–835.

[99] Aesch. *PV* 829–835. On the alleged Euboean presence in northwestern Greece, Piccinini 2017: 45–46, 49–55 (with previous bibliography).

[100] Aesch. *PV* 829–835. [101] Aesch. *PV* 658–672. [102] Castrucci 2012: 6.

In this consultation, the responses of both oracles were defined collectively as 'riddling, obscure, and dark-worded oracles'.[103] Only eventually, after many embassies, did a clear prophecy come from Delphi, that is, that Io is to be cast out from her family and home.[104] This might be read as contradicting the claim here that Zeus Dodonaios' responses are clear and straightforward. Yet, a close analysis of the verses can help to resolve this seeming problem. The obscurity of the first responses delivered by the gods of Delphi and Dodona[105] might depend on the difficulty that any consultant would have in harmonizing two distinct utterances, which, by definition, are, regardless of the content, different in their formulation and wording. The human mind of any ancient consultant was challenged in interpreting the divine messages, but in the case of two distinct and different oracles, the major difficulty was to find a viable solution, without offending either one of the gods and establishing a (personal) hierarchy of divine authority. Moreover, it is not surprising that this oracle comes from Delphi (and not from Dodona), as the god who orders Inachus to let Io roam free,[106] far away not only from Hera's jealousy but also from Zeus' passion, could never have been Zeus himself.

In conclusion, this piece of evidence, pointing to an apparently obscure response from Zeus Dodonaios, cannot be considered as an exception to the rule; rather, it looks like a clever trick to stress human responsibility (and ability) to interpret correctly divine messages, as well as a diplomatic way to avoid the possible embarrassment of an oracle contradicting another.

Zeus Dodonaios Master of Clarity

From this analysis of the verses attesting prophecies and consultations of Zeus Dodonaios in Aeschylus', Sophocles', and Euripides' tragedies, it emerges that Zeus Dodonaios was primarily consulted about issues concerning the security of household, family and final journeys taking someone home.[107] This picture is confirmed by the oracular consultations found

[103] Aesch. *PV* 661–662: *anangellontes aiolostomous/ chrēsmous, asēmous, duskritōs t'eirēmenous*. Following the common view that the divine answers are enigmatic and ambiguous: Lateiner 1993, Giuliani 2000, Harrison 2000: 130–131, 146–147, Maurizio 2001, Naerebout and Beerden 2012, Almqvist 2021.

[104] Aesch. *PV* 658–659. Such a contrast between the first and the second response was already noted by Parke (1967: 52), who, however, does not advance any explanation.

[105] Aesch. *PV* 658–672. [106] Aesch. *PV* 666.

[107] These cases illustrate the nature of Zeus as a god relating to values of the *oikos* distinct from that of Delphic Apollo, who was more inclined to deliver oracles about departure and estrangement from home.

on the lead tablets at Dodona: although the oracle was not consulted exclusively for these issues, among private queries, those concerning health, marriage, family, children, residential shift and travel constitute a considerable part of the evidence.[108]

Moreover, an in-depth reading of the plays also shows that Zeus Dodonaios, regardless of the specific enquiry, has his own specific way to formulate the divine answer, characterized by conciseness. In this respect, the straightforwardness and clarity of Zeus Dodonaios' responses are revealed as being in opposition to the reputation of Apollo at Delphi, who, according to literary sources, expressed himself mostly in an elliptical and obscure manner. Besides Aeschylus' consideration of Dodona as an oracle delivering clear prophecies with no riddling, Sophocles characterizes Zeus Dodonaios' utterances as clear and to-be-believed, and Euripides points towards the straightforwardness of Dodona's responses. The oracular utterances of Dodona may be ambiguous, like all oracles, but unlike those of Delphi, they are not characterized by obscure language. The clarity and concision of the questions and answers delivered by the Epirote oracle is indeed a distinctive feature confirmed by the epigraphic evidence: queries are not longer than a few lines; more often a few words, if not one, expresses the worries of the consultant(s). Equally laconic are the few divine answers, which are often so straight and direct as to sound more like orders than divine counsels.[109]

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[108] See n. 78.

[109] On the oracular responses in the tablets, see the accurate and prudent observations of Martín González 2021 (with previous bibliography).

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