



A Cognitive Analysis of the Main Apolline Divinatory Practices: Decoding Divination

Lecture by Dr. [Giulia Frigerio](#) (Marie Skłodowska-Curie Postdoctoral Fellow, Department of Philosophy, Classics, History of Art and Ideas, UiO; NIA Research Affiliate 2024)



(View of the Sanctuary of Apollo at Delphi from the theatre. Photograph by G.Frigerio)

The lecture will take place on **Wednesday, 23 October 2024, at 7:00** p.m. (EEST) at the Norwegian Institute at Athens, Tsami Karatasou 5, 11742 (the lecture will also be streamed online via Zoom)

Registration is required for both in-person and virtual attendance.

To attend **in-person**, please register at norwinst@uib.no

To attend **via Zoom**, please register via the following link:

https://uib.zoom.us/meeting/register/u5EudemsgqzspH9V-rHUSb4D_CnWaOybdbcXx



Abstract

In the past years, many interpretations of Apolline divination in ancient Greece attributed the behaviour of the oracle to hallucinogenic substances and to an altered state of mind. Scholars looked for chemical substances in the laurel branches the Pythia was probably chewing during the ritual, in the water of the sacred springs and in the sacred vapour emanating from the earth in Delphi. All these ideas have already been controverted following chemical analyses that did not find hallucinogenic substances in a quantity which is enough to alter the state of mind of the prophet and of the consultants in any of the places where Apolline divination was practised. Today, the questions remain open: what was actually going on during the process of divination? Why did the Greeks believe in the words of the prophet? Was the promantis sincere? I approach this issue from a cognitive perspective, that of the prophet/prophetess and that of the ancient oracle seekers by considering the cognitive stimuli that contributed to this experience. These cognitive stimulants led them to honestly believe that communication with the god did occur, during which Apollo truly revealed his wishes to mankind. These cognitive processes depend on the habitus and the neural activity.

Specifically, this presentation is part of a bigger study published in the scholarly monograph “A Cognitive Analysis of the Main Apolline Divinatory Practices. Decoding Divination”. This study analysed the landscape, the architecture and the material culture of the sanctuaries of Delphi, Claros and Didyma. For the sake of this seminar, we will only focus on the architecture at Delphi, Claros and Didyma and on selected pieces of material culture. The research sheds new light on the interpretation and function of ancient divination which is nowadays still open. The chosen case studies can serve as the groundwork for a major contribution to the field: the introduction of a new methodology where the cognitive approach, which is already an innovative choice, is combined with a study of the habitus, which I believe is necessary for a correct interpretation of the archaeological evidence.

Biographical Note

Dr Giulia Frigerio holds a BA in Classical Studies from the University of Pavia that she attended as a scholar of Borromeo College. Subsequently, she moved to Oxford, where she took her MSt in Archaeology. She continued to nourish her passion for this field thanks to a PhD in Classical and Archaeological Studies with a specialization in Cognitive Archaeology at the University of Kent. Dr Frigerio joined the University of Oslo in 2023, where she is currently a Marie Skłodowska-Curie Postdoctoral Fellow within the project “Female Bodies in Sacred Spaces: Re-evaluating Women’s Agency in the Greek World (FemBod)”.