

“Vergil and Homer opened my Books:” The *Sibylline Oracles* and the non-Jewish canon

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Abstract

The hybrid cultural weave of the *Sibylline Oracles* is one of the most arresting aspects of a collection which preserves Judaeo-Christian compositions in Greek ranging from c. second century BCE to the seventh century CE. Reviewing world history in the form of prophecy, sketching rewards and punishments due at the end of days, and urging ethical behavior, these oracles in Homerizing hexameters combine Classical and Biblical traditions and are attributed to an ancient Sibyl. This article focuses on a distinctive case of repetition within the *Sibylline corpus* to highlight how the sense of a Classical canon is updated in the Jewish development of this prophetic genre. The passages triggering both intertextual and intratextual investigation are *Sibylline Oracles* 3.419–25, which “predicts” that the blind Homer will be the first to open the *Sibylline books* and copy her tale of Troy, and the far less studied *Sibylline Oracles* 11.163–71, where phrases about Homer are revised to produce an emphasis on Vergil’s skill as a poet and discretion in concealing the *Sibylline writings* until his death. Study of these lines in their immediate and wider narrative contexts reveals the Jewish sibyllists exploiting the literary knowledge of Classically-educated readers, first and foremost in order to build up the *Sibylline authority*, a priority which is developed through both “combative” and “parasitic” stances in relation to canonical authors. Overall, this study offers new information about modes of allusion in Jewish Greek literature and the relationship between the tracks of Homeric and Vergilian reception in cross-cultural contexts.

Keywords

Homer, intertextuality, intratextuality, prophetic authority, *Sibylline Oracles*, Vergil

“Vergil and Homer opened my Books:” The *Sibylline Oracles* and the non-Jewish canon

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Introduction: Sibylline compilations

The hybrid cultural weave of the *Sibylline Oracles* is one of the most arresting aspects of a collection which preserves Judaeo-Christian compositions in Greek ranging from c. second century BCE to the seventh century CE. Reviewing world history in the form of prophecy, sketching rewards and punishments due at the end of days, and urging ethical behavior, these oracles in Homerizing hexameters combine Classical and Biblical traditions and are attributed to an ancient Sibyl. This article focuses on a distinctive case of repetition within the Sibylline corpus to highlight how the sense of a Classical canon is updated in the Jewish development of this prophetic genre.¹

Thus far, studies in the intertextual practices of the Jewish and Christian “Sibyllists” (the anonymous composers of *Sibylline Oracles*) have focused on features such as the use of pagan and Septuagintal epithets for divinities,² or the combination of Greek myths, such as the Titanomachy, with Biblical narratives, of the Flood or the Tower of Babel, to re-orient both prehistory and historical patterning to monotheistic ends.³ Above all, we see that the Sibyllists draw upon multiple backgrounds for a trademark feature of this branch of Sibylline prophecy, which is to “predict,” from a prehistorical or otherwise elevated vantage-point, the course of human history divided into periods of races or empires.⁴

Of the 12 “Books” of *Sibylline Oracles* that we possess,⁵ Book 3, which contains the oldest material in the collection (second century BCE), and Books 1 and 5, (?first-second centuries CE, Book 5 containing very little definitely Christian material), have been singled out as the most relevant sections of the corpus for scholars exploring the Sibyl’s intertextual engagement with “cosmogonical and eschatological legends;” these are also the Books that are closest to the form of Homeric epic.⁶ Jane Lightfoot’s detailed work on Books 1–2 in context of the Sibylline collection has further highlighted the variety in allusive texture between different oracles and differences between Sibylline forms of reference to Classical and Biblical traditions. Highlighted in Lightfoot’s close analysis

1. On the force of the term ‘canon’ applied in Classical studies, see Theodora Hadjimichael, *The Emergence of the Lyric Canon* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 6–7.
2. Jane L. Lightfoot, *The Sibylline Oracles. With Introduction, Translation, & Commentary on the First and Second Books* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 204–6 (Pagan divine names), 535–51 (Appendix A: Predications of God and Divine Epithets).
3. For an overview, see Jesús Maria Nieto Ibáñez, “Los mitos griegos en el corpus de los Oráculos Sibilinos,” in *Sibille e linguaggi oracolari: mito, storia, tradizione* (ed. Ileana Chirassi Colombo and Tullio Seppilli; Pisa: Istituti editoriali e poligrafici internazionali, 1998), 389–410.
4. The most elaborate version of such presentations creatively draws upon and recombines elements from the myth of human history as a sequence of metallic races, found first in Hesiod *Works and Days* 106–201. For more detail, see the introductions and notes on *Sibylline Oracles* 1.69–124, 283–312 in Lightfoot, *Sibylline Oracles*, and Olaf Wassmuth, *Sibyllinische Orakel 1-2. Studien und Kommentar* (Leiden: Brill, 2011).
5. Numbered 1–8 and 11–14: books 9 and 10 duplicate material from the earlier books. See further Rieuwerd Buitenwerf, *Book III of the Sibylline Oracles and its Social Setting* (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 29.
6. Nieto Ibáñez, “Los mitos griegos,” 407.

are some remarkable sections in Book 3 of “high-density borrowing,” amounting to Sibylline “verse paraphrase” of passages of Genesis, Deuteronomy, Ezekiel and Isaiah.⁷ Biblical material provides the “plots,” while Homeric epic provides the meter, lexicon, “isolated motifs” and line-ending formulae by which the Sibyllists poetically expand on their sources.⁸ By contrast, no such sustained “tracking” of particular narratives found only in *non-Jewish* sources is commonly detected in the extant Sibylline corpus. Scattered evidence of Sibylline “intertextual” engagement with Homeric and Hesiodic poetry points rather to Sibylline creative freedom to shuffle and adapt features of those narratives at the core of Hellenizing education throughout the ancient Mediterranean world. Lightfoot finds that “the Sibyl simultaneously employs different kinds of allusion, those proper to both of the traditions in which she is writing.”⁹ The present article follows up the point by exploring a more self-conscious dimension of Sibylline allusion and intertext with the non-Jewish canon.

The Sibylline use of Greek mythology, clearly at its most intense in Books 3 and 1, has raised questions about the balance of its Jewish composers’ antagonism or *rap-prochement* with the cultural prestige of archaic Greek epic traditions. Most recently, Ashley Bacchi’s work on Book 3 has emphasized the embeddedness of the earliest Jewish Sibyllists, who were probably based in Alexandria, in contemporary Hellenistic trends toward politicizing the mythological landscape inherited from the archaic Greek poets.¹⁰ Bacchi takes up from Erich Gruen the term “expropriation” to express the idea of simultaneous Sibylline appropriation and subversion.¹¹ However, Lightfoot, in her analysis of the texture of *Sibylline Oracles* 1–2, ultimately denies that either polemic or desire for compatibility should win out as keys to reading the later and more developed Sibylline versions of prehistory. Lightfoot puts the accent rather on ways in which Books 1–2 refer back to and amplify the beginning-to-end structure of Book 3 and its rooting of the Sibyl in universal history. The original “anchor” is found in the “signature” to Book

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7. Armin Lange and Matthias Weigold, Book 3 far dominates the (incomplete but telling) list of examples of close rewriting of Biblical material in the *Sibylline Oracles*, in *Biblical Quotations and Allusions in Second Temple Jewish Literature* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2011), 249–50. Of the examples outside Book 3 there listed, the reuse of Gen 1:1–26 in *Sib. Or.* frg. 3.3–14 is particularly striking.
 8. Lightfoot, *Sibylline Oracles* 203, 227–37. Homeric, Hesiodic and other epic *loci similes* are cataloged in an appendix to the edition of Aloisius Rzach *XPHΣMOI ΣIBYΛΛIAKOI = Oracula Sibyllina* (Vindobonae: F. Tempsky, 1891), 240–316. On the Sibylline use of Isaiah, see Shiu-Lun Shum, *Paul’s Use of Isaiah in Romans. A Comparative Study of Paul’s Letter to the Romans and the Sibylline and Qumran Sectarian Texts* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2002), 38–95. The Sibyllists “rewrite” Biblical and apocryphal sources in the sense of poetic rearrangement and expansion rather than “reinterpretation”.
 9. Lightfoot *Sibylline Oracles*, 227. She cites Yehuda Amir, “Homer und Bibel als Ausdrucksmittel im 3. Sibyllenbuch,” *SCI* 1 (1974): 73–89, as an intriguing and semi-convincing example of argument that the Sibyllists at least sometimes mobilized the Homeric contexts of the Homeric phrases in their own verses.
 10. Ashley L. Bacchi, *Uncovering Jewish Creativity in Book III of the Sibylline Oracles* (Leiden: Brill, 2020), focusing on the Titanomachy.
 11. Bacchi, *Uncovering Jewish Creativity*, 34–5, n.27: see Erich Gruen, *Constructs of Identity in Hellenistic Judaism* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2016), 546 [index] s.v. ‘Jewish cultural identity’.

3 which presents the Sibyl as a close relative of Noah, a biographical note taken up in Book 1 (cf. *Sib. Or.* 3.823–7 with 1.288–90). As a co-survivor of the Flood, this figure of the Sibyl dates from a period prior to division of human race into Jews and Gentiles, claiming the authority to address both.¹²

This article builds on Lightfoot's insight that the use of "pagan" sources in the *Sibylline Oracles* within and beyond Book 3 is invested first and foremost in building up the Sibylline authority, a priority which is developed through both "combative" and "parasitic" stances in relation to Classical traditions. What the surviving corpus of *Sibylline Oracles* preserves, without parallel in extant Jewish-Greek literature, is a sense of the centuries-long growth and development of a new form of expression with a distinctive voice (despite the flexibility of its features and its concerns).¹³ In this process an important guide is the re-use of Sibylline lines in new contexts. While we cannot often pin down the dates of specific oracles, we can deduce, for example, that Books 1–2, 8 and 11 reuse lines of Book 3, Book 12 draws on Book 5, and Book 7 on Book 2.¹⁴

What I want to suggest is that a view of the Sibylline collection as a continually *self*-assertive project offers a framework for understanding Sibylline practices of reference to non-Jewish traditions. The question I now pursue concerns the relationship between Classical *intertexts* and *intratexts* in the Sibylline corpus. "Intertextuality" refers to the complex interrelationship between a text and other texts taken as basic to the creation *or interpretation* of the text.¹⁵ Further in this vein, "intratextuality" has been defined by a Classicist as "involving . . . the relations between parts and the whole" as discerned by *readers*, rather than with emphasis on the creator.¹⁶ In practice, so far, intratextuality has proved illuminating of, primarily, the dynamics of highly "constructed," single-authored Roman poetry.¹⁷ The multi-authored, centuries-long collection of *Sibylline Oracles*

12. Lightfoot, *Sibylline Oracles*, 23, 75, 214–8, with earlier bibliography.

13. A potential analogue might be the question of whether the NT Gospels are "genre-generative" forms of life-writing about Jesus: for nuanced views on the extent of their innovation in relation to other ancient forms of biography, see Sean A. Adams, *Greek Genres and Jewish Authors: Negotiating Literary Culture in the Greco-Roman Era* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2020), 257–76, and Robyn Faith Walsh, *The Origins of Early Christian Literature: Contextualizing the New Testament within Greco-Roman Literary Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021), 170–94.

14. On the interrelations between Sibylline books, see the introductions to each translated oracle in John J. Collins, "Sibylline Oracles: a new translation and introduction," in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha 1: Apocalyptic Literature and Testaments* (ed. James H. Charlesworth; London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1983), 317–472. See further Lightfoot, *Sibylline Oracles*, 107–9 on the structures of Books 3 and 1–2 as forms of "reduced Bible," respectively "Old Testament" and "New Testament," the latter interpreting the former.

15. Definition from Merriam-Webster online, my emphasis.

16. Andrew Laird, "Design and Designation in Vergil's *Aeneid*, Tacitus' *Annals*, and Michelangelo's *Conversion of Saint Paul*," in *Intratextuality: Greek and Roman Textual Relations* (ed. Alison Sharrock and Helen Morales; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 143–70, at 145.

17. See Richard L. Hunter, "Regius urget: Hellenising Thoughts on Latin Intratextuality," in *Intratextuality and Latin Literature* (ed. Stephen J. Harrison, Stavros Frangoulidis and Theodore D. Papanghelis; Berlin: De Gruyter, 2018), 451–69, at 459 meditating on the

offers different terrain for this approach, whose language encourages consideration of the Roman-ruled Jewish Sibyllists as *readers* of the Hellenistic foundations of their genre. We will draw out new significance from a distinctively intratextual passage in the understudied Book 11, presumed from its references to Joseph, Moses, and Solomon, and repeatedly anti-Egyptian contents, to be of first century CE Jewish authorship.¹⁸ Close readings of both its source passage in Book 3 and this Book 11 passage in their immediate contexts bring out the author-construction of the *Sibylline Oracles* as a figure highly aware of her own passage through antiquity and interaction with non-Jewish traditions, both Sibylline and not.

“Homer copied my books”

The fall of Troy is distinctive among the *non*-Jewish mythological themes treated more than once in our Sibylline collection. On the two occasions in which the event is prophesied in some detail, it is followed up by a passage about a particular author-figure. The first such reference is found right at the center of *Sibylline Oracles* 3, within a longer set of oracles (3.350–488) judged by their anti-Roman sentiments and allusive references to (e.g.) Italian civil wars to have been inserted most likely in the first century BCE.¹⁹ First, the Sibyl predicts distress and never-ending fame for Trojans caused by a very beautiful and famous “Fury . . . in Sparta” (3.413–18).²⁰ Immediately following these lines is a prophecy of the existence and work of Homer, a “false writer” with two major titles for his thoughts, who will be the first to open the Sibyl’s books and master her style:²¹

καί τις ψευδογράφος πρέσβυς βροτὸς ἔσσεται αὐτίς
 ψευδόπατρις· δύσει δὲ φάος ἐν ὀπήσιν ἔῃσιν·
 νοῦν δὲ πολὺν καὶ ἔπος διανοίαις ἔμμετρον ἔξει,
 οὐνόμασιν δυσὶ μισγόμενον· Χίον δὲ καλέσσει
 αὐτὸν καὶ γράψει τὰ κατ’ Ἴλιον, οὐ μὲν ἀληθῶς,
 ἀλλὰ σοφῶς· ἐπέων γὰρ ἐμῶν μέτρων τε κρατήσσει·
 πρῶτος γὰρ χεῖρεσσιν ἐμὰς βίβλους ἀναπλώσει·

And then there will be a certain false writer, an elderly mortal
 of feigned fatherland. The light will go out in his eyes.

relationship between intertextuality and intratextuality as ‘mattering more to Latinists than Hellenists because intertextuality hangs from the very beginning over Latin literature much more importantly . . . than over Greek literature.’”

18. Collins, “Sibylline Oracles,” 431–2 summarizes and evaluates the arguments for both third and first century CE authorship, concluding in favor of the latter.
19. See John J. Collins, *The Sibylline Oracles of Egyptian Judaism* (Missoula, Mont.: Society of Biblical Literature and Scholars’ Press, 1974), 27–8.
20. Most scholars (following Pausanias 10.12.2?), take this as a reference to Helen. In this tragic-inflected passage of the *Sibylline Oracles*, we could recall Aeschylus’ labeling Helen an Ἐρινύς (*Agamemnon* 749), picked up e.g. in Euripides *Orestes* 1389.
21. The text of the *Sibylline Oracles* given here is that of Johannes Geffcken, *Die Oracula Sibyllina* (Leipzig: J.C. Hinrichs’sche Buchhandlung, 1902). Translations of the *Sibylline Oracles* are my adaptations from Collins “Sibylline Oracles.”

Great intelligence will he have, and speech fitting his thoughts
mingled under two names; he shall call himself a Chian
and write the story of Ilium, not truthfully, but
cleverly. For he will master my words and meters,
since he first will open my books with his hands.

Sibylline Oracles 3.419–25

Having identified Homer in an allusive (oracular) fashion by the traditions of his blindness and the claim of provenance from Chios, the narrator proceeds to complain about Homer's creating gods to stand beside his "empty-headed" heroes (3.426–30).

This boldly anachronistic passage spins the Sibylline dependence on Homeric "words and meters" in a direction that has been taken as evidence both of cultural convergence and of antagonism. It initially raises loose comparisons with other Hellenistic Jewish Greek literature asserting (for example) Moses' teaching of canonical Greek authors.²² However, the so-called "Second Sophistic," Imperial-era Greek literary context has also been invoked for the Sibyl's labeling of Homer as a "false writer" and correcting his account of what happened at Troy.²³ More specifically, the passage suggests a self-conscious awareness of similarities between Homer and the Sibyl as constructed author-figures whose "books" were crafted following long- and far-circulating oral traditions, and whose cult sites proliferated throughout the Mediterranean world. The multiplicity of local claims to be the birthplace of Homer or the grotto of the Sibyl²⁴ is the most readily understandable reference of the Sibylline coinage *ψευδόπατρις* in 3.420, as well as the use of *βροτός* in v.419, which counters the increasing tendency to regard Homer as divine. Such comparison of the "biographies" of these figures is prompted by reading this passage in combination with the concluding "signature" to *Sibylline Oracles* 3, in which the Sibyl acknowledges various geographic and other identifications (3.813–14: "The Greeks will call me shameful one, born of Erythrae . . .")²⁵ but denies their validity. Within that catalog of misleading appellations, further, Homer's *Odyssey* may have

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22. The theme is found in Eupolemus, Artapanus, Aristobulus and Philo among others: see first Erich Gruen, *Diaspora. Jews amidst Greeks and Romans* (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 221–30. The specific idea that Homer appropriated the verses of a female prophet called Sibylla is found also in Diodorus of Sicily IV 66.6; although the story has a different frame, this first century BCE prose source may well be influenced by the likely contemporary Jewish Sibylline passage. Bacchi, *Uncovering Jewish Creativity*, 140–2 argues for the decisive role of the Jewish Sibyllist in giving a competitive edge to an ambiguous oral tradition.
23. For this point within a very stimulating close reading of the passage, see Emma Greensmith, "The Wrath of the Sibyl: Homeric Reception and Contested Identities in the *Sibylline Oracles* 3," in *Late Hellenistic Greek Literature in Dialogue* (ed. Jason König and Nicolas Wiater; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022), 178–210. On the problems of the label "Second Sophistic", see Tim Whitmarsh, *Beyond the Second Sophistic: Adventures in Greek Postclassicism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013), 1–7.
24. See for example Cicero *Pro Archia* 19 on the frontrunners among cities claiming ownership of Homer; see Pausanias 10.12.3–7 on Erythrae and Marpeesus' rivalry for the Sibyl.
25. Lactantius, at *Divine Institutes* 1.6.9, identifies the Erythraean Sibyl as the one who predicted the Trojan War and Homer's work: it seems likely that Lactantius derived this from reading a work close to our Book 3. Greensmith, "Wrath of the Sibyl," 207–8, n.84 considers the idea

inspired the idea, not known from any other source, of the Sibyl as “born of Circe as mother and Gnostos as father” (3.815).²⁶

Undoubtedly, the prediction of Homer signals a pointed cultural rivalry in the moment: how (far) this unusual passage illuminates the wider intertextual practice of the Sibyl in this or other books is harder to determine. Book 3’s prediction of Troy’s fall, which foregrounds the destructive power of the “Fury [who] will sprout in Sparta,” is distinctly post-Homeric in its negative emphasis on Helen,²⁷ but the prediction of Homer’s writing does seem to cue attention to several intertextual relations with the *Iliad* earlier in this passage.²⁸ Certainly, Sibylline cross-reference with Iliadic lines concerning the aftermath of the Trojan War would sharpen the Sibyl’s following assertion that Homer copied the Sibyl’s words and meters, while her own perspective is consciously longer and wider than that of the Homeric poems.

One Sibylline mechanism for putting Homer in his place is, as I have argued elsewhere, to bring a more “cosmic” perspective to Homeric foci through “Hesiodic” themes and emphases, although in versions that have come a long way from Hesiod.²⁹ One such example is the account in *Sibylline Oracles* 3 of the fall of Troy itself, for it is framed by eight lines about a warning sign for the Trojans, described as “the abominable race of Rhea, an everlasting sprout in the earth” (3.402–4). Such a framing links the entire Trojan War with the Sibyl’s earlier, Euhemerist-inspired retelling of the Titanomachy in this book, which had concluded not only with the imprisonment of the Titans in the earth (3.151) but, as a consequence of re-envisioning of the Titans as primeval mortals, a striking emphasis on the succession myth as the origin of war for mortals (3.154–5).³⁰ Referring back to that post-Hesiodic mythological context helps the Sibyl to expose the limitations of Homer’s “utterly false writing about empty-headed men” (3.430).

Another telling set of interactions with iconic lines of the *Iliad* may be detected in this Sibylline oracle’s transition from its frame (the warning sign of the earthquake in Phrygia) to a focus on the Trojan War:

σήματα δ’ οὐκ ἀγαθοῖο, κακοῖο δὲ φύσεται ἀρχή.
παμφύλου πολέμοιο δαήμονας ἔξει³¹ ἀνακτας,

that the prophecy of Homer’s work was an insertion composed precisely with a view to the “Erythraean discourse” in the sphragis to Book 3.

26. The text is debated. Bacchi, *Uncovering Jewish Creativity*, 134–5 suggests reading Gnostos as the adjective (γνωστός), ‘well known’ (or, ‘a-gnostos’, ‘unknown’) in reference to the famed (but often unnamed) Odysseus.
27. For postHomeric reference points, see Buitenwerf, *Book III*, 231.
28. See further Greensmith, “Wrath of the Sibyl,” 196–8.
29. See Helen Van Noorden, “Hesiodic rhapsody: the *Sibylline Oracles*,” in *Reception in the Greco-Roman World: Literary Studies in Theory and Practice* (ed. Marco Fantuzzi, Helen Morales and Tim Whitmarsh; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021), 344–70.
30. Modern views of the Hesiodic Titanomachy as evocative of the ‘heroic’ Trojan War narrative, in timeframe, structure and features (see e.g. Robert Mondi, “Tradition and Innovation in the Hesiodic Titanomachy,” *TAPA* 116 (1986): 25–48, esp. 32–9) might also see the Sibylline connection of Troy and the Titanomachy as bringing out an implicit connection in Hesiod.
31. Emended from MSS ἔξειτ’ first by Charles Alexandre, *Chresmoi Sibylliakoi* (Paris: Didot, 1841–53).

Αἰνεάδας δὲ διδοῦσ' αὐτόχθονας,³² ἐγγενὲς αἷμα.
 ἀλλὰ μεταῦτις ἔλωρ ἔση ἀνθρώποισιν ἐρασταῖς.
 Ἴλιον, οἰκτεῖρω σε· κατὰ Σπάρτην γὰρ Ἴρινός
 βλαστήσει . . .

The signs will be the beginning not of good, but of evil.
 It [Phrygia] will have princes who are knowledgeable in the war of all tribes,
 Producing native descendants of Aeneas, kindred blood.
 But thereafter you will be prey to people who are lovers.
 Ilium, I pity you. For a Fury will sprout in Sparta . . .

Sibylline Oracles 3.410–15

The first two lines set up the Phrygian region for success through the expertise of its leadership in war and the descendants of Aeneas, before the Sibyl applies to Troy a twist on the Homeric image of “prey” familiar first from the proem of the *Iliad* (the bodies of heroes as prey for dogs and birds, *Iliad* 1.4–5). The progression of thought here is open to several interpretations. Prediction of disaster for Phrygia followed by pity for Ilium first suggests the Fall of Troy as a reference point in v.413, and ἀνθρώποισιν ἐρασταῖς has consequently been interpreted either as a reference to the avenging Menelaus and Agamemnon, or to Helen and Paris.³³ However, unless we take the Sibyl as deliberately confounding chronology,³⁴ the adverb μεταῦτις in 413 makes it difficult to read the punchline as a reference to the fall of Troy “after” the production of “native descendants of Aeneas” (3.412), and so “people who are lovers” could well refer to the greedy Romans (so castigated at *Sibylline Oracles* 3.447) who incorporated Phrygia into the province of Asia in the late second century BCE.³⁵

32. This is the conjecture of Buitenwerf, *Book III*, 230 n.43 for Αἰνεάδας *διδοῦς* αὐτόχθονος. His footnote deals with several difficulties in *Sib. Or.* 3.410–11.

33. Menelaus: Collins, “Sibylline Oracles”; Paris and Helen: Buitenwerf, *Book III*, 231, n.45, finding reference to Helen in vv.414–18, and Lafontaine, “Tra oscurità e evidenza: la Guerra di Troia nella profezia sibillina,” presented at “*Prolepsis*: Predicting, Anticipating, Foretelling from Antiquity to the Renaissance” (Bari, 20–21.12.2021).

34. Lafontaine, “Tra oscurità e evidenza,” identifies chronological and logical order as a feature of ancient discussions on clarity, and applies the finding in general terms to this run of prophecies in *Sib. Or.* 3.

35. Bacchi, *Uncovering Jewish Creativity*, 184–90, esp. 186–7, where she compares a warning to Rhodes of being ‘prey to lovers’ at 3.447 as a reference to Rome’s sanctions on Rhodes in 167 BCE. Daniel Jolowicz, “A Glitch in the Matrix: Aphrodisias, Rome and Imperial Greek Fiction,” in *Literary and Linguistic Resistance under the Roman Empire* (ed. Daniel Jolowicz and Jaś Elsner; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, forthcoming), takes the term as periphrasis for “conquerers”. For the term Αἰνεάδας, George Panayiotou, “Addenda to the *LSJ* Greek-English Lexicon: Lexicographical Notes on the Vocabulary of the *Oracula Sibyllina*,” *Hell* 38 (1987): 46–66, 296–317, at 55–6 compares the use of the Latin word *Aeneades* as indication for Romans, though he admits that in Greek literature this meaning is not common outside the *Sibylline Oracles*.

We should note that the prophecy in vv.411–12 also has a heritage going back to the *Iliad*—in Poseidon’s striking intervention on behalf of Aeneas, in *Iliad* 20, predicting his fated rule over the Trojans:

νῦν δὲ δὴ Αἰνεΐας βίη Τρώεσσιν ἀνάξει
καὶ παίδων παῖδες, τοὶ κεν μετόπισθε γένωνται.

Now the strength of Aeneas will rule over the Trojans
And his children’s children, who afterwards will be born.

Homer *Iliad* 20.307–8

Peter Smith has shown that ancient interpretations of these two lines as the *Iliad*’s only *post-eventum* prophecy, functioning as propaganda for dynasties in the Troad in the eighth century BCE claiming descent from Aeneas, arose in a period of resentment against Roman domination in Asia Minor and increasing Roman self-advertisement as the descendant and successor of Troy.³⁶ From the context of Rome’s claim to “Phrygian” origin, elsewhere reflected both positively and negatively in *Sib. Or.* 3, most modern interpreters understand *Sibylline Oracles* 3.411–12 to be referring to the Romans.³⁷ Still, there remains the possibility of reading these lines as another contemporary testimony from the Greek East of an implicit *challenge* to the Roman succession narrative, one which then signals the validity of its interpretation through the Sibyl’s following, back-handed invocation of Homer as cultural authority.³⁸ At the very least, we can say that the Sibyllist reconstructs the Iliadic line as a *post-eventum* prophecy in some degree, and in that sense is anticipating the Sibyl’s claim that Homer copied her own trademark mode of utterance.

This is, however, not the end of the significance of this Sibylline prediction within the *Sibylline Oracles*, for later Sibyllists themselves then reread and adapted the Book 3 passages on Troy and Homer to new ends. We now turn to one of the most striking and extended instances of intratextuality in the Sibylline corpus.

36. See Peter M. Smith, “Aineiadai as Patrons of *Iliad* XX and the *Homeric Hymn to Aphrodite*,” *HSCP* 85 (1981): 17–58, especially 25–45. By contrast, in their Iliadic context, he argues, the lines are probably best understood (just) as a rhetorical expression of prosperity that contrasts with the doomed generation of Priam evoked in the previous line (20.306).

37. So Buitenwerf, *Book III*, 230. For clear exegesis of the Troy-Phrygia-Rome nexus in the Sibylline context, see Bacchi, *Uncovering Jewish Creativity*, 184–90, and Jolowicz, “Glitch in the Matrix.”

38. By contrast, one of the (late antique) exegetical scholia (T *Il.* 20.307–308a) interprets the Iliadic lines as referring to the Romans, and explains that Homer knew about the future of Rome thanks to the Sibylline Oracles (!). See further Sergio Casali, “The Development of the Aeneas Legend,” in *A Companion to Vergil’s Aeneid and Its Tradition* (ed. Joseph Farrell and Michael C. J. Putnam; Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell 2010), 37–51, especially 41, commenting on Vergil’s ‘philo-Roman’ rewriting of the Iliadic lines.

“Vergil copied my books”

The only other place in this Sibylline corpus to make detailed reference to the fate of Troy is found in Book 11, whose date is estimated to be at the earliest around the start of the first century CE. Several oracles in this book are markedly hostile to Egypt, so the default presumption is of Jewish authorship, in the wake of hostility to Jews in Alexandria in the first half of the first century.³⁹

Sibylline Oracles 11 recapitulates Biblical prehistory and the interaction of empires as far as Solomon’s building of the Temple (11.87), before a “digression” about Romulus and Remus (11.109–21) and then a significant oracle on the Trojan War (11.122–62) and another on Vergil (11.163–71). Following this, a brief passage compresses all Classical-era Greek history up to the advent of Alexander the Great, whose rise and legacy, the rule of Cleopatra, and Julius Caesar’s conquest of Egypt, then form the remaining subjects of the book. Book 11 does not delve into any Greek myths other than the Trojan War, although, like other oracles of the corpus, it is composed throughout in Homerizing hexameters and the verses are constructed in part from Homeric and Hesiodic phraseology.

Although reprising aspects of the Trojan War prophecy in *Sibylline Oracles* 3 (mentioning, for example, the “Fury from Sparta”), the version in Book 11 is greatly expanded toward aspects of the aftermath. Features not mentioned in Book 3 include: reference to the Wooden Horse (11.135–7), Agamemnon’s success in destroying Troy (with possible reference to the prior sacrifice of Iphigenia⁴⁰) but also his doomed return (11.130–2, 141–2) and above all attention to the fate of Aeneas. Verses detail Aeneas’ lineage (11.144–5), his escape with his family from Troy (11.146–54), his founding of Rome (“the mighty city of the Latins,” 11.155), his death (11.156–7), and the future rule of his race as far as the Euphrates and Tigris rivers (157–61).⁴¹ At this point comes a close revision of the passage in Book 3 predicting that another elderly individual will copy Sibyl’s work:

καί τις πρέσβυς ἀνὴρ σοφὸς ἔσσεται αὐτίς αἰοῖδος,
 ὃν πάντες καλέουσι σοφώτατον ἐν μερόπεσσι,
 οὗ κόσμος πραπίδεςσιν ἄλλος παιδεύσεται ἐσθλαῖς·
 γράψει γὰρ κεφάλαια * ~ - δύναμιν τ’ ἐπίνοιαν*.
 καί τε σαφῶς γράψει μάλ’ ἀθέσφατα ἄλλοτε ἄλλη⁴²
 τοῖσιν ἐμοῖσι λόγοις μέτροις ἐπέεσσι κρατήσας·

39. See Collins, “Sibylline Oracles,” 430–3, introducing his translation of this book.

40. 11.130: *κάκιστα ἔργα*: so suggests Xavier Lafontaine, “Tra oscurità e evidenza.”

41. In these respects, as well as in its recurring theme of the hatred between Asia and Europe, the *Sibylline Oracles* are thematically close to Lycophron’s *Alexandra*, especially its notorious “Roman passages” (vv. 1226–82 and 1446–50)—see Gabriella Amiotti, “Il rapporto fra gli oracoli sibillini e l’ “Alessandra” di Licofrone,” in *La profezia nel mondo antico* (ed. Marta Sordi; Milan: Vita e Pensiero, 1993), 139–49, at 145–6, although focusing on *Sib. Or.* 3 rather than 11.

42. The manuscript line ends ἄλλοτε κάλλη; Rzach, *XPHΣMOI ΣΙΒΥΛΛΙΑΚΟΙ* emended to the instrumental dative, but he, followed by Geffcken, printed ἄλλοτε ἄλλη, whereas Alfons Kurfess, *Sibyllinische Weissagungen: Griechisch-deutsch* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1951) prints the form with iota subscript. My thanks to Oliver Thomas (University of Nottingham) for correspondence about modern editorial presentations of the instrumental case.

αὐτὸς γὰρ πρῶτιστος ἐμὰς βίβλους ἀναπλώσει
καὶ κρύψει μετὰ ταῦτα καὶ ἀνδράσιν οὐκέτι δείξει
ἐς τέλος οὐλομένου θανάτου, βιότοιο τελευτῆς.

And there will be a certain elderly wise man, a bard in his turn,
whom all call the wisest among articulate mortals,
by whose excellent skill all the world will be educated:
For he will write the headlines * —power and purpose*
and in different ways at different times will write clearly really inexpressible things
having mastered my stories, meters and utterances:
For he as the very first will open my books
and will hide them afterwards and no longer show them to men
Until the goal of wretched death, the end of life.

Sibylline Oracles 11.163–71

While reprising Book 3’s oracle on Homer,⁴³ the notable differences in the present passage, in the context of the preceding focus on Aeneas, point rather to Vergil, as Alfons Kurfess explained over 60 years ago.⁴⁴ Gone are Book 3’s references to a blind mortal, false homeland, and work collected under two names, along with any reference to tales of heroes such as Hector. Rather, we find emphasis on the universally acknowledged wisdom (ὄν πάντες καλέουσι σοφώτατον) and skill (πραπίδεσσιν ὅλος παιδεύσεται ἐσθλαῖς) of this bard, on the significance and depth of his writings (κεφάλαια taken as “major events;” ἐπίνοιαν and σαφῶς γράψει μάλ’ ἀθέσφατα are obscure but indicate poetic purpose and magnitude in subject), his priority in opening the Sibyl’s books (πρῶτιστος 169), and his subsequently hiding them until his death (170–1).

Our transmitted text, despite its difficulties,⁴⁵ clearly works to “update” the Sibylline self-construction of authority in relation to non-Jewish cultural icons. It makes better sense when read intratextually (i.e. with an eye to its model in *Sibylline Oracle* 3.419–25) than when considered as a standalone prophecy. Verses 11.166–7, whatever they precisely denote about Vergil or the *Aeneid*, seem to be composed to recall and contrast with the description of Homer’s writings in the Book 3 passage as somewhat sophistic (“he will write the history of Ilium, not truthfully, but cleverly”). The implied comparison puts a new angle on the reputation of Vergil’s *Aeneid* as an “instant classic.”⁴⁶ Other

43. Hence I think it appropriate to translate αὐτίς here (v.163) as ‘in his turn’.

44. In the brief commentary on Book 11 in Kurfess, *Sibyllinische Weissagungen*, 333–6.

45. Various emendations have been proposed to deal with the missing iamb in v.166: e.g. Alexandre, *Chresmoi Sibylliakoi ad loc.* ends the line κατὰ δύναμιν τ’ ἐπίνοιαν (retaining focus on Vergil as writer), Rzach, *ΧΡΗΣΜΟΙ ΣΙΒΥΛΛΙΑΚΟΙ* has καθ’ ὄν δύναμιν ἐπινοιών, and Kurfess, *Sibyllinische Weissagungen κεφαλαιωδῶς δύναμιν διανοιών* (translating the whole line “Denn er schreibt mit kräft’gen Gedanken die Heldengesänge”). I am doubtful about all of these and so prefer to print the manuscript reading.

46. Llewelyn Morgan, “Creativity out of chaos: Poetry between the death of Caesar and the death of Vergil,” in *Literature in the Roman World* (ed. Oliver Taplin; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 75–118, cited at 116.

later Greek poetry testifies that Vergil is a successful rival to Homer,⁴⁷ but according to the Jewish Sibyllists, the field in which Vergil surpasses Homer is not epic poetry, but Sibylline prophecy, because Vergil was actually the *very* first to access the Sibyl's words and meters.

The passage's concluding point about hiding the books until death (11.170–1) recalls on one level the contemporary biographical tradition of Vergil on his deathbed wanting the *Aeneid* to be burned, only to be overruled by his executors and Augustus himself.⁴⁸ However, it also constructs Vergil as a Jewish apocalypticist “hiding” Sibylline writings.⁴⁹ And when preceded by the Sibyl's idea of Vergil's mastering *her* stories (11.168, with an odd use of the dative), it is plausibly based on an idea within Vergil's poetry. Kurfess points to *Aeneid* 6, in which the Cumaean Sibyl leads Aeneas to the underworld, and in return for her revelations, Aeneas promises to transcribe and enshrine the Sibyl's utterances (*Aeneid* 6.72–3: *hic ego namque tuas sortis arcanaque fata / dicta meae genti ponam . . .*, verses that link the Aeneas-legend with the pagan Roman *Libri Sibyllini*).⁵⁰ In these lights, the Jewish Sibylline passage presents Vergil's poem as a “faithful copy” of Sibylline wisdom, rather than a plagiarism.

Although the context of oracles about Rome's prehistory, the fall of Troy and the imperial future of Aeneas' descendants initially suggests Vergil *qua* poet of the *Aeneid* as the referent of this passage, there is a case for cross-reference to a different Vergilian poem that displays mastery of “[Sibylline] meters and utterances”. This is Vergil's Fourth *Eclogue* (produced in the consulship of Pollio, 40 BCE), which in its opening lines cites the “Cumaean Sibyl” for the view that we are concluding a series of world ages. Whether or not a fictional citation, it was *this* poem's description of an imminent fantastic golden age of peace, adopting Sibylline spondaic rhythms and internal rhymes, as well as details strikingly reminiscent of *Sib. Or.* 3.785–95 (itself drawing heavily on Isaiah 11, among other texts) that persuaded many Classicists that Vergil at least in this text was influenced by something very like the extant *Sibylline Oracles*.⁵¹ I do not think we need to make

47. Cf. his citation as a “second Homer” and a “clear-voiced swan sustained by echo [i.e. of Homer]” in a fifth/sixth century. CE Greek epigram (*Palatine Anthology* 2.414–16), with Daniel Jolowicz, *Latin Poetry in the Ancient Greek Novels* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2021), 5 n.17.

48. This tradition is extant in Aelius Donatus *Life of Vergil* (fourth century) apparently deriving from one by Suetonius (second century) and allegedly arising soon after Vergil's death in 19 BCE.

49. Collins, “Sibylline Oracles,” 438 cites as *comparanda* Dan 12:4, 9 and 4 Ezra 16:46. Kurfess, *Sibyllinische Weissagungen* 336 cites 2 Ezra 12, 37; Assumption of Moses 1, 17.

50. Kurfess, *Sibyllinische Weissagungen*, 336 (*ad Sib. Or.* 11.168). Following the observation of Jane Lightfoot, “Nonnus and the Book,” in *Nonnus of Panopolis in Context III* (ed. Filip Doroszewski and Katarzyna Jażdżewska; Boston: Brill, 2020), 317–31, at 237 that in the *Sibylline Oracles* an emphasis on truth is linked with spoken rather than written words, I note that this too is a point thematised by *Aeneid* 6, in which, following the instruction of Helenus (book 3), Aeneas persuades the Sibyl not to commit her prophecies to writing on leaves that could be scattered by the winds, but to respond to him directly. See pp.17–18 below.

51. See first Roland G. Austin, “Vergil and the Sibyl,” *CIQ* 21 (1927): 100–5; Nicholas Horsfall, “Vergil and the Jews,” *Vergilius* 58 (2012): 67–80. Specific echoes of *Sib. Or.* 3 phrases in Vergil's *Eclogue* 4 are noted by Kurfess, *Sibyllinische Weissagungen*, 300.

an absolute choice between Vergilian reference-points. In my view, the reading of v.167 that points to a poet who “writes . . . differently at different times,” while it could refer to different books of the *Aeneid*, makes best sense if taken as encompassing both *Eclogues* and *Aeneid* as Vergilian depictions of Sibylline wisdom about the “headlines” of history.⁵²

Vergilian interactions

The immediate Sibylline context for Book 11’s prophecy of Vergil’s activity, whose main concerns are Romulus and Remus (11.109–17), the fall of Troy (122–40) and the destiny of Aeneas and his line (144–62), put Kurfess and others in mind of the *Aeneid*. The unelaborated comparison points (“cfs.”) of Kurfess’ commentary, which point to themes in *Aeneid* 2 and lines in *Aeneid* 6 in particular, deserve reassessment within an updated sense of Sibylline intertextual and intratextual practice. It is not clear what kind of “parallel” Kurfess envisaged the *Aeneid* to be in relation to this section of the *Sibylline Oracles*; he does not explicitly raise the possibility of Vergilian “influence” on these later Sibylline strata.⁵³ Some references in these Sibylline passages remain mysterious; for instance, predictions about Romulus and Remus are followed by two predictions of insurrection in Egypt (*Sib. Or.* 11.117–21). Alongside apparent echoes of Vergilian phrasing and emphases, to be considered below, there are aspects of the Sibylline prophecies, such as reference to Aeneas’ death “in the watery depths of the sea” (11.156–7) that I doubt should be conflated with the versions known from Vergil and other sources.

I will first highlight the sense of flow and shaping to the extant Sibylline combination of prophecies, effected through overlapping elements of ring composition. Romulus and Remus build strong walls and instigate war (11.115–16); Agamemnon and Menelaus destroy the famous walls of Troy and Zeus “fulfils the murderous deeds of war” (11.132–4: the link between the rise of Rome and the fall of Troy thereby solidified). Agamemnon is singled out as king (βασιλεύς) at the point when he storms the walls (11.130–1) and at his death (11.141–3). Troy’s fall is in this version strikingly gendered: the city is personified as a woman on her knees, both unaware (οὐχὶ νοοῦσα) and grieving (ἢ βαρυνεπυθής), receiving the wooden horse full of Greeks (11.136–7, this reference perhaps serving to “explain” the introductory, non-Homeric application to Greece of the epithet “horse-taming,” at 11.123).⁵⁴ Troy’s “receiving” the horse is echoed two lines later by the many [dead] that Hades will admit (ὕποδῆξεται), and the emphasis on entrapment is “answered”

52. *pace* Kurfess, *Sibyllinische Weissagungen*, who for 11.167 prints καὶ δὲ σοφῶς γράψει μάλ’ ἀθῆσφατα ἄλλοτε ἄλλη and (inexplicably to me) translates “Und es gelingt ihm zuweilen, auch einzelnes gut zu beschreiben”, which sounds much more grudging and renders the whole prophecy of Vergil’s renown quite sarcastic in tone.

53. The extent of Vergil’s own debts to Hellenistic Jewish sources including sibylline traditions, in *Aeneid* 6, remains a point of debate. See e.g. Jan Bremmer, “The Golden Bough: Orphic, Eleusinian, and Hellenistic-Jewish Sources of Vergil’s Underworld in *Aeneid* VI,” *Kernos* 22 (2009): 183–208 and Nicholas Horsfall, *Virgil, Aeneid 6. A Commentary* (Berlin/Boston: de Gruyter, 2013).

54. This epithet in the Homeric poems is much more commonly applied to Trojans than to Greeks, individually and collectively, and it carries extra weight as the final word of the *Iliad* (applied to Hector). See Grace. H. Macurdy, “The Horse-Taming Trojans,” *CIQ* 17 (1923): 50–2.

by the evocation of Agamemnon's downfall at the hands of his cunning wife (11.143). In the intervening lines, a focus on the ransom from Priam, "the old man of many tears" (139: πολυδακρύτοιο γέροντος), becomes a point of contrast with the following prediction of 'ageless' (140: ἀγήρατον) glory in future generations," a phrase that was applied to Troy in *Sib. Or.* 3.418.

Any consideration of Vergilian "influence" on these prophecies must first acknowledge that within the prophecy of Troy's fall, the successive allusions to Hades' receipt of many dead and to Priam's ransom and tears (11.138–9) evoke the start and end of the *Iliad*. However, the application of Homeric formulas in this passage cannot be described as Iliadic. Besides the opening reference to "horse-taming Greece," noted above, the Sibyl refers to Agamemnon immediately following her warning for Ilium regarding the Greek heroes as "far the best of those who love war" (ἀρηιφίλων ὄχ' ἄριστοι, 11.129). Introducing Agamemnon as "one of these, king, a mighty warrior" (τούτων δ' εἷς ἔσται βασιλεύς, κρατερὸς αἰχμητής, 11.130), with no mention of Achilles, challenges Hellenized readers' recollections of Agamemnon's quarrel with that warrior, acknowledged "best of the Achaeans" (ἄριστος in the singular).

Conversely, details in the prophecy seem to echo Vergilian presentations of the featured characters. The Sibylline three-line picture of Agamemnon himself combines several of the same elements as does the vignette at *Aeneid* 11.266–8, highlighting Agamemnon's reversal of fortunes from leadership in war to defeat through his wife's treachery as soon as he achieved his return home.⁵⁵ Meanwhile, in a striking supplement to the pattern set by the prophecy of Troy's fall after the advent of Helen, a "Fury from Sparta" (*Sib. Or.* 3.414 ~ 11.125), the Sibyl has spotlighted the device of the Wooden Horse: "an ambush pregnant with Greeks" (*Sib. Or.* 11.137: ἔγκυον Ἑλλήνων λόχον). The Horse is retrospectively recalled as a λόχος already by characters in Homer's *Odyssey*,⁵⁶ but the image here is more complex. Kurfess on this line simply indicates "*Aeneid* 2.15ff."⁵⁷ Indeed, Vergil memorably combines prior tragic traditions of the Horse as pregnant;⁵⁸ his main account of the fall of Troy both draws attention to the belly/womb of the Horse (*Aen.* 2.20: *uterum*, 51: *aluum*, 401: *aluo*) and (though in an episode of contested authenticity) refers to Helen as a "common Fury" (*Aen.* 2.585: *communis Erinys*). A closer analogy to the prophecy in *Sib. Or.* 11, however, is the retrospect at *Aen.* 6.511–27, in which the shade of Deiphobus in the underworld first attributes his death to the deadly crime of Spartan

55. *ipse Mycenaeus magnorum ductor Achium / coniugis infandae prima inter limina dextra / oppetiit, deuictam Asiam subsedit adulter*. Compare the Sibylline presentation (11.141-3): τοῦνομα δὲ σχήσει βασιλεύς μέγας ἐκ Διὸς ἀνὴρ / στοιχείου ἀρχομένου· ὅς ἐπεὶ νόστου τετύχησι, / δὴ τότε καὶ πέσεται δολίης ἐν χειρὶ γυναικός.

56. *Od.* 4.531 by Menelaus, 8.515 glossing the song of Demodocus, 11.525 by Odysseus.

57. Kurfess, *Sibyllinische Weissagungen*, 335.

58. It is implicit already in Aeschylus *Agamemnon* 825 (the Greek army as the 'brood of the horse') and explicit in Euripides *Trojan Women* 11: ἔγκυμον ἵππον τευχέων, the imagery further developed in Ennius *Alexander* 80–1 [*apud* Macrobius *Saturnalia* VI.2.25 in a list of Vergilian literary borrowings]: *gravidus armatis equus / qui suo partu ardua perdat Pergama*. See Roland G. Austin, *P. Vergili Maronis Aeneidos Liber Sextus* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1977), 175. However, compare also Lycophron *Alexandra* 342: τὸν ὠδίνοντα μορμωτὸν λόχον, a precedent for *Sibylline Oracles* 11 in combining the idea of pregnancy with "ambush" in the context of an extended prophecy.

Helen⁵⁹ and bitterly recalls the horse *armatum peditem grauis attulit aluo*—‘heavy with armed infantry it carried in its womb’ (*Aen.* 6.516, adapting Ennius (see n.58 above).

Besides the Sibylline focus on the Wooden Horse, its subsequent snapshots of Aeneas’ escape from Troy (*Sib. Or.* 11.146–52) and future foundation of the “city of the Latins” (11.155) may well put readers in mind of Vergil’s *Aeneid*. Aeneas comes into view from Troy as it burns, carrying his aged father Anchises on his back and leading his son [Ascanius] by the hand (*Sib. Or.* 11.146–9), an image for which Kurfess indicated parallels in *Aen.* 6.110–11 (Aeneas’ recollection of his escape, told to the Sibyl of Cumae) and the enormously influential verses *Aen.* 2.423–4. More specifically, the Sibylline vision of Aeneas escaping Troy with a *single* son (*Sib. Or.* 11.149: *υἷον δ’ ἐν παλάμῃ κατέχων μόνον*) seems to reflect Vergil’s emphasis, whose impact on Aeneas-traditions is reflected e.g. in the Forum of Augustus completed in 2 BCE.⁶⁰ Among the earlier traditions, which note plural children of Aeneas, some scholars count Poseidon’s prophecy in *Iliad* 20.307–8 of the future rule of *παίδων παῖδες* from Aeneas (cited above, p.9, in relation to the prediction of [Phrygian] “native descendants of Aeneas” at *Sib. Or.* 3.412).⁶¹ If the “Vergilian” picture of Aeneas in *Sib. Or.* 11 recalls and counters these lines, it would bolster the implied assertion in the follow-up prophecy of Vergil, that he came closer than did Homer to the Sibylline truth about the fate of Troy.

A notable aspect of the Sibyllists’ portrait of Aeneas in flight is its emphasis on Aeneas’ fearful awareness of the dangers of the land and sea (*Sib. Or.* 11.152: *δειμαίνων περάσει γαῖαν φοβερήν τε θάλασσαν*). Such dangers are highlighted by Vergil’s Sibyl in her first prophetic address to Aeneas, *Aen.* 6.83–4: *o tandem magnis pelagi defuncte periclis / (sed terrae graviora manent) . . .*, and in turn by Aeneas speaking of Anchises (*Aen.* 6.113: *omnis pelagique minas caelique ferebat*). Rather than simply adding these to Kurfess’s list of “cfs,” however, I want to factor in our Sibyl’s following prophecy, of Aeneas’ death “in the watery depths of the brine” (*Sib. Or.* 11.156–7: *ἐπὶ βένθεσιν ἄλμυς / ὕδασιν*) in the fifteenth year after founding Lavinium: she then predicts that his memory will persist in his family’s future empire stretching as far as mid-Assyria (*Sib. Or.* 11.158–62). Most commentators assimilate vv.156–7 with the traditions of Aeneas’ death or disappearance at the river Numicus after between three and eight years of rule

59. It has been noted that Deiphobus’ account in *Aeneid* 6 presents Helen’s betrayal of him to her “lover” Menelaus in terms reminiscent of Clytemnestra with the adulterous Aegisthus, echoing the Homeric Agamemnon’s misogynistic presentation of his death in *Odyssey* 24. See Katherine R. De Boer, “Blaming Helen: Vergil’s Deiphobus and the Tradition of Dead Men Talking,” *EuGeStA* 9 (2019): 26–50. I therefore wonder if the Sibylline framing of the Trojan War prophecy with the downfall of Agamemnon “anticipates” this Vergilian revisiting of Homer.

60. Anne Rogerson, *Virgil’s Ascanius: Imagining the Future in the Aeneid* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 2–4 and 16, with n.5, on Vergil’s impact on iconographic and other depictions of the escape.

61. However, *παίδων παῖδες* could be understood rather as an expression of the long-term divine perspective: its phrasing is echoed by Apollo within the *Aeneid* predicting the future rule of Aeneas’ “children’s children” (*Aeneid* 3.97–8), while the question of Roman descent from Ascanius/Julus or from Silvius, Aeneas’ future son by Lavinia, is famously kept open in the *Aeneid*. On the latter point see Rogerson, *Virgil’s Ascanius*, 15–36.

in Latium.⁶² Allusions to this event have been detected by ancient and modern scholars of the *Aeneid* in relation to passages such as *Aen.* 6.88–9 within the Cumaean Sibyl's prophecy to Aeneas, and Jupiter's famous prophecy in Book 1, which includes a prediction of Aeneas' apotheosis (*Aen.* 1.259–60).⁶³ As Kurfess acknowledges, however, the Sibylline timeframe contradicts that of Vergil's Jupiter (three years), and I would add that the Sibyl's situating Aeneas' death at sea is not to be conflated with the mainstream tradition of situating the event at the Numicus river.⁶⁴

Within Vergil's epic, Jupiter's prophecy of Rome's empire without end (*Aen.* 1.279: *imperium sine fine*) is a significant intratext in the finale of Anchises' extended speech to Aeneas in the Underworld.⁶⁵ Lines from this section of *Aeneid* 6, which introduces Augustus as the one who will re-found the Golden Age (*Aen.* 6.791–3), were noted by Kurfess as comparanda for the second half of the Sibyl's Trojan War prophecy in *Sib. Or.* 11. Aeneas is introduced as a famous child of heroes "from the race and blood of Assaracus" (*Sib. Or.* 11.144: ἐκ γενεῆς τε καὶ αἵματος Ἀσσαράχοιο), which may well recall Anchises' description of Romulus as *Assaraci . . . sanguinis* at *Aen.* 6.778.⁶⁶ Subsequent sibylline predictions of Aeneas' descendants have likewise been compared to the most famous lines of imperial prophecy in *Aeneid* 1 and 6.⁶⁷ Still, differences from Vergil's account should not be overlooked. An emphasis on Aeneas' mortality (and implicit denial of apotheosis, since he is "not forgotten" due to his descendants' rule, not because of any cult worship) is in keeping with the Jewish Sibylline determination to diminish the status of epic heroes (compare *Sib. Or.* 3.430–1). Even as they recall "high points" of the *Aeneid*, Sibylline prophecies of Aeneas' fear and subsequent death at sea might also be seen ironically as "fulfilling" the dread of the epic hero at a moment that was identified by Servius as Aeneas' *lowest* point in Vergil's poem: the fear that strikes him on the point of shipwreck (*Aen.* 1.92). The admiration that the Sibyl next proceeds to express for Vergil as a poet is to be balanced against her claim of ownership over the material (*Sib. Or.* 11.168–9: "my stories" etc.). Against a broader late first century BCE context of jostling over which Sibyls predicted the wanderings of Aeneas (Erythraean, Trojan, Cimmerian . . .), it would be unsurprising if Vergil's apparently original connection of the Sibyl of Cumae to the legend of Aeneas⁶⁸ became in turn a provocation for the Jewish Sibyllists to stake their claim.

62. See Collins, "Sibylline Oracles," 438, Jan H. Waszink, "Vergil and the Sibyl of Cumae," *Mnemosyne* 1 (1948): 43–58 at 53 n.26.

63. James O'Hara, *Death and the Optimistic Prophecy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), 105–9.

64. Kurfess, *Sibyllinische Weissagungen*, 335 on Vergil's "three years" [in Jupiter's prophecy at *Aen.* 1.265–6]. The sea, *pace* Nicholas Horsfall, "The Aeneas-legend and the *Aeneid*," *Vergilius* 32 (1986): 8–17, at 9 declaring that the Numicus as the site of Aeneas' death or disappearance is an element of the story that does not vary.

65. Austin, *Aeneidos Liber Sextus*, 233–4.

66. Kurfess, *Sibyllinische Weissagungen*, 336.

67. Kurfess at least judges 11.159–61 "quite modest" compared to the imperial prophecy at *Aen.* 6.794ff.

68. Waszink, "Sibyl of Cumae" evaluates the various poetic and prose sources for prophecies of Aeneas' adventures.

Aspects of the Sibyllists' preceding prophecy on Romulus and Remus have the potential already to have diverted readers' memories toward the accounts of Romulus' activity in *Aeneid* 1 and 6. One such detail is the repeated location of the twins' activities on "seven hills" (ἑπτὰ λόφοισι, the site first for battles [*Sib. Or.* 11.112] and then for building city walls [11.115] and yet more war [11.116: βαρὺν Ἄρη]). Such collocations echo Jupiter's prediction of Romulus' activity as "founding the walls of Mars" (*Aen.* 1.276–7: *Romulus . . . Mavortia condet / moenia*) but also the memorable expression in Anchises' prophecy to Aeneas in *Aeneid* 6, immediately following on from Romulus and in tight connection with a prediction of Rome's ambition and imperial reach: "famous Rome" (*Aen.* 6.781: *incluta Roma*) "will surround her seven hills with a single wall" (783: *septemque una sibi muro circumdabit arces*, a line copied from *Georgics* 2.535). On this point too there is a case for Vergilian "influence," since Vergil's presentation has been assigned a pivotal role in the history of this cliché, found also in Rev 17:9, as the "signature" of Rome's importance in contradistinction to other cities.⁶⁹ For Jewish Sibyllists, the associations of the number seven with completeness,⁷⁰ encouraged by Vergil's elegantly structured line (*septemque una . . .*), could be an extra motivation to emphasize the seven hills here.⁷¹

If we are persuaded that there is a non-accidental cluster of Vergilian intertexts from *Aeneid* 1 and 6 in these prophecies of Rome and Troy in *Sibylline Oracles* 11 before the prophecy about Vergil himself, the question then arises as to what kind of larger point could be cued by such potentially multifaceted attention to Vergil in this (presumed Jewish) part of the collection. Phrases from the *Aeneid* are not used in Vergilian order, and none come from Vergil's Sibyl-figure: moreover, pro-Roman elements from the relevant *Aeneid* passages, such as celebration of Augustus or of Rome's fame, are in our Sibylline prophecies dropped in favor of a repeated warning about Egyptian insurrection (*Sib. Or.* 11.117, 120–1). I therefore judge that the Sibyllists took Vergil's prophetic passages not as pure "influence" but as provocation to lay their own claim to the predictions of "Trojan Rome." This is not the only part of the extant *Sibylline Oracles* where Vergilian interaction can be posited—Lightfoot judges Vergil's detailed portrait of the underworld (with Sibyl as guide) a not-implausible influence (alongside Christian sources) on the finale of *Sibylline Oracles* 2.⁷² However, in Book 11, the passage about Vergil himself, in the obvious rewriting of Book 3's prediction of Homer, brings thematic significance to preceding Sibylline echoes of lines from Aeneas' meeting with the Sibyl and encounter with Anchises in the underworld, the most intratextual part of the *Aeneid*.

It is helpful in this context to point to the connection that Ellen Oliensis has discovered between Vergilian intratextuality and reflection on the medium of Sibylline verse. "Sibylline syllables" are memorably presented in *Aeneid* 3.344–52 as prophecies written

69. Caroline Vout, *The Hills of Rome: Signature of an Eternal City* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), especially 74–86. Lightfoot, *Sibylline Oracles*, 447 compares Rev 17:9 with other apocalyptic images of Rome.

70. See first the references in Vout, *Hills of Rome*, 63 n.28.

71. Also for the 'seven-mouthed Nile', *Sib. Or.* 11.254–5, παρὰ χεύμασι Νείλου / ἑπταπόροις), Kurfess compared *Aen.* 6.800 (*septemgemini . . . ostia Nili*).

72. Lightfoot, *Sibylline Oracles*, 141–2, 502–5, 514 (but cautiously phrased as "a connection") regarding the arrangement of sinners in the underworld, in *Sibylline Oracles* 2.

on leaves and blown by the wind into disorder, as well as (in *Aeneid* 6.43–4) a plurality of voices from the hundred entrances to her cave, texts which in *Aeneid* 6 are then “stabilized” into a prophecy of Rome that Aeneas promises the Sibyl to preserve for future generations (*Aen.* 6.72–3). Tracking internal connections between passages of the *Aeneid* has been found to yield “a story about the making of the poem” as a practice of joining *disiecta membra* (scattered fragments) of other texts including Vergil’s own.⁷³ My own suggestion is that Vergil is conversely used in *Sibylline Oracles* 11 to “authorize” the intertextual and intratextual practice of the Sibyllists of the Roman period. Their use of prior *Sibylline* texts, among others, within new prophecies is thereby claimed to be on par with the activity of the foremost Roman poet.

If, as I now suggest, foregrounding Sibylline intratextuality through Vergil calls attention to the broader compositional methods of the Sibyllists, our inquiry implicates wider issues relating to the continued composition and circulation of Sibylline oracles in the early Imperial period,⁷⁴ let alone the “literary” qualities of the *Sibylline Oracles*⁷⁵ and broader questions regarding allusions to Latin literature in this and other Greek literature of the Imperial period,⁷⁶ which I cannot hope to answer here. The next, concluding section pursues only the ramifications of this study for the construction of the Sibylline authority.

Ramifications: the intratextual and intertextual Sibyl

As a repetition (with difference) of the prophecy on Homer in *Sib. Or.* 3, the prophecy of Vergil’s work in *Sib. Or.* 11 accentuates wider comparisons, initially between the two prophecies of the fall of Troy and then between other aspects of the two Sibylline books. In both details and in broader structures, Book 11 seems to be patterned after Book 3. Striking correspondences between these sets of oracles include: a world history at least as far back as the Tower of Babel (*Sib. Or.* 3.98–104 and 11.6–18); oracles on Alexander and his successors (3.381–400, 11.186–231); long series of oracles against various non-Jewish nations (3.300–380, 433–544, 11.172–85, 277–314) including apostrophe of a nation as a woman (3.785–808 of Judea, 11.277–97 of Egypt), and a concluding “sign-off” from the Sibyl that asserts her utterance of truth (3.809–29, 11.315–24).

Re-examined in this framework, Book 11 emerges overall as a clear response to the earlier Book 3. Counterpoints of detail include the only other use in the corpus of the Sibylline coinage ψευδόπατρις, at 11.40, in relation to the great leader Moses’ pretended Egyptian origin (whereas the use of the term in 3.420 contributed to the discrediting of the greatness of Homer). Counterpoint passages: the Sibyllists’ account of the punishments

73. Ellen Oliensis, “Sibylline syllables: the Intratextual *Aeneid*,” *PCPS* 50 (2004): 29–45.

74. See e.g. Mark D. Usher, “*Teste Galba cum Sibylla*: Oracles, *Octavia*, and the East,” *CP* 108 (2013): 21–40, 21–23 for review and some speculation about interactions between different branches of Sibylline prophecy.

75. On this question, see first the introduction of Lightfoot, *Sibylline Oracles*.

76. In another article I pursue the suggestion in Lightfoot, *Sibylline Oracles*, 190–1 and 397 (*ad Sib. Or.* 1.1.94: ὕδωρ ἔσται ἅπαντα καὶ ὕδασι πάντ’ ἀπολείται) of a possible allusion to Ovid *Met.* 1.292: *omnia pontus erat, derant quoque litora ponto.*). On the broader question, see now the introduction of Jolowicz, *Latin Poetry*.

to fall on Egypt (11.277–314) recalls the imagery of reversed fortunes prominent in Book 3's oracle against Rome (3.350–60). Further, Book 11's concluding portrait of the Sibyl echoes from the sphragis of Book 3 her denial of craziness and assertion of complete knowledge of past and future, even as the new sign-off gives her a very different profile, perhaps closer to the interplay of association with and denial of contemporary figures of worship in Books 4 (Apollo) and 5 (Isis).⁷⁷ Announcing (11.315): "Now I will go to Pytho and rocky Panopeia" brings the Sibyl provocatively closer to, though not identifying with, the priestess inspired by Apollo⁷⁸ rather than, as in Book 3, claiming to have been informed by God and Noah. Still, in concluding Book 11, the Sibyl returns to the idea that someone reading her books (βίβλοις) will understand her command of the truth, against charges of mindless frenzy in the grip of divine possession (11.318–21).⁷⁹

Although the compilatory or editorial composition of the "books" of the *Sibylline Oracles* should make us reluctant to generalize about the political sympathies of broad swathes of their oracles, we can at least observe that (a) although never "pro-Roman," Book 11 is not "anti-Roman" in the way that Books 5 and 8 consistently are, and (b) it is distinctly "pro-Vergilian" in its reading of Roman mythical history and in its prophecy of Vergil's activity. It therefore seems that *Sib. Or.* 11, which most modern scholars judge to have been composed soon after Vergil's death, seeks to appropriate Vergilian prestige along with the cachet of the Cumaean Sibyl because they are firmly linked in the minds of the Sibyllists. In other words: Vergil's distinctive use of/association with Sibylline prophecy elevates his cultural authority beyond that of Homer for the Sibyllists, and, in a move not unlike those in some pagan Hellenistic and Roman texts, the Jewish Sibyl makes Vergil's rivalry of Homer a vehicle for her own claims to inspiration and universal importance.⁸⁰ Thus, while the passage on Homer in *Sib. Or.* 3 emphasized his mortality, against contemporary ideas of Homer's divinity, the Sibylline reference to Vergil in Book 11 casts him in terms we would have expected for Homer. Vergil is a bard (11.163: ἀοιδός) whose wisdom will be acknowledged by everyone, and by whom the *cosmos* will be educated.

When the *Sibylline Oracles* are viewed as a snapshot of a diachronic tradition, the distinctive repetition in other Books of lines and passages from the foundational Book 3 works to expose the problem of what the Sibyllists regard as "external" or "other" to the Sibylline genre they are developing. The reference to Homer as author in Book 3 is a

77. On prophetic rivalry in the early centuries CE as backdrop to the Sibylline personas of Books 4 and 5, see Olivia Stewart Lester, *Prophetic Rivalry, Gender, and Economics: A Study in Revelation and Sibylline Oracles 4 - 5* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2018), 165–8.

78. Jane Lightfoot, "Polytheism in the *Sibylline Oracles*," in *The Gods of Greek Hexameter Poetry: From the Archaic Age to Late Antiquity and Beyond* (ed. James J. Clauss, Martine Cuypers and Ahuvia Kahane; Stuttgart, Franz Steiner Verlag, 2016), 315–41 at 338 notes the Sibyl's travel to Delphi "only for her true nature to be revealed".

79. With this passage's take on the semi-contrasting, semi-confirmatory relationship between speech, writing and evidence of truth, compare Cicero's observation on rationality implied by Sibylline acrostics, at *De div.* 2.54.111–12.

80. This Vergilian reception is however also a precursor to the Christian "theological" elevation of Vergil, from Constantine onwards, arising from the interpretation of *Eclogue 4* as a "messianic" prediction of Christ.

form of allusion masquerading as intertext (insofar as the Sibyl constructs their relationship as dependence in the other direction) which seeks to account for this work's verbal and metrical recourse to Homer on both deliberate and unconscious levels. The Sibylline allusions to Vergil likewise masquerade as intertexts (the Sibyl looking to Vergil for reference to "her own" words recorded in his books). At the same time, however, the prophecy of Vergil's activity is a genuine Sibylline intratext "surpassing" the earlier prophecy about Homer, which effectively comments on Vergil's reputation as the Roman Homer as a status properly deriving from the Sibyl herself.

This analysis of Book 11 not only offers a new sense of how the Jewish Sibyllists exploited mutual interactions of evolving Sibylline traditions in the Roman world. It also emphasizes the importance of the Jewish Sibylline literature as a body of work that foregrounds the complexity of authorizing strategies and the picture of hybrid cultural interaction across the ancient Mediterranean world especially after the third century BCE. The study of Jewish Greek literature in particular, which negotiates a variety of power differentials from the Hellenistic to Roman Imperial eras, still has great capacity to benefit from a focus on forms of intertextuality, as a means of signaling both place in and independence from a dominant cultural tradition.

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