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Marvelous Women of Prophecy in the Narrative Strategies of Herodotus's *Histories* and Luke-Acts

1. Introduction

In the Greek historiographical tradition, Herodotus and Saint Luke stand out in a few ways from historians of their times. One way is their inclusion of women in their histories, both quantitatively and qualitatively. Another way is their substantial inclusion of the divine sphere as a part of their descriptions of human history. This essay then explores the link between these two interests: women and the divine. For the limits of this contribution, the comparison will be on the narrative significance of women in relation to divine communication.¹

1.1 Marvelous women and prophecy in the *Histories* and Luke-Acts?

When Herodotus (484–430/420 ca. BCE) describes what he wishes to preserve from fading away in time through his ἵστορίη (inquiry, research)², he says that it is “the great and the marvelous deeds” (ἔργα μεγάλα τε καὶ θωμαστά, Hdt. 1.praef.2–3).³ For this, he extends his net widely, investigating deeds among the Greeks *and* the Barbarians. Thus, with respect to his narrative interests, the sky's the limit! His main line of investigation, however, explores the causes of the hostility between the Greeks and the Barbarians (Hdt. 1.praef.3). This provides the overall structure and the red thread throughout the nine volumes. Yet the *Histories* is no pure military or political history. While he develops the central theme of conflicts between the Greeks and (primarily) the Persians, he describes *on the way* what is worth reporting, the great and the marvelous. In modern terms then, Herodotus does the work

1 I count it a privilege to be one of the contributors to honor our colleague Max Küchler. I hope this article, which covers in two ways much space and time, will shed some light on the study of women's roles in antiquity.

2 In the *Histories* ἵστορίη in Ionic Greek; ἱστορία in Attic Greek.

3 References to the Greek text of the *Histories* are taken from *Herodotus* 2015 (Wilson), consulted on the site of the Thesaurus Linguae Graecae.

of an historian and an ethnographer, as he is interested not only in events, but also in individuals within their societies. His curious mind seeks to make sense of how things work, particularly relationships, for example, among Greeks and Barbarians, men and women, nature and humans, even gods and humans. Within this rich spectrum, quite a few *marvelous* women appear in the *Histories*. This explains the spark that set off the main line of inquiry for this contribution. Yet, as the title suggests, what justifies this comparison between Herodotus and Luke's writings? Something that may surprise modern readers is that both Herodotus and Luke – in comparison to other historians of antiquity – gave significant attention to the roles that women played in the periods they describe.⁴ Although 500 years lie between these fathers of historiography, a comparison of this shared interest is justified, since Luke also highlights the significant contributions of women, who, by virtue of their character and actions, merit the epithet of 'marvelous'.⁵

For the present contribution, however, this comparison of marvelous women is too broad. The focus will be sharpened by exploring another aspect that these two historians have in common, namely, divine involvement in human affairs. As regards Luke's double work ('Luke-Acts'), this theological aspect is quite evident and requires no justification. As for Herodotus, scholars have long noticed his interest in the involvement of the divine in human and natural affairs.⁶ He provides several examples where the divine is perceived as influential in the human sphere. He also describes human responses to the divine through various religious rites and practices. Given that that divine and religious aspects play such an important role in the narrative strategies of both authors, their works may be qualified as theological historiography or, better, prophetic historiography.⁷

For these reasons, we will examine the portrayals of those women who participated in or were greatly influenced by divine communication, that is, the oracular and the prophetic. In short, we shall observe and compare marvelous women of prophecy in two different prophetic traditions. Due to the considerable amount of material, this analysis will pay special attention to the narrative significance of women and prophecy in the initial *logoi* in the *Histories* and Luke-Acts. Indeed, these two interests were shared by Herodotus and Luke: the roles of women and the role of the divine in human history. I will try to put the two together and finally consider how they intersect in history.

4 By 'Luke' I follow the traditional attribution of the Gospel of Luke and the Acts of the Apostles to a person named Luke. Although I think it can be argued that this Luke could have been one of Paul's colleagues, it is not necessary to explore here the various options, since the discussion does not depend on this position. It does assume, however, that the author had an excellent understanding of Greek and Jewish customs and beliefs throughout the Mediterranean basin in the first century CE.

5 Just as Herodotus can rightly be called the "father of history" as did Cicero (Leg. 1.1.5), Luke also can be considered the father of Christian (or Messianic) historiography.

6 See, for example, *Kirchberg* 1965; *Lachenaud* 1978; *Burkert* 1990; *Gould* 1994; *Harrison* 2000; *Mikalson* 2003; *Kindt* 2006; and *Scullion* 2006.

7 Cf. *Morgan* 2019.

1.2 The visibility of women in the *Histories* and in Luke-Acts

Experienced readers of the *Histories* and of Luke-Acts will recognize the attention that our two authors give to women and their part in their histories. For those with less familiarity with one or the other, a brief survey is provided here for some background information, which will be expanded in later sections. It is timely to explore women and prophecy in tandem since substantial works have been published recently on both aspects.

When one speaks of women's visibility, it is generally meant in a comparative sense, that is, compared to other works of their times. In fact, it is patent that neither the *Histories* nor Luke-Acts are primarily about women. Their perspectives, however, are unique when compared to authors of their times and the patriarchal milieus in which they wrote. This sensitivity seems to reflect their universal outlook on human existence, which included men and women performing various roles in society.

Concerning Herodotus's narrative representation of women, John Gould remarks that Herodotus "shows himself remarkably sensitive to the full range of human experience as it is lived by women," which underlines "the visibility of women in the world as Herodotus presents it."⁸ In fact, narratively, Erwin Wolff has shown how Herodotus's portrayal of women, at the beginning and the end of the work, offers a key to the narrative's structure.⁹ This feature of the *Histories* stands out in general in Greek historiography, and it can be illustrated by a comparison: Herodotus mentions women and the feminine 375 times,¹⁰ while his immediate successor, Thucydides, mentions women less than fifty times.¹¹ In Josine Blok's analysis, "women play a salient role" in the *Histories*, and their "participation in the narrated historical events is thoroughly intertwined with all other aspects of the *Histories*."¹² Indeed, as mentioned above, one of these key aspects of the *Histories* is the relationship between the divine and humans. Women also play a role in this regard, and an excellent example of this, as we will consider below, is the role of the Pythia, the priestess of Apollo at the Delphic Oracle. Other women are mentioned in relation to prophecy, but she is by far Herodotus's most important woman, and thus will be the main focus of our discussion on his narrative strategies.

8 Gould 1989, 130. In addition to studies discussed below, many others have explored aspects of the portrayal of women in the *Histories*: Sancisi-Weerdenburg 1983; Munson 1988; Gray 1995; Haze-windus 2004; Larson 2006; Anhalt 2006; and Rossellini/Saïd 2013.

9 Cf. Wolff 1964.

10 Cf. Dewald 2013, 152.

11 Wiedemann 1983, 163, counts less than fifty occurrences in Thucydides's work, including references to women/wives, mothers, priestesses, etc. The comparison is approximate due to the items counted, but it does provide a good idea about the inclusion of women in the narratives of the two authors.

12 Cf. Blok 2002, 225.

As regards Luke's writings, recent studies demonstrate a continued interest in Luke's portrayal of women.¹³ It is generally known, that, compared to the other Gospels, the third Gospel provides more information about women and their place in Jesus's ministry and teaching.¹⁴ Alfred Plummer, for example, rightly places this element within Luke's emphasis on the universality of God's plan.¹⁵ Evidence for this aspect can be found in the multiple parallels of events and parables involving men and women (e. g., the annunciations of Gabriel to Zechariah and Mary; the songs of Mary and Zechariah; the praising of Simeon and Anna, etc.). Plummer signals how Luke's Gospel gives "a prominent place" to women, as well as a good variety of types of womanhood. As in Herodotus's times, Luke's portrayal of women went against Jewish and Gentile perspectives on women. For these reasons, Plummer nicely describes passages highlighting women as "the Gospel of Womanhood."¹⁶

For the specific question about women and prophecy in Luke-Acts, it is helpful to situate Luke's writings within their principle theological inspiration, the Jewish prophetic tradition.¹⁷ Women are specifically identified as prophets in other biblical books. The Hebrew Bible mentions five: Miriam (Exod 15.20), Deborah (Judg 4.4), Huldah (2 Kgs 22.14; 2 Chr 34.22), an unnamed prophetess with whom Isaiah had a son (Isa 8.3), and Noadiah (Neh 6.14). Further, the prophets Joel (2.28/3.1) and Ezekiel (13.17) mention daughters who (will) prophesy. In the New Testament, women who are specifically qualified by 'prophetess' or 'to prophesy' are Anna (Luke 2.36–38), the four daughters of Philip (Acts 21.9), women who prophesy in Corinth (1 Cor 11.5), and, finally, Jezebel a false prophetess in Rev 2.18–28.¹⁸ Comparatively, Luke's interest comes to the fore. This element, however, increases when other women are included who speak under the direction of the Holy Spirit (Elizabeth, Mary). Also, it is noteworthy that Luke is the only NT writer who cites Joel's prophecy about the outpouring of the Spirit (Acts 2.17–21).

This then provides the basis for this comparison between women and prophecy as related by two historians from different theological perspectives.

13 For example, *Quesnell* 1983; *Ryan* 1985; *Portefaix* 1988; *D'Angelo* 1990; *Karris* 1994; *Seim* 1994; *Black* 1995; *Arlandson* 1997; *Levine* 2002; *Reid* 2011; *Spencer* 2012; *Forbes/Harrower* 2015; and *Shillington* 2015, 117–138.

14 Cf. *Scholer* 1992, 880.885–886. *Shillington* 2015, 120, provides a helpful table of statistics for occurrences of men and women in the Synoptic Gospels. Luke's Gospel has the highest number of women (80; Mark 8; Matt 16), and the lowest ratio between male and female (3.2:1 compared to 6.5:1 in Mark; 4.7:1 in Matt). *Shillington* rightfully indicates that Luke's Gospel is longer than the other two: 91 pages of text compared to Matthew's 83 pages and Mark's 43 pages.

15 Cf. *Plummer* 1922, xlii–xliii; *Green* 1997, 317–319.

16 *Plummer* 1922, 528. Plummer provides there a good, but non-exhaustive, list of key passages. *Talbert* 2002, 93, indicates those passages concerning women that are found only in Luke.

17 For a comparison of oracular traditions in Delphi and the Near East, see *Huffman* 2007.

18 The Talmud also adds Sarah, Hannah, Abigail, and Esther. See *Reid* 2011, 50 n. 20.

1.3 Preliminary remarks

Before proceeding with this study that covers much ground, a few preliminary remarks are in order. First, this contribution considers the stated questions from a historiographical angle rather than purely historical. In other words, the focus will be on how our two authors represent people and subjects, rather than focusing on questions of historicity, whether what they affirm is factual or not. I do recognize fully that their interrelationship is pertinent; thus, some background material is provided. The comparison explores two master narrators from two distinct worldviews and time periods. It is crucial, then, to reserve judgment on their representations, and to explore each historian on their own terms, without imposing extrinsic notions. The point is that both authors make use of oracular and prophetic exempla as additional authoritative voices, or as mouthpieces for the historian.¹⁹

Second, it is essential to acknowledge that what we know about women in antiquity derives from sources written by men. In the times depicted by Herodotus and Luke, women lived primarily in patriarchal societies, and history-writing was performed mainly by men. This means that women's roles were generally not in leadership, and their actions, whether good or bad, were portrayed by men who had their own interests and biases. This said, I think this study, as others have shown, may help to appreciate the unusual sensitivity toward women on the part of Herodotus and Luke. Finally, of course, my account of this is colored by my own male perspective. Yet, despite this, it is hoped that something good can be gleaned from it.

2. Marvelous women of prophecy in Herodotus's *Histories*

2.1 A brief history of the Delphic Oracle and the Pythia

In order to appreciate the role of the Pythia in Herodotus's *Histories*, we consider here briefly the history of the Delphic Oracle, which was the most famous oracular institution among the ancient Greeks (the Hellenes).²⁰ Of all forms of divination, it was the most prestigious and influential, so much that Greeks and non-Greeks

19 I am indebted to *Kindt* 2006, 35.44, for these expressions. The latter of which is probably inspired by Pearson and Sandbach's translation of Plutarch's accusation of Herodotus in *On the Malice of Herodotus* (Plut. mor. 871D; not 871E as she indicates on p. 45 n. 59): "but he uses the Pythian god as his mouthpiece," which is a creative translation of ἀλλὰ τῷ τοῦ Πυθίου προσώπῳ χρώμενος.

20 For historical sketches of the Delphic Oracle, see *Fontenrose* 1978, 1–10; *Bowden* 2005, 12–39; *Scott* 2014, 9–50; and *Kindt* 2016, 1–15.

traveled from long distances to consult Apollo.²¹ In addition to Herodotus's *Histories*, several ancient writings attest to the Delphic Oracle.²² Plutarch, for example, exalts its status as being “the most ancient in time and the most famous in repute” (Plut. mor. 414B). Its longevity is remarkable, lasting from (at least) the eighth century BCE until the end of the fourth century CE.²³ Owing to its prestige for all Hellenes, it was considered a Panhellenic temple, and as such was administered by an independent governing body called the Amphiktyonic Council. Its belonging to all Hellenes meant that cities paid homage in various ways to Apollo, for example, by building houses and filling them with gifts and tributes in his honor (often called ‘treasuries’). Twenty-seven of these structures existed at the end of the fifth century.²⁴ Therefore, by Herodotus’s times in the fifth century, Delphi had already become an inter-Hellenic center for cult and banking.

Two main reasons undergird the prestige of the Delphic Oracle in Greek culture: the authoritative inspiration of Apollo and the sanctity of the site.²⁵ Compared to other oracular centers and numerous forms of divination, Delphi’s temple was the only one linked to the voice of a god.²⁶ Consultants were drawn to Delphi to receive Apollo’s counsel via the Pythia.²⁷

Furthermore, two traditions anchored this site as one of the most sacred places for all Greeks. It was considered the navel (*omphalos*) of the earth. One legend locates it there as defined by Zeus who had sent out two eagles who collided and landed on the ancient site now called Delphi (cf. Pindar fr. 54). Another tradition, the *Homeric Hymn to Apollo* (lines 281–374), recounts how Apollo – in search of a location for his oracle – found the most suitable site in Crisa (often used to denote Delphi). First, however, he had to defeat the she-dragon, which he successfully accomplished. The dragon’s body then decayed from the scorching sun; hence, the name of the location Pytho, from the Greek *puthein* ‘to rot’.²⁸ From this point on, a sanctuary was dedicated to Pythian Apollo. Again, the *Homeric Hymn to Apollo* (247–253) provides an idea about how the Greeks perceived Apollo’s purposes for the oracle, “to whom I could give unfailing advice (*nēmerteā boulēn*) through

21 Fontenrose 1978, 1–4; Price 1985, 131. For example, Herodotus describes the fascinating interaction between Croesus and the Delphic Oracle (Hdt. 1.87–91).

22 As far as ancient texts that treat the question of the Delphic Oracle, the most extensive are *Homeric Hymn to Apollo* (*hymni Homerici* 3) (sixth c. BCE) and Plutarch’s *The Oracles at Delphi no longer given in Verse*, and *The Obsolescence of Oracles* (first c. CE).

23 Archeological evidence places its existence securely in the eighth century BCE. Scott 2014, 45–50.

24 Cf. Price 1985, 131.

25 Cf. Fontenrose 1979, 238–239.

26 On various types of divination in Greece such as oracles and hepatoscopy (liver divination), see Bowden 2005, 1–11.

27 The Oracle of Zeus in Dodona was also one of the most prestigious, but priests there interpreted the will of the god through the analysis of the rustling leaves of an oak tree. Sourvinou-Inwood 2012, 429.

28 Cf. Scott 2014, 31–32. See Fontenrose 1978, 1, for other sources containing the myth that Ge (earth) and Themis (her daughter) had spoken oracles at Pytho.

the prophetic responses in the rich temple.”²⁹ Apollo could only be consulted in the innermost sanctuary (the *adyton*) via his intermediary, the priestess Pythia.³⁰ Regarding these legends, Joseph Fontenrose writes, “Whatever Delphic origin myth a Hellene accepted, he firmly believed that the Oracle had been active in the later Bronze Age.”³¹ Fontenrose indicates various sources that provide evidence for previous oracular activity there, but was not yet connected to the cult of Apollo whose temple was established there in the eighth century BCE.³²

Based on the sanctuary’s eminent reputation, it does not seem an exaggeration to affirm that the Pythia exercised the most important role among women in the ancient Mediterranean basin. This fact is quite remarkable for two reasons: Greek culture was highly patriarchal (e.g., only men could consult the Oracle!), and it was unusual for a male god such as Apollo to have a female intermediary.³³ Her essential role was to be a channel for the voice of Apollo. All this underlines the unique status of the Pythia, who, for Herodotus, was nothing less than ‘marvelous’.

The Pythia (or Pythias) was completely dedicated to the Oracle’s service for life.³⁴ The Pythia’s position could only be occupied by women from families of Delphi. The importance of the presence of Pythion (Apollo) and the Pythia in Delphi is confirmed by the quadrennial Pythian Games beginning in 586 BCE. The name of the first Pythia, Pheomonoe, meaning literally “prophetic mind,” illustrates well her oracular function.³⁵

Disagreement subsists concerning the Pythia’s role in providing responses to the Oracle’s consultants.³⁶ Herodotus, for example, never explains how it worked and thus seems to take for granted that his readers have knowledge of it. Recent proposals about what actually happened during the “mantic session” and the Pythia’s role thereof are mainly due to a lack of information, even conflicting material, ranging from ancient sources (of various literary forms and periods) to recent geological research in and around Delphi.³⁷ Fontenrose challenges “several cher-

29 Quotation taken from *Price*, 1985, 143.

30 ‘Pythia’ appears in the Greek texts as Πυθία (Xen. mem. 1.3.1) and Πυθίη (Ionic, such as Hdt. 1.13.2 and Callim. fr. 194.26 (cf. *Montanari* 2015)). A search of both forms in the corpus of the *Thesaurus Linguae Graecae* yields 786 occurrences of which 64 are found in Hdt.

31 *Fontenrose* 1978, 1.

32 Cf. *Fontenrose* 1978, 4.

33 Cf. *Bowden* 2005, 25.

34 Plutarch (mor. 414B) informs that during its busiest times in the past the Delphi Oracle required up to three Pythias, two ordinary ones and one understudy if needed. See *Scott* 2014, 12. These “ordinary women” remained chaste throughout their terms of service (*Sourvinou-Inwood* 2012, 429). *Bowden* 2005, 16, and *Graf* 2010, 389, however, maintain that evidence is not sufficient to know exact details of her service.

35 *Scott* 2014, 310 n. 5. Other occurrences of Φημωνόη are found, for example, in Hes. Frg. 226 and Strab. 9.3.5).

36 *Scott* 2014, 20; *Flower* 2018, 34.

37 For the procedures of the consultation, see *Amandry* 1950; *Roux* 1976, as well as *Fontenrose* 1978, who in Chapter 7 “The Mantic Session” (196–232) examines in detail ancient material, and he attempts to debunk several proposals. He takes into consideration research in English and French.

ished beliefs about the Delphic Oracle,” describing this as “a kind of Delphic piety.”³⁸ He refers in particular to those authors who maintain that the Pythia could not have spoken intelligibly, uttering instead cries – or gibberish – while in a mantic frenzy or trance, perhaps due to intoxicating vapors escaping from a chasm near the Pythia’s tripod. According to this interpretation, it was the prophets’ role to decipher the Pythia’s incoherent speech for her consultants. Yet, strains of rationalism³⁹, even male chauvinism⁴⁰, appear to lie behind the position that considers women of those times incapable of providing articulate responses in dactylic-hexameter verse as found in ancient sources. Some of these display significant mastery of the Greek language, such as in the *Histories*.⁴¹ According to the detractors of the Pythia’s ability, the sources for this literary prowess must have been either occult powers or the rational work of her prophets.⁴² Fontenrose’s detailed work suggests that this can be explained otherwise concluding that “A close study of all reliable evidence for Delphic mantic procedures reveals no chasm or vapors, no frenzy of the Pythia, no incoherent cries interpreted by priests. The Pythia spoke clearly, coherently, and directly to the consultant in response to his question.”⁴³ Similar to Fontenrose, other scholars assert the *possibility* of the Pythia’s coherent communication, albeit to various degrees and with different approaches.⁴⁴ Nevertheless, geological research on Delphi has brought back the question of the influence of hydrocarbon gases escaping from a fissure in the Delphi sanctuary.⁴⁵ The gases’ mild narcotic effects might have induced the Pythia into a trance-like state, thus affecting the intelligibility of her oracular speech.⁴⁶ Despite the fascination of this proposal, even this recent geological research cannot resolve definitively this

See also Scott 2014, 10–12, for a summary of the difficulties in ascertaining reliable knowledge about the Delphic consultation.

38 Fontenrose 1978, xiv.

39 Cf. Price 1985, 132–133.141–142.

40 Cf. Maurizio 1985, 71; Flower 2018, 36–37.

41 Cf. Fontenrose 1978, 6.

42 Cf. Fontenrose 1978, 6 (see n. 8 and 9 for references to these positions).

43 Fontenrose 1978, 10.

44 E.g. Fontenrose 1978; Price 1985, 133.141–142; Dewald 2013, 172. Most forcefully from an anthropological approach, Maurizio 1995 and Flower 2018. Bowden 2005, 33–34, accepts the Pythia’s responses in prose, but not in hexameter. Scott 2014, 28, does not exclude the possibility *a priori*, but has some sympathy for the notion that the Pythia’s priests composed responses in verse by drawing from the great amount of information circulating in Delphi, a regular meeting place for people from various regions.

45 The presence of a chasm in the cave was already signaled in the first century BCE by Diodorus Siculus (Diod. 16.26.2–4). Fontenrose 1978, 198–201, considers this to be one of the myths surrounding the location of the Delphic Oracle.

46 Cf. De Boer/Hale 2000; de Boer/Hale/Chanton 2001; de Boer/Spiller 2002; and Piccardi et al. 2008. Piccardi’s study is appropriated by Ustinova 2009, 121–153. For a helpful discussion on how historians have used geological studies on Delphi, see Scott 2014, 20–24 (he does not, however, include Piccardi). For a general geological survey of Delphi, see Péchoux 1992.

debate.⁴⁷ Whatever the case may be, Greeks generally believed that the Pythia was genuinely inspired by Apollo.⁴⁸

Conversely, a subject generally not debated is that the Pythia was not alone at the sanctuary and received assistance from the temple staff during the nine days of the year when full consultation of the Oracle was possible.⁴⁹ All the religious personnel were Delphians. What they actually did is a bit unclear. The holy ones (*hosioi*), the prophets (*prophetai*), and the priests (*hiereis*, possibly the same as the prophets) probably aided the Pythia and her consultants, for example, during the elaborate process of preparation of the inquirer⁵⁰, the formulation of questions, the consultation before the Pythia, and perhaps even in the subsequent interpretation of the oracle.⁵¹

Fontenrose also challenged the commonly accepted position that ambiguity was one of the Oracle's unquestioned characteristics, calling this "wholly modern."⁵² While some scholars uphold his argument, recent publications continue to assume this as an *intrinsic* quality of the Oracle.⁵³ Plutarch records the famous words of Heraclitus, which seem to allude to the elusive nature of the Delphic Oracle: "The oracle neither conceals, nor reveals, but indicates."⁵⁴ Thus, from a diachronic perspective, Michael Scott proposes that the societal function of the Pythia should be underscored: "All this means that we need to understand the Pythia at Delphi not as providing a 'fortune-telling service,' but rather as a 'sense making mechanism' for the individuals, cities and communities of ancient Greece."⁵⁵

The Oracle's greatest activity and prestige ran approximately from 580 to 320 BCE, that is, from the Amphictionic takeover following the First Sacred War to around the death of Alexander the Great.⁵⁶ Its subsequent decline can be considered parallel to the deterioration of the Greek city-states during the Hellenistic and Roman periods. The Oracle's final decline took place due to the Roman Empire's pressure on pagan culture and cult, given that the Christian worldview was progressively assumed as the official state position. Despite attempts by Emperor Julian "the Apostate" (during 361–363 CE) to revive pagan culture, the Delphic Oracle never regained a new lease of life. Julian had sent a letter to Delphi asking for news, and he received a message that the Oracle was no longer in service. Sub-

47 Cf. Scott 2014, 24. Graf 2010, 389.

48 Cf. Mikalson 2003, 57–58.

49 On this point, Price 1985, 129–131, provides a helpful summary of "uncontroversial facts" about Delphi. Price 1985, 134, also mentions (but without references) that "extra consultations were possible at other times." Bowden 2005, 17, is more cautious about this for lack of evidence.

50 On the preliminary rites, see Parke/Wormell 1956, 30–33, and Scott 2014, 13–18.

51 Cf. Maurizio 1985, 83.86.

52 Fontenrose 1978, 236.

53 Bowden 2005, 49–51, takes a nuanced approach recognizing the ambiguity in the stories about the Oracle, but not that this was an intrinsic feature, for which Scott 2014, 28–30, argues.

54 Plut. mor. 404D.

55 Scott 2014, 30.

56 Cf. Fontenrose 1978, 5.

sequently, the closure of the Oracle (as well as any form of divination) took place by decree of the Roman emperor Theodosius I (around 391 CE).⁵⁷

With this background information, we now turn to Herodotus's *Histories*, the oldest historiographical source for the description of the Delphic Oracle. As stated, this section focuses on the place of the Pythia in the narrative strategies of Herodotus, not per se in the historicity of the Pythia and her activities.⁵⁸

2.2 The Pythia's narrative portrayal and importance in the *Histories*

By the time Herodotus had composed his enormous project in the second half of the fifth century BCE, the Delphic Oracle had already achieved international fame. He describes events relating to the Oracle during the peak of its activity and influence (ca. 716–479 BCE). Herodotus seems to take for granted his readers' knowledge of the Delphic Oracle. Consequently, he does not make it an object of specific analysis; hence, mentions of the Oracle and of the Pythia occur within descriptions of other topics. This generally reflects Herodotus's religious beliefs as manifested in the *Histories*; "Herodotus' polytheism was a rooted assumption."⁵⁹

Nonetheless, the frequent mentions of the Pythia (64 times) and their consistent distribution throughout the nine books (all but Book 2) draw attention to its narrative importance for Herodotus's work.⁶⁰ An anecdote illustrates this well. Guy Lachenaud tells that his doctoral supervisor reproached him for not being sufficiently persuaded that his subject was of importance and that indeed a good

⁵⁷ Cf. Fontenrose 1978, 5, and his references: Cod. Theodos. 16.10.9; Cod. Justin. 1.11.2.

⁵⁸ Mikalson 2003, 57–58, provides a helpful discussion of the advantages and disadvantages of Fontenrose's classification of oracles regarding their historicity. He concludes (58), "Significantly more important for religious history is the question whether the Greeks of the time *believed* that Delphi issued these oracles, and, quite simply, there is no evidence that they did not. None, in classical times, is rejected as a forgery. Whatever their origins, however they may have been revised or re-shaped, the Delphic oracles seem to have been accepted by the Greeks after Herodotus as Herodotus presented them. And if so, they become part of the corpus of Greek religious beliefs, whatever fact or fiction lies behind them." See also Mikalson 2003, 210–211 n. 172, for ancient sources that show acceptance of Delphi's oracles. On the problem of using the *Histories* as the main source for reconstructing activities of Delphic Oracle, see Bowden 2005, 4 and 66–73, in a helpful chapter "What did historians and philosophers say about the Delphic oracle?" (65–87).

⁵⁹ Harrison 2000, 179.

⁶⁰ According to Powell's concordance, the Pythia occurs sixty-four times and always with the article (Powell, 327; the asterisk indicates occurrences found in direct speech). Book 1: 13.2; 19.3; 47.2; 48.1; 55.1; 65.2, 4; 66.2; 67.2, 3; 85.2; 91.1, 6; 167.2, 4; 174.5, 6; Book 3: 57.3; 58.2; Book 4: 15.3; 150.3; 151.1; 155.2, 3; 156.2; 157.2; 159.2; 161.2; 163.2; 164.1, 3; Book 5: 43; 63.1; 66.1; 67.2; 79.1; 82.1, 2; 90.1 bis; 92 β2*; Book 6: 34.2; 36.1; 52.5 bis; 66.2, 3; 75.3; 77.2; 86 γ1*, 2*; 123.2; 135.3; 136.1; 139.2; Book 7: 140.1; 142.2; 148.3 bis; 169.2; 171.2; 220.3; Book 8: 51.2; Book 9: 33.2. These results are confirmed by Thesaurus Linguae Graecae® Digital Library. Ed. Maria C. Pantelia. University of California, Irvine. <http://stephanus.tlg.uci.edu> (accessed Jan. 21, 2019). Dewald 2013, 176, indicates only 45 occurrences of the Pythia, and she provides the additional statistics under

part of Herodotus's historical thought could be understood through the prism of Delphi!⁶¹ In fact, based on statistics alone, the Pythia could be considered the most important woman in the *Histories*, accounting for 64 times out of the 375 mentions of women (concrete and abstract meanings).⁶² Given the multiple references to the Pythia, our discussion must also be selective and concise here.

While the argument certainly holds that the Pythia is the most important woman in Herodotus's description of the ancient world, it is also good to remember that she was Apollo's mouthpiece and represents a sacred institution. In Herodotus's world, she is far from being a female crusader, independent of human structures. For this reason, Carolyn Dewald may be right in placing her in the category of 'passive women', similar to those women portrayed by Herodotus in family contexts.⁶³ In light of Herodotus's portrayal, in what sense can she be considered passive or active? Dewald, in her general discussion of women in the *Histories*, explains that the Pythia resembles women in family contexts who represents social limits. The Pythia distinguishes herself from other 'passive women' who exemplify "the mortal and finite nature of family security," because she is on the other side of the existential continuum epitomizing limits established by the gods.⁶⁴ This denotation of passiveness, of course, is paradoxical, because the Pythia is presented as active in historical narratives, and not, for example, in fictional illustrations or parables.

So, it seems profitable to consider, in the discussion below, the paradoxical nature of the Pythia's role in the *Histories*. On the one hand, she can be considered passive as the intermediary for Apollo's voice within an institutional framework. On the other hand, she may be considered an active individual, perhaps to some extent independent in her function⁶⁵, given that "on forty-five occasions she advises kings, tyrants, aristocrats, and commoners, both Greek and barbarian."⁶⁶ This paradoxical nature may be explained through the perceived spiritual unity of Apollo and the Pythia. Thus, considering her role only as a passive character could give false impressions about her part in maintaining divine order in the *Histories* as a perception of the Delphic Oracle in ancient history.

A study of the speaking subject of the oracles in the *Histories* certainly reveals the presence of the Pythia and this paradoxical aspect. She is most often considered the giver of oracles. Her name, however, is interchangeable with other expressions

the category of 'priestesses': female founders of cults: 2.54a, 2.54b, 2.171, 2.182, 4.33.3a, 4.33.3b, 4.35.1a, 4.35.1b.; other priestesses: 1.175, 2.55.3a, 2.55.3b, 2.55.3c, 5.72, 6.134, 7.111.; and women in mixed structures: 1.31.2, 4.8–10.

61 Cf. Lachenaud 1979, i.

62 Cf. Dewald 2013, 171. Dewald indicates (151 n. 1) that this publication is a lightly modified version of her earlier article in *Women's Studies* 8 1/2, 93–126, 1981.

63 Cf. Dewald 2013, 172.

64 Cf. Dewald 2013, 172.

65 Dewald 2013, 172 n. 28, signals a passage in the *Histories* (6.16.2) regarding "the general independence of women serving their religious functions." She suggests a parallel with the women in sacerdotal functions in the *Lysistrata* of Aristophanes (explored by Foley 1982).

66 Dewald 2013, 172.

such as “the oracle” in an institutional sense, and as “the god” as the divine source (i. e. Apollo).⁶⁷ Thus, her attachment to Apollo’s service implies an active and passive facet. Dewald recalls the latter part of this complex identity: “The Pythia, we should note, is an institution rather than an individual person; she is not named [specifically] unless something odd diverts her from priestly function (6.66).”⁶⁸ But this may be overstated, given that other women are unnamed in the *Histories* and have considerable roles in the narrative.⁶⁹ Herodotus, for example, never sees the need to defend her position in Delphi. She was valuable for her unique and established role, which apparently was not available to others in that specific function.

Her active side, or where she is most felt in the *Histories*, can be further illustrated. Jon Mikalson considers the non-technical expressions that reveal how the oracles were perceived by their consultants.⁷⁰ One finds, for example, that the Pythia *tells* or *says* the oracle, but stronger words are also employed such as ‘to command’ (κελεύειν) or ‘to forbid’ (ἀπαγορεύειν, and οὐκ ἔαν) certain actions. “The implication in those cases is that the oracle is giving more than warning and advice. Those are commands.”⁷¹ Here the paradox of passive and active may be considered a reflection of the unity of Apollo and the Pythia, the divine and human sides of one voice.

Again, the passive side of the Pythia can be explored further from various angles, for example, from the perspective of the consultants, such as the *theopropoi* (agents or ambassadors of an oracular mission). They seek counsel from ‘the oracle’ or from Apollo, but never from the Pythia. In this case, she appears to be viewed through her subordinate role as a prophetic intermediary. In short, “She spoke the words, but the words were Apollo’s.”⁷² Another example of this is found in the context of the first two oracles to the Athenians. Herodotus records that during the first consultation the Pythia commands the Athenian delegation “to leave my sanctuary;” and in the second she says “I will tell you this.” For Mikalson, the subject of “my” and “I” is simply Apollo.⁷³

67 The Pythia (e. g., 7.148–151; 1.167.4 and 174; 3.57.3; 4.150–151); the Oracle (1.13 and 46–47; 5.80.1; 6.19.1–2); and the god (1.69.2; 4.155.3–4 and 157.2, and 5.80.1). See Mikalson 2003, 55–56.210 n. 157.

68 Dewald 2013, 177. Herodotus provides two names of the Pythia: Periallus who gets bribed by Cobon to say what Cleomenes wanted (Hdt. 6.66.2) and Aristonice was the Pythia whom the Athenians encountered and begged to provide a more favorable oracle at the time of the battle of Salamis in 480 BCE (Hdt. 7.140.4).

69 See, for example, Larson 2006 who argues that the suppression of names is a rhetorical technique used by Herodotus throughout his work, and in particular in the opening and closing *logoi*, for unnamed wives of Candaules and Masistes. Rather than being a disrespectful omission of their names, he protects their names by exculpating them on their husbands’ downfall, which simultaneously implies greater responsibility in their own downfall.

70 In the *Histories*, the most common technical terms for “to prophesy” are ἀναρπεῖν, χρᾶν, and θεσπιζειν, cf. Mikalson 2003, 55.

71 Mikalson 2003, 55.

72 Mikalson 2003, 55.

73 Cf. Mikalson 2003, 55.

That said, it does not appear justified to underestimate the *authority* and *presence* that the Pythia projected in Delphi, and elsewhere so extensively in space and time, and thus relegate her to the status of a mere ‘mouthpiece’. There, at the center of the Delphic Temple, was a woman to whom existential questions were brought from cities and individuals. Without the Pythia, there was no voice for Apollo. Thus, in Herodotus’s thought, it represents a clear example of human and divine collaboration working toward balance in natural and human affairs, which was an enjoyable theme for Herodotus. In fact, Herodotus depicts the collaboration between Apollo and the Pythia in mantic sessions: “For Herodotus the procedure was simple and straightforward. One asked one’s question, and one got one’s answer, from Apollo.”⁷⁴ In the *Histories*, Herodotus does not evoke “the machinations of the priests, the workshop of the poets, and the chasms, caves, vapors, and psychedelic mushrooms” that are mentioned in later sources and often evoked by modern scholars.⁷⁵ Yet this procedure was not flawless, as Herodotus shows: the Pythia was bribed twice (5.63, 6.66), and once forced by Athenian *theopropoi* to give a more favorable oracle (7.141).⁷⁶ Was this her passive side? And perhaps the fault of the temple’s personnel?

Furthermore, the matters for which she is consulted emphasize her participation in and influence on Greek and non-Greek societies. Clearly, her range of influence and benefit is not restricted to one city-state. This is in itself extraordinary; she was in the service of an enormous clientele. The list below shows consultations taken only from Book 1.⁷⁷ This will then be completed by a summary of other highly significant consultations in the remaining books (except Book 2 which contains no mention of Pythia). The Delphic Oracle via the Pythia is consulted by:

- the Lydians concerning political strife between Gyges’s supporters and the Heraclidae, the royal line of the assassinated king Candaules (1.13);
- the Lydian king Alyattes regarding his continued illness (1.19);
- Lydian king Croesus whether he should attack the Persians led by Cyrus (1.46–54); and whether his reign would be a long one (1.55);
- Lycurgus the Spartan as regards the political situation of his homeland (1.65);
- the Spartans about their plan of conquest of Arcadia (1.66);
- the Spartans concerning which god they should honor in view of victory over Tegea (1.67);
- Croesus who relates the reasons for his army’s defeat at the hands of Cyrus and the apparent betrayal by Apollo (1.90);
- the Caereans (Agylla) about how to expiate the crime of the murder of their Phocaeen prisoners (1.167);

74 Mikalson 2003, 56.

75 Cf. Mikalson 2003, 56.

76 Cf. Dewald 2013, 172 n. 29. Herodotus provides other parallels of other priestesses who are politically involved (Hdt. 5.72 and 6.134).

77 Bowden 2005, 168–169, provides a helpful concordance of Athenian consultations of the Delphic Oracle from various sources and periods.

- the Cnidians in regard to the unusual injuries inflicted on the workmen of their isthmus project (1.174).

The summary above highlights the intersection of religion and politics on an international level via consultations of Delphi's priestess by various cities and formidable individuals.⁷⁸ This is significant on the narrative level, because all of these consultations are related in Book 1 which orients the readers' comprehension and experience of the rest of Herodotus's long work. Religion, politics, and customs are intertwined from beginning to end, thus contributing to a holistic and consistent worldview developed in the *Histories*.

The list above can be expanded by other significant consultations taken from Books 3–9, when the Greco-Persian conflicts are at their most intense point. Mikalson summarizes the importance of the Delphic Oracle in this regard as it plays "the single greatest 'religious' role in Herodotus' account of the Persian Wars."⁷⁹ This is substantiated by an exceptional fact: Herodotus depicts the Pythia's involvement (to various degrees) in "all the major battles and events of the Persian invasion, except for the battle of Marathon."⁸⁰ Mikalson provides a constructive assessment about the Pythia's involvement in the course of events vis-à-vis various powers and situations during the Persian Wars. He sets this out in terms of positive, neutral, and negative as related to the Greek cause.⁸¹

The Pythia's oracles appear to offer positive support in assisting Athens to become a regional power (5.63.1–3 and 5.78); and strategically, advising the evacuation of Athens (7.140.5–6), the emphasis on their navy's strength (7.143–144), and Salamis as a key location for victory (7.142). Also, her encouragement of prayers for the winds leading to the destruction of Persian ships (7.178, 189, 191–192, and 8.13), indication of Plataea as a favorable site for battle (8.114.1–2), as well as encouragement of Tisamenus the Spartan diviner (9.33, 35), all led to the death blow of Mardonius and the Persians' defeat in Plataea (9.62–65).

On a somewhat neutral note, the Pythia gave accurate predictions about the fall of Miletus (6.19), Athens's conquest of Aegina (5.79–81, 89), the destruction of Athens and other Greek cities (7.140), and the death of Leonidas king of Sparta (7.220). Negatively, against Panhellenic interests, the Pythia seems to discourage the Argives (7.148–152) and Cretans (7.169–171) from joining Greek resistance. Also, a manipulated oracle cost the Greeks the support of the Spartan king Demaratus (6.75.17–18 and 6.84.15–17). Later, her prediction of the destruction of Athens and enjoinder to "flee to the ends of the earth" (7.140.5) almost led to complete

78 Other examples of aristocratic families, city-states, and peoples who consulted the Delphic Oracle but are not mentioned in the list above: Alkmeonids, Apollonians, Argives, Athenians, Cretans, Delphians, Dolonci, Epidaurians, Metapontines, Pelasgians, Phocaeans, Siphnians, Thebans, Thereans. For references, see *Strassler* 2009, 873–874.

79 *Mikalson* 2003, 117.

80 *Mikalson* 2003, 120.

81 Cf. *Mikalson* 2003, 117–121.

Athenian despair and abandonment (7.139–144). Finally, despite some modern scholars' claim that the Delphic Oracle was compromised with the Persians, the Oracle actually achieved one of its highest points among the Greeks following Persian retreat in 479 BCE.⁸²

As for the Persians, Herodotus never reveals that they received direct support from the Delphic Oracle. The Persian general Mardonius attempted to obtain help from Apollo Ismenios, Ptoös, and Abaios (8.133), but Herodotus does not disclose the content of the oracular responses.⁸³ It would be wrong, however, to conclude that Apollo (or any other god) was by default on the side of the Greeks. Herodotus shows through various anecdotes and sayings that the Greek gods are not by obligation pro-Greek! It can be argued that the gods were more favorable to the Greek coalition because of the sacrileges committed by the Persians, first during Darius's expedition and then under Xerxes. In short, the gods were ultimately interested in defending their reputation via retribution on the Persian empire as well as maintaining a balance of power among human structures.

In summary, Herodotus does not depict Pythia as supporting only one Greek city. Rather, her interventions take place on an international level at the crossroads of politics and ethics. Moreover, the Delphic priestess is not limited to military conflict within established boundaries, she even gives counsel about the foundation of colonies (4.150–152)! Yet her primary societal role can be summed up this way: "She seeks to resolve conflict and correct misbehavior"⁸⁴ In Book 3.38, we read that "Custom is king of all." The Pythia is often depicted as an enforcer of customs in various regions which have a quasi-sacred status in the *Histories*. In this respect, Dewald is right in saying that the Pythia is "a stunning and extreme example of the nomothetic woman setting out the cultural limits and controls within which Greek society will thrive, beyond which it will perish."⁸⁵ An example of this function in society is evident in the story about Candaules, and especially his wife who greatly benefits from the Pythia's intervention.

2.3 Other marvelous women involved in or influenced by the Pythia

The link between women and prophecy can also be explored through the experiences of other women in the *Histories*. Despite the fact that women are never presented as consultants of the Delphic Oracle, Carmen Sánchez-Mañas's article "Women in Herodotus' Oracles: A Look beyond the Pythia" explores female presence (individuals and groups) within the framework of men who consult or receive

82 Cf. Mikalson 2003, 121.224 n. 35.

83 Cf. Mikalson 2003, 122.

84 Dewald 2013, 172.

85 Dewald 2013, 172.

oracles.⁸⁶ Sánchez-Mañas examines ten of the one hundred and one passages in which oracular sites are consulted and responses given. While it may be an exaggeration that “women other than the Pythia enjoy great visibility in the oracular passages of the *Histories*,”⁸⁷ it is also fair to interpret this in light of the highly patriarchal environment in which the oracular activities took place as well as the literary milieu in which the *Histories* was produced. Her study reveals significant diversity among individual women and groups as well as the domestic and public situations in which they appear. Narratively, Herodotus shows how these women—who are mostly presented in family situations and have non-leadership roles—nonetheless contribute to some significant moments in history.⁸⁸

To illustrate this point, we will consider an example of a woman who directly benefited from the Pythia’s counsel: the astute and courageous wife of Candaules, the last Heraclid king of Lydia (Hdt. 1.7–14). Narratively, this well-known *logos* in Herodotean studies is crucial because it appears at the beginning of Book 1. It belongs to the ‘plupast’ material that sets the stage for the explanation of *the* initial cause of the Greco-Barbarian conflicts, namely, Croesus king of Lydia, the main character of Book 1.26–92.⁸⁹ A few reasons encouraged Herodotus to tell this story. First, it explains how the Heraclidae lost their dynasty in 716 BCE to the Mermnadae, the royal line whence Croesus came. Second, it is also a ‘marvelous’ story with intrigue, sex appeal, and murder. This certainly got his listeners/readers’ attention! For those unfamiliar with the story, it all begins with king Candaules’s obsession with his wife’s beauty which drove him to share it, albeit only visibly, with Gyges, his favorite officer. Despite Gyges’s resistance, the king prevailed and hatched a plot. Gyges then looked upon the queen’s naked figure, and he got caught by the queen. Yet, then and there, she says nothing to either one, until the next day.

Being an extremely perceptive woman, she knows well that Candaules and Gyges’s behavior was a major infringement of custom (*nomos*); thus, someone must

86 Cf. Sánchez-Mañas 2018, 156.

87 Sánchez-Mañas 2018, 180.

88 Cf. Sánchez-Mañas 2018, 180. For example, the shift in royal power from the Heraclidae to the Mermnadae through the intervention of Candaules’s wife (see discussion below), who is subsequently supported by an oracle from Delphi; the story of Labda (Hdt. 5.2), mother of a son who will become king of Corinth in accordance with the Pythia’s oracle (Hdt. 5.92B); Argeia, the mother of twins who makes sure that both of her sons hold kingship in Sparta; they are protected by the Pythia’s counsel to the Spartans (Hdt. 6.52); Timo, an under-priestess of the chthonic goddesses Demeter and Persephone (Hdt. 6.135) thwarts Miltiades’s plans to desecrate the temple with the aim to weaken the Parians and conquer Paros. The Pythia defends her from charges of conspiracy.

89 Herodotus claims to know the one (Croesus) who first did unjust deeds toward the Greeks (1.5.11). The narrative proper then begins with the king who was chiefly responsible for setting in motion hostilities between Greeks and Barbarians. The material preceding this may be considered plupast material, that is, background information that helps readers to understand more fully the focus or core narrative. On the meaning and uses of ‘plupast’ in historiographical research, see *Grethlein/Krebs* 2012, 1–16.

die, either the king who planned it or Gyges who saw her nakedness.⁹⁰ Neither rebuking nor consulting her husband, the queen presents an ultimatum to Gyges: either his own death or the assassination of the king with her help. Unsurprisingly, Gyges chooses the latter, and the Heraclid dynasty is shattered in 716 BCE. This harsh verdict of a death sentence is supported by a common theme in the *Histories*, that is, the link between the sacred and customs, whose violation is often followed by divine retribution (*tisis*). In Book 3, for example, Herodotus provides a more dramatic example of a violation of customs when Persian king Cambyses's murderous acts and temple desecration in Egypt, which are followed by divine retribution on Cambyses (3.27–38). With respect to this, Herodotus cites Pindar's axiom: "Custom is king of all" (3.38.20).⁹¹

In the case of Candaules, although Herodotus does not explicitly evoke divine judgment, it may be understood as such due to his aside that Candaules was doomed (1.8.7–8): "Not much time had gone by (for it was necessary that evil should come to Candaules), when he spoke thus to Gyges." Candaules's behavior had crossed the line of decency and self-control, which was a flagrant incitement to divine wrath. The principle evoked by Gyges before the act "May everyone look after his own things" (1.8.4) was violated and had to be punished.⁹² This interplay between *nomos* and *tisis* recurs in the *Histories*, as Lisa Hau writes:

"The ultimate internal authority in the *Histories* is oracles, particularly the Delphic Oracle. When oracles predict punishment for an action (1.13) or command characters to atone for their actions, the reader has to understand that those actions were wrong – particularly as the atonement usually makes the unwanted consequences go away, thus proving them to have been brought on by the divine (e. g. 1.19 and 22)."⁹³

At this point, Herodotus mentions the fierce reaction to the murder of Candaules, and a dispute inevitably arises about legitimate rule. A truce, however, is quickly found based on the agreement that the Oracle in Delphi (ἐκ τοῦ ἐν Δελφοῖσι χρηστηρίου, 1.13.2) must confirm or reject Gyges's claim (1.13.1). The Oracle ordained that Gyges should occupy the throne (ἀνεῖλέ τε δὴ τὸ χρηστήριον καὶ ἐβασίλευσε οὕτω Γύγης, 1.13.7).⁹⁴ Thus, the divine confirmation of royal power apparently appeased both groups, because the Pythia had spoken. Once this matter is settled, the narrative returns to a focus on male characters. The Lydian queen

90 The gravity of this action is foreshadowed in Gyges's thoughts about the outcome of such action: "Speaking thus, Gyges resisted: for he was afraid that some evil would come of it for him" (1.9.1, trans. *Herodotus* 1921–1924 [Godley]).

91 The proverb νόμος ὁ πάντων βασιλεὺς θνατῶν τε καὶ ἀθανάτων comes from an unknown poem of Pindar, which is quoted in Plato's *Gorgias* (Plat. *Gorg.* 484b).

92 Cf. *Asheri/Lloyd/Corcella* 2007, 82.

93 *Hau* 2016, 181.

94 The expression ἐκ τοῦ ἐν Δελφοῖσι χρηστηρίου (1.13.2) means the seat of the oracle in Delphi. (LSJ, 2006, s. v. χρηστήριον). Herodotus gives a summary statement (1.13.1–2) about how the Oracle confirmed Gyges's legitimate rule, and it is elucidated in the following lines (3–7).

had done her part, and, thanks to the Pythia's support, it was not unfruitful as we learn in the following lines.

Besides the newly established royal line, Herodotus reveals more information about the relationship between the Lydians and the Delphic Oracle. Gyges became a generous supporter of the oracle in Delphi by sending an enormous number of votive offerings (ἀναθήματα), some of which were still visible in Herodotus's day in the Corinthian treasury (1.14). This Gyges was also the first barbarian (only after the Phrygian king Midas) who gave offerings to Delphi. This religious connection between the Lydian empire and Delphi was noteworthy for Herodotus (confirmed by many other examples), because he quickly covers Gyges's military exploits and other deeds in a few sentences (1.15.1). In short, Gyges respected Apollo in Delphi, which was a good thing from Herodotus's perspective.

Herodotus notes that Gyges received additional information from the Pythia. The oracle contained a string attached, which stated that vengeance for the Heraclidae would be taken, not on Gyges, but on his posterity in the fifth generation (1.13.8–9). The Lydians and their kings disregarded this part of the oracle until it was actually fulfilled in Croesus's generation. Indeed, apparently Croesus was ignorant of all this until the Pythia revealed it to him when Croesus despairingly lamented his defeat at the hands of Cyrus and wrongly accused Apollo for his lack of support (1.91). In the end, Gyges got a good deal; not so for Croesus. The dynasty of Gyges underlines the Herodotean theme of the rising and falling of men, kings, and cities. But none of this would have happened if two women had not intervened, the Pythia and the anonymous Lydian queen who knew the power of customs and of the Oracle!

We will now consider other marvelous women of prophecy, but in a different prophetic tradition as presented in Luke-Acts. It will be noted how these two traditions eventually meet in the pages of Luke's work, and later in Christian history.

3. Marvelous women of prophecy in Luke-Acts

3.1 Initial signals to the prophetic tradition in Luke-Acts

To appreciate the narrative importance of marvelous women and their link with prophecy in Luke-Acts, it will be helpful to survey the prophetic orientation at the beginning of the two-volume work. This will then help us enter the dynamics of a later encounter with the two prophetic traditions.

While the Greek prophetic/oracular tradition continued from Herodotus's times until Luke's in the first century, another prophetic tradition developed among the Jewish people in the eastern Mediterranean. Above, we looked briefly at specific occurrences of prophetesses of that tradition in the Hebrew Bible and in the New Testament. It is noteworthy that Luke-Acts does not present anything simi-

lar to the Delphic Oracle and the Pythia's function there. Apart from Zechariah's encounter with the angel Gabriel, the temple of Jerusalem is mentioned several times in Luke-Acts, but not portrayed as an oracular center. Luke seems to place an emphasis on the decentralized nature of prophetic activity, performed by men and women and in various places.

Luke's literary project connects to the Jewish tradition very early in the narrative and continues throughout it (closing with a quotation of Isaiah 6.9–10 in Acts 28.25–27). The preface of Luke's Gospel is concise, dense, and subtle (Luke 1.1–4).⁹⁵ It introduces the subjects that interest him, his sources, methodology, and pragmatic aims. No element therein alerts the reader *explicitly* that this is a Christian (messianic) writing. Two elements allude to the prophetic tradition to which Luke is connecting his narrative. His focus (similar to Herodotus's) is on deeds (or events).⁹⁶ The expression “things accomplished among us” (Luke 1.1) could mean simply “things done.” Yet when one reads the preface from the perspective of the entire double work, Luke may also be making a claim for continuity with previous prophetic activity concerning the plan of God. In other words, the expression may be understood as a divine passive, that is, “accomplished by God,” which elicits the notion of fulfillment and thus builds on a greater theological narrative.⁹⁷ Regardless, the rest of the story amply illustrates this point via anecdotes and speeches.⁹⁸

Second, Luke mentions important sources for his literary project, namely, “those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and servants of the word.” For the latter part of the phrase, one may wonder: servants about what word or whose word? Luke introduces, via an ellipse, some expressions that occur throughout his two works: “the word of God” and “the word of the Lord.” The use of the genitive here can communicate both the origin and the object of the communication, that is, a message from God/the Lord and/or about God/the Lord. These expressions evoke the notion of teaching, a transmission of knowledge.⁹⁹ Thus, the “servants of the word” are presented throughout Luke-Acts as those who communicate under divine direction, either divinely inspired words or teaching about God's interventions.

95 Much has been written about Luke's preface. On its conciseness and density, *Moles* 2011 provides an outstanding elucidation from a classical historiographical perspective.

96 “Things” (English Standard Version for πραγμάτων in v. 1) is weak. Deeds or events are stronger. In Herodotus's preface, we find first a general phrase τὰ γενόμενα ἐξ ἀνθρώπων (“that which has been done/accomplished by men”), then more specifically ἔργα μεγάλα τε καὶ θωμαστά (“great and marvelous deeds” Hdt. 1.praef.1–3).

97 Overall, the New Revised Standard Version brings out this aspect better: “an orderly account of the *events* that have been *fulfilled* among us;” rather than “a narrative of the *things* that have been *accomplished* among us” (ESV). My italics.

98 Luke relates that Jesus makes this specific claim of continuity and fulfillment in Luke 24.26, 44, which is expounded in various discourses in Acts.

99 For example, “the word of God” (Luke 5.1; 8.11, 21; 11.28; Acts 4.31; 6.2,7; 8.14; 11.1; 12.24; 13.5, 7, 46; 17.13; 18.11); “the word of the Lord” (Acts 8.25; 13.44, 48, 49; 15.35, 36; 16.32; 19.10; 20.35).

In this sense, following the preface with its subtlety, Luke's readers encounter a narrative of a prophetic movement. It is both initiated and guided by the God of Israel. The notion of continuity is key for Luke; the links with Israel's past figures and Scriptures are so numerous that even readers/listeners from a non-Jewish background could have hardly missed this point. John the Baptist and Jesus, the subjects of the first two chapters of the first volume, are placed in relation to figures of Israel's past, John with the prophet Elijah (1.17; then 9.19), and Jesus with King David (1.32). But Jesus is also *proleptically* called "the son of God," as well as "savior" and "Messiah the Lord" (Luke 1.32, 35; 2.11). In addition, even the angel Gabriel who announces these revelations is known from previous Jewish literature (Dan 8.16; 9.21).

By means of Luke's narrative representation of this prophetic movement, readers then discover how Jesus *accomplished* those promises, and how he was received and rejected among the Jewish people and the nations. Luke offers a glimpse of how Jesus himself aligns his movement with the Jewish prophetic tradition by citing Isaiah 61.1–2 in the synagogue of Nazareth (Luke 4.18–19). The prophetic formula is clear "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me," which is followed by his mandate (v. 18–19) and subsequent confirmation: "Today this word is fulfilled in your hearing" (v. 21).

Consequently, in a broad sense, almost all of the women mentioned in Luke-Acts are involved in this prophetic movement of Jesus. Luke portrays them as supporting its development. The discussion below takes a narrower view of those women who actually contributed prophetically to the movement. Some of the examples are explicitly developed by Luke, while others are mentioned but not illustrated in greater detail. In fact, like the *Histories*, the focus is mainly, but far from exclusively, on the contribution of men to Jesus's prophetic movement.¹⁰⁰ Finally, it will be considered, in the section on Acts, how Luke depicts the meeting of two prophetic traditions, Greek and Jewish, and what he intends his readers to appropriate theologically and practically from those examples.

3.2 The Gospel of Luke

Immediately after the preface, readers encounter a series of episodes of prophetic activity. Given that the first two chapters are a part of Luke's *Sondergut*, those parts that are unique to his narrative, it is clear that he wished to include other anecdotes that gave weight to his theological narrative and thus orient readers in their interpretation and experience of it. From Chapter 3 onward, the narrative

100 This narrative focal point is certainly grounded in the masculine leadership of the movement via Jesus's choice of twelve disciples (confirmed in Acts), and the leading role in the church of Jerusalem, Antioch, etc. Female participation in leadership is rare.

continues with the first stories of John the Baptist and Jesus as adults. Most of the material therein is drawn from Mark's Gospel, which is supplemented by material from other sources.

As regards the first two chapters, Luke depicts three women in relation to the Jewish prophetic tradition: Elizabeth, Mary, and Anna. What is particularly significant about their contribution, along with Zechariah and Simeon's prophecies, is that these women offer *fresh* prophecies, complementary to ancient ones recorded in Israel's Scriptures. It is easy to see then that for Luke these women are nothing less than marvelous in his eyes. Despite their brief appearances here, he immortalizes them by means of his narrative. Thanks to this, their lasting influence is incalculable. We will explore briefly Luke's presentation of their contribution to the prophetic movement. They have some characteristics in common: particular circumstances, the presence of the Holy Spirit, piety, and spiritual perception.

Elizabeth's story is told with her husband Zechariah as it relates to the initial stages of the prophetic movement. Thus, they appear only in the first chapter of the first volume. Luke provides several elements that help build a portrait of this couple. We will focus on Elizabeth, who is portrayed as being a descendant of Aaron, Israel's first priest (lit. "of the daughters of Aaron" 1.5). She and her husband (also from the priestly class) are righteous before God on account of their devotion to the teachings of the Lord (i. e., the God of Israel, v. 6). Spiritually, then, she and her husband were in excellent standing before God. Nevertheless, she was not able to have children, and this was a cause for shame (1.25, 36). Being advanced in age, along with Zechariah, she had probably given up hope to have children (see Zechariah's reaction in 1.18). God had heard their prayers (specifically, "his prayer" 1.13), and he had a plan for them, namely, to give birth to and raise the prophet of the Most High (1.76).¹⁰¹ The activity of the Holy Spirit is evident throughout the first chapter, for example, in Zechariah's prophetic praise (1.67–79). But we will concentrate on Elizabeth's own prophetic utterance when Mary came to visit her in a town in the hill country of Judah (1.39). Luke reports a double confirmation of the presence of Mary and her special child. Elizabeth's baby (John) leaps in her womb, and she exclaims under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit (v. 41), "Wherefore has this matter come to me that the mother of my Lord should come to me?" (v. 43). This anecdote is remarkable in that Luke reports that Elizabeth (with her baby) becomes the first witness (besides Mary) of the physical presence of the Messiah.¹⁰² One can only imagine the source of encouragement that this represented for Mary, who, shortly thereafter, would have to face peculiar circumstances around the birth of Jesus.

Following this, Luke informs his readers that all was accomplished according to God's purposes for John as the precursor of the Messiah (1.57–66, 80; 3.1–20;

¹⁰¹ Luke reports Jesus's great esteem for John (Luke 7.24–28).

¹⁰² Gabriel had announced to Zechariah that his son would be filled with the Holy Spirit even from his mother's womb (1.15).

with confirmations by Jesus in 7.24–30; 20.3–8). In conclusion, despite the difficult circumstances before John's birth (and perhaps also at the time of his cruel death), Elizabeth is portrayed as a model of faith and perseverance, exemplified by her piety and sacrificial role in the prophetic movement of the Messiah.

Turning now to Mary's prophetic participation, we have already seen how she and Elizabeth met while they were both with child. Mary is described as being in a very different state than Elizabeth. Mary is a young woman (or virgin, *παρθένος* two occurrences in 1.26) who lives in Nazareth of Galilee. She is old enough to be promised in marriage, to Joseph who (importantly) was from the family of king David (1.27). Similar to the spiritual evaluation of Elizabeth, Luke signals a form of divine approval of her life through Gabriel's salutation: "Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you." (1.28).¹⁰³ With this mention of the divine presence as well as the Holy Spirit's (1.35), it can be assumed that her praise (1.46–55) is equally moved by the Spirit as that of Zechariah and Elizabeth. In this respect, her role as mother of the most important person in history (so far) is difficult to overstate. He will be "the son of the Most High" (v. 32), "the Son of God" (v. 35) and will receive "the throne of David" (v. 32). Luke reports briefly her initial reaction which reveals something of her character. First, her transparency with Gabriel about her obvious perplexity (lit. "How will this be since I do not know a man" v. 34), then her astounding readiness to be a part of this project as a "servant of the Lord" (*ἡ δούλη κυρίου* v. 38).

Her prophetic speech (1.46–55), like Zechariah's, evinces characteristics of Israel's psalms.¹⁰⁴ The focus is on giving thanks to "the Lord" (and "God my savior") for his intervention in her life and in light of previous moments in Israel's history. Thus, the prophetic aspect is manifest less in the announcement of future acts and more in the remembrance of the pattern of God's mercy toward those "who fear him" and who are vulnerable (like her v. 48; and in general "the lowly," "the hungry" 1.52–53) as well as his judgment on those who do not serve God with their means ("the proud," "the mighty," "the rich" v. 51–53). In short, God's mercy toward her ("his servant" *δούλης αὐτοῦ* v. 48) parallels his mercy toward Israel his servant (*παιδὸς αὐτοῦ* v. 54). God has been, and will continue to be, faithful to his covenant people (v. 55). Her prophetic contribution then undergirds Luke's theological project at the very beginning. In Luke's outlook, Jesus's movement cannot be understood or told without showing how it is embedded in God's promises and worked out in Israel's history. Rather than rupture, he envisages cohesion, and Mary's song illustrates this well.

As regards the third woman of prophecy, Anna, there is not much material about what she did and said (Luke 2.36–38). But there is no doubt about Luke's

103 This can also be confirmed in Mary's words: *ὅτι ἐπέβλεψεν ἐπὶ τὴν ταπεινωσιν τῆς δούλης αὐτοῦ; "for he has regarded the low estate/condition of his servant" (Luke 1.48a). For ταπεινωσις, see LSJ, 1757.*

104 Multiple parallels exist between Mary and Hannah's prayers (1 Sam 2.1–10).

understanding of her role. The import of her example here must be gained from reading the passage concerning Jesus's presentation at the temple (2.21–35). Although no prophetic formula is present, she is specifically described as a prophetess (προφήτις), one of only two occurrences in the New Testament.¹⁰⁵ Similar to the other two women of prophecy, Anna is depicted as having had some difficult experiences. One can imagine the emotional and social challenges that she faced, as she was a widow for most of her adult life (v. 37), which could be extremely difficult for women without the support of family. Also, no miraculous birth is mentioned as a part of her participation in God's plan. However, like the other two, she does seem to have a counterpart in Simeon, though we do not know the nature of their relationship. For her vital needs, she may have received provision and protection through her attachment to the temple.¹⁰⁶ Similar to Zechariah and Elisabeth, her piety is expressed through her devotion to Israel's religious structures (the temple) and practices (fasting and prayer, v. 37). Unlike Elizabeth and Mary, Anna's words are not reported; only the nature of her speech and action. Luke draws attention to her spiritual awareness by way of the timing of her arrival at the temple when Jesus is blessed by Simeon as well as through her communication of the event. She both praises God and shares this news of the Messiah with those who were expecting God's "redemption of Jerusalem" (v. 38).¹⁰⁷ Thus, Anna's prophetic contribution, although limited to this passage in Luke-Acts, confirms the nature of Jesus's prophetic movement, set in motion by God and received favorably by people of esteemed character.

The fact that Anna was not the mother of an important male protagonist in God's plan did not prohibit Luke from recording her example. Luke wishes to illustrate his accent on theological continuity by providing another example of a pious individual. That these three examples of women of prophecy were purposefully inserted in the *Sondergut* of Luke's long narrative shows their pertinence for understanding the historical context and Luke's theological project. Luke's interest in highlighting women is certainly a reflection of his understanding of Jesus's ministry and teaching in which one finds multiple mentions of women in stories and illustrations. In sum, these three women of prophecy merit Herodotus's description of 'marvelous'.

Now, does Luke show other women linked to prophecy in his Gospel? Despite the number of passages which highlight the participation of women in Jesus's ministry (i. e., in the service of the word of God) or beneficiaries thereof, it does not appear to be the case, based on the criteria of specific description such as the presence of the Holy Spirit, prophetic introductory formulas, and explicit or implicit

105 The second occurrence describes Jezabel in Rev 2.20 in a clearly negative portrayal: ἡ λέγουσα ἑαυτὴν προφήτιν ("who calls herself prophetess") whose teaching is deceptive and immoral.

106 Cf. *Spencer* 2012, 321.

107 Cf. *Spencer* 2012, 305–306.

inspired speech.¹⁰⁸ The use of Paul's definition of prophecy in 1 Corinthians 14.3 would certainly extend the number of prophetic occurrences in Luke and Acts, but I will not follow this application here.¹⁰⁹ Other studies cited above demonstrate how important female disciples were in support of Jesus's ministry and as first witnesses of Jesus's resurrection. Although they were not a part of the Twelve, they were still valued for their service.

3.3 The Acts of the Apostles

Luke's interest in showing continuity in the accomplishment of God's plan of salvation through Jesus flows from volume 1 into volume 2. What Jesus did and said was the main object of the first volume (Acts 1.1). Thus, the object of the sequel is what Jesus's disciples did and said about and through the resurrected Christ. In addition, the Holy Spirit continues to be mentioned as equipping people for ministry (1.2, 5, 8; 2.4; 4.8, etc.). This narrative attention on Jesus' male disciples (especially Peter, Stephen, and Paul) is paralleled by Luke's interest in showing the participation of women in service of "the word" (Luke 1.2).

In the second pericope (Acts 1.12–14), which recapitulates the names of Jesus's male disciples, Luke mentions the presence of Jesus's female disciples as well as Mary his mother (1.14).¹¹⁰ Also, Luke uses the clause "men and women" in his description of events (in response to apostolic preaching, 5.14; and to Philip's preaching, followed by baptism, 8.12; and in relation to persecution, 8.2; 9.2; 22.4). In sum, a part from the negative example of Ananias and his wife Saphira (Acts 5.1–11), Luke continues to show the faithful presence and participation of women.¹¹¹

This background information helps to appreciate the link that Luke makes between women and prophetic activity. In Peter's speech on the day of Pentecost, following the manifestation of the Holy Spirit on the disciples, he quotes the prophet Joel in order to demonstrate the fulfillment of God's plan for the outpouring of his Spirit. Luke mentions that "they were all together in one place (2.1), and the subject could include both male and female disciples. In the New Testament, Luke alone cites this part of Joel's text.¹¹² This supports his interest in the Holy

108 An anonymous woman appears to try (Luke 11.27–28), but there is no indication of divine inspiration. What she proclaims is correct (i. e., Mary is blessed), but Jesus shifts the question of blessing on "those who hear the word of God and obey it."

109 "On the other hand, those who prophesy speak to other people for their upbuilding and encouragement and consolation" (NRSV).

110 This is the last mention of Mary, the mother of Jesus, in the New Testament.

111 Some examples of women specifically named in Acts: Mary, mother of Jesus (1.14); Tabitha (9.36, 40); Mary, mother of John Mark (12.12); Rhoda (12.13); Lydia of Thyatira (16.14); Damaris (17.34); Priscilla (18.1, 18, 26); and groups of women are also mentioned favorably (Acts 17.4, 12; 21.9).

112 The apostle Paul cites Joel 3.5 in Romans 10.13: "For 'Everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved!'"

Spirit in both volumes and the prophetic nature of Jesus's movement, as well as his emphasis on the participation of women in prophecy. The words of Joel's prophecy that underline the link between women and prophecy are clear:

“In the last days it will happen, God says: I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams, and even upon my male servants and upon my female servants, in those days I will pour out my Spirit, and they shall prophesy.” (Acts 2.17–18)

Luke certainly chose to include this passage in order to underline the Holy Spirit's recurrent activity, and, through it, the universal impact of God's work on all persons, regardless of sex, age, and social status. Luke describes a new phase in God's plan as being accomplished, and all people were invited to take part in it. Here we have the prophetic confirmation of male and female servants (or slaves) of the word of God, which evokes the ellipsis “the word” in Luke's preface (Luke 1.2). This may have been the theological inspiration for highlighting female prophetic activity in Luke 1–2.

In a later passage, Luke reports an example of the realization of female prophetic activity (Acts 21.9). Without much detail on this point, Luke informs that Paul and his team came to Caesarea and stayed in the home of Philip the evangelist. In this place, significant prophetic activity seems to be taking place, because female and male prophets are mentioned. Philip, we learn, had four unmarried daughters who all prophesied.¹¹³ The use of the present participle (προφητεύουσαι) suggests the idea that these (probably young) women exercised the gift of prophecy regularly.¹¹⁴ During their visit, a prophet named Agabus from Judea gave a prophetic warning to Paul concerning his planned visit to Jerusalem. All those present – assuming also the four prophetesses – urged Paul to follow this exhortation, but he decided to continue his journey to Jerusalem (Acts 21.12–15).

Another example that could be considered as female prophetic activity is Priscilla's intervention (with her husband Aquila) concerning Apollos's lack of understanding of “the way of the Lord/God” (Acts 18.24–27). It is one of the rare examples of women who actually are recorded as speaking in Acts (in either direct or indirect discourse). I hesitate to include this as prophetic, because Luke does not provide the typical markers such as the presence of the Spirit upon her nor an introductory prophetic formula.¹¹⁵ Above I did make an exception for the song

113 The church historian Eusebius (HE 3.31; 5.24; and 3.39) conveys a tradition (via an Ephesian church leader) about Philip and his daughters. They moved to Hierapolis in Asia Minor, where two of them stayed and remained unmarried.

114 Paul's instructions about the gift of prophecy assume its regular implementation by women (1 Cor 11.5).

115 The expression “fervent in spirit” (ζέων τῷ πνεύματι 18.25) is debated whether it is the Holy Spirit who equips Apollos, or if it is a reference to his own enthusiasm. Additionally, this phrase qualifies Apollos and not Priscilla and Aquila.

of Mary as a prophetic utterance based on other contextual cues. Here, however, Luke does not provide the content of their doctrinal correction. If we applied Paul's description of prophecy (1 Cor 14.3), then Priscilla and Aquila's intervention would certainly qualify as a prophetic utterance. But Luke does not provide a specific definition of prophecy in his two volumes; rather, it is assumed.¹¹⁶ Nevertheless, we can note that Apollos knew the teaching of John the Baptist about baptism (18.25), which places Apollos as a beneficiary of the prophetic tradition. Additionally, the expressions "the way of God" and "the way of the Lord" evoke ancient Jewish expressions concerning God's will and teaching.¹¹⁷ Thus, Priscilla and Aquila play a crucial role by providing a fuller picture of teaching of and about Jesus. This scene is a type of *mise en abyme* of the pragmatic aim of Luke's literary project stated in Luke 1.4. Subsequently, Apollos continues his teaching ministry in line with orthodox teaching (18.26) and the Jewish scriptures (18.28). In short, Apollos became "a servant of the word" thanks to Priscilla and her husband.¹¹⁸

An exploration of female prophetic activity in Acts cannot avoid a discussion of another female who had prophetic powers: the slave girl in Philippi (Acts 16.16). At this point in our story, the two prophetic traditions, Greek and Jewish, collide in Philippi in Macedonia. "To collide" seems the best expression to describe this encounter, for it is not a story of mutual religious edification. This anecdote is important for Luke's narrative as he provides significant coverage of the prophetic utterance and the consequences of this encounter with Paul (16.16–40). It also illustrates Luke's concern for demonstrating the superiority of Jesus's power over other spiritual beings, and, consequently, the supremacy of faith in Jesus vis-à-vis pagan beliefs and practices (e.g., Acts 8.9–12; 14.8–18; 19.18–20). Jesus's authority over the spiritual world is well documented in the first volume. Thus, Luke emphasizes continuity between Jesus and the apostle Paul who exercises Jesus's authority over a hostile spirit.

Luke describes the person as a girl (παιδίσκη) living in Philippi. She is a slave, given the mention of her owners (κύριοι 16.16, 19). She has a python-spirit (πνεῦμα πύθωνα); a detail which connects her prophetic ability with the Apollonic prophetic tradition.¹¹⁹ There is no mention of Delphi nor Pythia, but she is said to be connected to that source via a spirit (16.18).¹²⁰ Luke explains the nature and use of this ability: she was able to prophesy or divine (μαντεύομαι). She functioned

116 Cf. *Fitzmyer* 1981, 430–431.

117 See *Morgan* 2013, 7–16; 154–160.

118 It is noteworthy that Priscilla is placed before Aquila in two occurrences (18.18, 26). Some commentators have understood this as emphasizing Priscilla's role in the ministry. This may have bothered the scribes of the Codex Bezae, who invert the names, so that Aquila appears first. See also Acts 17.12 where 'men' replaces 'women'; and 17.34 for the omission of Damaris. Cf. *Marguerat* 2015, 189 n. 14.

119 Manuscripts \mathfrak{P}^{74} \aleph A B C* D* have the more difficult reading πνεῦμα πύθωνα, while others have πνεῦμα πύθωνος (\mathfrak{P}^{45} C³ D¹ E Ψ 1739 Maj), which is probably due to scribes wishing to clarify for readers that this is "a spirit of Python," thus a "spirit of divination." *Comfort* 2008, 398.

120 For this featured passage in Acts, see *Morgan* 2013, 151–154, and *Keener* 2014, 2420–2429.

as a seer, or fortune teller, which procured a great deal of money for her owners. How she received this power is not reported. Given the presence of a spirit which is then exercised (and in light of NT texts), the girl at some time in her life became possessed by this spirit, and this made her owners happy. Luke reports that the girl followed Paul and his missionary team for several days. But this was not a case of a girl's curiosity; rather, she was animated by a spirit to speak repeatedly, "These men are slaves of the Most High God, who proclaim to you a (the) way of salvation" (16.17). Luke does not say what caused Paul to address the spirit possessing the girl. The best explanation is probably based on a combination of factors. The girl's behavior was abnormal, and this simply bothered the missionaries. Local people possibly informed Paul about this girl and her commercial activity. He appears also to have recognized that this was the spirit speaking and not out of her own volition. Additionally, her words might have relativized the Christocentric message in light of the local worldview. Their message could have been understood according to local beliefs as "a way of salvation"; and their God was simply the "Most High God" (δοῦλοι τοῦ θεοῦ τοῦ ὑψίστου), who could be a great divinity like Zeus within a pantheon of gods.¹²¹ The repetition and the ambiguity of the prophetic utterance seem to have had a taunting ring to it and moved Paul to action. He and his colleagues needed no support from this Python-spirit for success.¹²² Subsequently, Paul spoke directly to the demon and it left the girl. Paul's authority derived from his source: "I order you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her" (16.18).

The young girl was now set free spiritually, which caused great anger in her owners. They saw the drachmas rolling away with this spiritual deliverance. This, in short, was the spark that caused an immediate upheaval in the local population. The collision of prophetic traditions within the social and economic spheres is manifest in their exclamation: "These men are disturbing our city; they are Jews and are advocating customs [ἔθη] that are not lawful for us as Romans to adopt or observe" (16.20–21 NRSV). One is curious to know something more about the girl's life after this spiritual liberation, for example, what happened to her in relation to her owners, whether she was sold to others or kept and possibly mistreated because of her loss of prophetic powers. Luke, if he knew it, chose to focus on the clash between Jesus's missionaries and a hostile crowd.

In summary, this encounter between two spiritual forces is not a new feature in Luke-Acts. Unlike Herodotus's portrayal of the spiritual world which does not describe conflicts between gods, nor does it view gods or spirits as good or bad, Luke presents any spirit that does not submit to Jesus or his followers as being antagonistic. For Luke, there is no neutral ground. This evinces Jesus's mandate as reported by Luke (4.16–30) in which Jesus claims authority within the Jewish

121 A deity known in the Greco-Roman world as *Theos Hypsistos*. See Trebilco 1989, and Keener 2014.

122 Luke reports other scenes in which Jesus casts out demons who express true statements about him (Luke 4.41; 8.28).

prophetic tradition citing Isaiah 61.1–2 in which the words are particularly illuminating: “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,” and “he has sent me to proclaim release to the captives” and “to set free the oppressed.” Luke’s theological accent is on salvation, and this encompassed victory over evil forces. Through this example and others, Luke makes it clear that Jesus was not alone in his service, nor were his apostles. Men and women were in the service of the word of God, in word and deed.

4. Conclusion

The visibility of women in the *Histories* and Luke-Acts displays unusual sensitivity toward women in light of the patriarchal societies of the times they describe and of the literary contexts in which they wrote. This element reflects Herodotus and Luke’s universal perspective on human existence, which included men and women performing various roles in Greek and non-Greek societies. In their own ways, they portray intricate relationships involving religion, politics, and customs. Being sympathetic to the worldviews underlying their histories, Herodotus and Luke portray women within those frameworks, which are mostly assumed and not argued. Although their historiographies represent very different theological perspectives, both authors see no apparent need to justify their beliefs in the gods or in God.¹²³ Consequently, for both authors, oracular and prophetic exempla have a programmatic function as additional authoritative voices to support their own perspectives. By narrating prophetic utterances, these in turn become mouthpieces for our historians. In this respect, François Hartog is certainly right in describing Herodotus as having “a type of oracular authority.”¹²⁴ This could equally be applied to Luke, who assembles ancient and fresh prophecies to demonstrate the realization of God’s plan. Therefore, in the narrative strategies of both authors, women of prophecy come to the fore very early, and they are placed in relation to established prophetic traditions. All these elements orient readers for the reception of their histories.

What then is so marvelous about the women portrayed by Herodotus and Saint Luke? Both show women involved in divine communication that had an extensive impact in time and space. Like their worldviews, they do not justify women’s participation in their prophetic traditions. These fathers of history portray women as servants of divine communication and thus take part in the divine governance over human customs and social order.

In Herodotus’s eyes, the Pythia and the Delphic Oracle were indeed directly or indirectly responsible for some of the marvelous deeds that he investigated. His narrative shows her participation in key developments among the Greeks and non-Greeks. According to Herodotus, without Apollo’s inspiration and the Pyth-

123 Cf. *Morgan* 2019.

124 *Hartog* 2000, 395.

ia's voice, the Greeks probably would have fallen to Persian domination. The various women who exercised the role of the Pythia were by far the most important women in those times. For this reason, the role of the Pythia within the renowned oracular institution can be understood as passive and active, a paradoxical reflection of the spiritual unity between Apollo and the Pythia. It exhibits the divine and human sides of one voice, the Delphic Oracle; an unusual collaboration working toward balance in world history.

In Luke-Acts, the author introduces prophetic activity of women and men in the opening chapters, and he relates other key oracular moments throughout the two volumes. Although the temple of Jerusalem is mentioned several times in Luke-Acts, it is not depicted as an oracular center such as Delphi in the *Histories*. Luke envisages the decentralized nature of prophetic activity, performed by men and women and in various places. For Luke, Joel's oracle found its fulfillment in Jesus's prophetic movement. His interest in highlighting women in relation to divine communication confirms the fulfilment of this prophecy and bolsters his theological project that emphasizes salvation in Jesus and freedom from the oppression of evil forces among all nations, regardless of sex, age, or social class. In Luke's eyes, women of prophecy, as true "servants of the word," certainly deserved Herodotus's description of 'marvelous'.

In the *Histories*, the Greek and Jewish prophetic traditions never meet. They do, however, cross paths in Luke-Acts. Indeed, they clash in Philippi, and only one comes out the winner. Luke reports no Christian assault on the temple of Delphi, nor a direct, verbal polemic on the Pythia. He does, however, describe the spiritual liberation of another woman of prophecy, a slave girl possessed by the Python-spirit. This episode supports Luke's emphasis on the superiority of Jesus's power over other spiritual beings, and, consequently, the supremacy of faith in Jesus versus pagan beliefs and practices. In light of the significant attention that Plutarch (a contemporary of the author of Luke-Acts), gives to the Delphic Oracle, it seems justifiable to consider that Luke wanted to prove something through this episode to his pagan readers as well as to encourage Christian readers from pagan backgrounds.

From this seemingly insignificant event in Macedonia, who would have thought it possible that, a few centuries later, the worship of the son of Mary would provide the grounds to bring an end to the Delphic Oracle, and thus, to the role of the Pythia. But even before the empire-wide eradication of pagan practices by Theodosius I in 391 CE, things were not going well for the Oracle during the brief term of emperor Julian (361–363 CE). According to a letter from Oribasius, his quaestor, Julian is informed of what ironically appears to be Delphi's last oracular response: "Tell the king the fair wrought hall is fallen to the ground. No longer has Phoebus [Apollo] a hut, nor a prophetic laurel, nor a spring that speaks. The water of speech even is quenched."¹²⁵ The Pythia's voice would no longer be heard in Delphi, thus marking the end of one of the most celebrated roles for women in antiquity.

¹²⁵ The quotation is taken from Scott 2014, 243. The reliability of this letter is questionable.

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