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Sibylline Oracles 1-2

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A Socio-Rhetorical Analysis of the Development and Function
of the Noah-Flood Narrative in *Sibylline Oracles* 1-2

Timothy Beech

Thesis submitted to the Faculty of Theology, Saint Paul University, in partial
fulfilment of the requirements for the Ph.D. (Th.)

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A SOCIO-RHETORICAL ANALYSIS OF THE DEVELOPMENT AND FUNCTION OF
THE NOAH-FLOOD NARRATIVE IN *SIBYLLINE ORACLES* 1-2

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this dissertation is a socio-rhetorical exploration of the development and function of the narrative of Noah and the Flood in *Sibylline Oracles* 1-2. As such, it entails three major emphases: 1) a 21st century western methodology (socio-rhetorical analysis) which is used to examine, on the one hand, 2) a diverse body of Judeo-Christian (but guised as Greco-Roman) literature (the *Sibylline Oracles*) that emerged primarily during the Second Temple period, and on the other, 3) how a traditional and textual resource (the Genesis flood narrative) has been developed and used within this body of literature to further the particular rhetorical purpose of the Sibyl. Thus, throughout the course of this dissertation, a contribution will be made to the scholarship on each of these three aspects in a number of innovative ways.

First, a contribution will be made to the ongoing development of socio-rhetorical analysis, and in particular, as to how it pertains to our understanding of rhetorolects (rhetorical discourse types). Based on our analysis of the discourse and major rhetorical *topoi* of *Sibylline Oracles* 1-2 in relation to the *topoi* of other similar ancient Mediterranean discourses, it will be suggested that the current socio-rhetorical understanding of rhetorolects should be broadened to better reflect not only early Christian discourse, but the discourse of the entire ancient Mediterranean generally. For early Christians enacted their own discourse through reconfiguration of other rhetorical discourses from other Mediterranean cultures. This is especially clear in the *Sibylline Oracles*, which seems to be an interweaving of various Jewish, Christian, Greco-Roman, and possibly even Gnostic and Babylonian threads of discourse.

In particular, we will affirm the insight in early explorations of socio-rhetorical analysis that the early Christian rhetorical discourses described by Vernon K. Robbins are primarily specific localizations of more general ancient Mediterranean discourse types. Such a position contrasts with recent work in socio-rhetorical analysis in which Christian texts become normative for identifying rhetorolects.

The case in point for this dissertation concerns both the similarities and differences between the discourses to which the *Sibylline Oracles* are most often compared—Judeo-Christian apocalyptic discourse and Greco-Roman Sibylline discourse (in addition to the discourse of Greco-Roman oracles generally)—both of which seem to exhibit the same array of major rhetorical *topoi*, while articulating these *topoi* in remarkably different ways. These differences in articulation stem in large part from the different social locations out of which these discourses emerged, and naturally result in significantly different religious responses to their contemporary social and cultural worlds. The similarities, however, suggest that what we find in Judeo-Christian apocalyptic discourse and Greco-Roman Sibylline (oracular) discourse are two distinct localizations of a single, more generic, ancient Mediterranean discourse type—which we will refer to in this dissertation as mantic discourse.

Second, the implications of this discussion for future development of the socio-rhetorical understanding of rhetorolects are immediately apparent in exploring the Sibylline books as rhetorical productions. To date, the majority of studies carried out on the *Sibylline Oracles* have been through the lenses of various historical-critical methodologies. These have certainly yielded important results. But there has been little, if any, in the way of rhetorical analysis, and nothing that focuses on rhetorical *topoi* and their use in discourse. Accordingly, it will be demonstrated that a socio-

rhetorical approach is able to offer fresh insight into a number of long-debated questions concerning the *Sibylline Oracles* and their contemporary literary environment.

To this end, it will be suggested that what we find in *Sibylline Oracles* 1-2 (and the *Sibylline Oracles* generally) is a unique blending of two specific localizations of mantic discourse—namely Judeo-Christian apocalyptic discourse and Greco-Roman oracular discourse. These two localizations blend together to create a discourse that was truly unique among the variegated discourses of the ancient Mediterranean. Significantly, this remarkable blending of these two specific localizations of mantic discourse revitalized the character of the Sibyl by incorporating her into the biblical tradition of prophets. By broadening her appeal to encompass both the Greco-Roman and Judeo-Christian worlds, the text gives the Sibyl's words an authority and a malleability that makes it possible to adapt her image in a changing rhetorical context—a transformation that would allow her words to continue to speak authoritatively well into the Middle Ages and beyond.

Third, and finally, one of the rhetorical resources that contributed to this transformation was the Noah-Flood narrative—a rhetorical resource that, while permeating the majority of the *Sibylline* books, is used most extensively in *Sibylline Oracles* 1-2. Within the discourses of the Second Temple period, the flood narrative as a topographically and topologically rich rhetorical resource appears to have been of greatest interest to two very different sets of authors: a) the writers of priestly rhetorlect, who saw within the flood narrative a compelling resource that could give legitimacy to their argument for the 364-day calendar and its accompanying implications for religious feasts and festivals, as well as the establishment of pre-

Mosaic precedents for various legal prescriptions and priestly responsibilities; and b) the writers of apocalyptic rhetorlect, who saw within the flood narrative the authoritative typological resources necessary to give credence to their own prophecies of cataclysmic destruction and global re-creation. Significantly, the writers of *Sibylline Oracles* 1-2 seem to draw upon most fully and contribute to this apocalyptic trajectory.

However, unlike a number of apocalyptic texts that seem to blend both priestly and apocalyptic rhetorlects (e.g. the Enoch Astronomical book), the writers of *Sibylline Oracles* 1-2 actually subordinate the elements of priestly rhetorlect within the flood narrative by eliminating them completely. They appear to do so in order to emphasize the elements of apocalyptic rhetorlect that more usefully contribute to their mantic agenda. This is particularly evident when we consider the prominent ideological positioning of the flood narrative within the argumentation of *Sibylline Oracles* 1-2. To this end, the Sibyl actually grounds her argument for an imminent end of the world within her ideologically reworked flood narrative. This is particularly evident when we consider the re-articulation of expected Sibylline *topoi* in light of the apocalyptic resources inherent to the flood narrative and its revolutionist, rhetorical response to the world.

In short, during a period in the Greco-Roman world when the influence of the Sibyl slowly had begun to fade, the rhetorical resources inherent to the flood narrative, when made kinetic by the Sibyl, were able to once again infuse her character and her words with vitality, urgency, and authority. While this may have been an unlikely blending of Greco-Roman and Judeo-Christian rhetorical resources, it can certainly be seen to have had far-reaching effects.

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INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this project is a socio-rhetorical analysis of the development and function of the narrative of Noah and the Flood as it appears in the first and second books of the extant collection of *Sibylline Oracles*. As such, it entails three major emphases: 1) a 21st century western methodology (socio-rhetorical analysis) which will be used to examine 2) a diverse body of Judeo-Christian (but disguised as Greco-Roman) literature (the *Sibylline Oracles*) that emerged primarily during the Second Temple period; and, more specifically 3) how a traditional and textual resource (the Genesis Flood Narrative) has been used within this body of literature—namely, how the writers of this body of material developed and used the ancient Hebrew Bible narrative about Noah and the Flood (albeit a Greek translation of it) towards a particular rhetorical purpose.

In order to help set the context for this study, chapter 1 will summarize briefly the place of the Sibyl and the authority and importance of her oracles in the Greco-Roman world, the adaptation of the character of the Sibyl and the medium of the Sibylline oracle by Jewish and Christian writers during the Second Temple period, and a brief overview of the scholarly analysis that has characterized the study of the *Sibylline Oracles* (*Sib. Or.*) to the present. In doing so, it will be seen where scholarship has brought us in terms of our understanding of the *Sibylline Oracles*, and how this project will build on this previous study—particularly in terms of our understanding of the relationship between the extant collection of Jewish and Christian *Sibylline Oracles* and their non-extant Greco-Roman counterparts, as well as the relationship between the *Sibylline Oracles* and apocalyptic, to which it is often compared. In particular, it will be suggested that a socio-rhetorical approach to the

discourse of the *Sibylline Oracles* is able to offer fresh understanding to this complex body of literature and to these long-debated questions.

Chapter 2 will outline the methodology that will be used to examine the *Sibylline Oracles* and their use and development of the Noah-Flood narrative—namely, the interpretative analytics called socio-rhetorical analysis (SRA) as it has been articulated and developed by Vernon Robbins and other members of the Rhetoric of Religious Antiquity group of the Society of Biblical Literature. In particular, a summary will be given of the three major emphases that have characterized SRA to date: the analysis of “textures”; the analysis of discourse types and the *topoi* that are characteristic of them; and the blending of these discourse types. In short, it will be seen that since SRA views texts as complex interweavings of religious, social, cultural, ideological, linguistic, and historical phenomena, it is as such an ideal method for use in the analysis of a complex body of literature like the *Sibylline Oracles*.

The next three chapters (3-5) will set the critical groundwork for our analysis in chapter 6 of the development and function of the Noah-Flood narrative in *Sib. Or.* 1-2. Chapter 3 deals specifically with the analysis of major rhetorical *topoi* in *Sib. Or.* 1-2, and specifically how these *topoi* have come to be articulated in relation to Greco-Roman Sibylline discourse, Judeo-Christian apocalyptic discourse, and other ancient Mediterranean discourse, as well as how these *topoi* have come to be blended uniquely in the *Sibylline Oracles*.

Chapter 4 will explore the major implications of the *topos* analysis of chapter 3 for our understanding of the discourse of *Sib. Or.* 1-2, as well as for the continued development of socio-rhetorical method. First, it would seem that there is a need to broaden the understanding of rhetorolects outlined by Robbins to better reflect the

rhetorical discourse of the ancient Mediterranean generally, and not simply that of early Christianity. The second implication concerns the assessment of which rhetorical discourse is being used in *Sib. Or.* 1-2—to which end we will suggest that what we generally find in the *Sibylline Oracles* is a distinctive blend of two specific localizations of mantic discourse—namely, Judeo-Christian apocalyptic discourse and Greco-Roman oracular discourse. And the third concerns the ideological reconfiguration of what we describe in chapter 1 as Sibyllism—particularly as it can be seen in the ideological shift that occurs in the rhetorical form and function of the *Sibylline Oracles* in relation to their Greco-Roman counterparts.

In order to narrow towards the focus of the dissertation, chapter 5 will examine briefly the use of the Noah-Flood narrative in the Second Temple period, and specifically its use within priestly and apocalyptic rhetorlect, since it is into this context that the writers of *Sib. Or.* 1-2 develop and exploit the wealth of rhetorical resources inherent to the Flood narrative. In particular, it will be suggested that although the originary story of Genesis 6-9 appears to have been written with a primarily priestly agenda in mind, and that, consistent with this agenda, it was used in a number of examples of priestly rhetorlect, it also came to be used prominently in a number of examples of apocalyptic rhetorlect. From here, we will highlight the relation of the Flood narrative (in the shape of various rhetorlects) to the discourse of *Sib. Or.* 1-2.

Finally, in chapter 6, the insights and the groundwork of the previous chapters will come together in the socio-rhetorical analysis of the development and function of the Noah-Flood narrative in *Sib. Or.* 1-2.

A number of other *Sibylline Oracles* could have been selected for analysis (books 3, 4, 7, 8, or 11), since they all make use of the Flood narrative, but the

developing and nuancing of the flood narrative is the most extensive in *Sib. Or.* 1-2. In the course of analysis, it will be seen how the Sibyl has used the resources of the Noah-Flood narrative in the development of the *topoi* inherent to the *Sibylline Oracles* (and, by extension, the discourse characteristic of Sibylline oracles), and that, in the course of so doing, she has established an extensive typology between the Noah-Flood narrative and her own prophetic message (i.e. between Noah and the Sibyl; between Noah's rhetoric and the Sibyl's rhetoric; and between various aspects of the ends and beginnings of the different world ages, among others). In short, it will be seen how the Noah-Flood narrative has contributed to a lasting and fundamental change in both the character of the Sibyl herself, and in the discourse of her oracles—changes which helped to renew and to extend the waning vitality of the Sibylline oracles and the reach of their authority well into the Renaissance.

There are at least two major objections that can be raised concerning the structure and layout of the thesis. The first concerns whether or not a full chapter devoted entirely to methodology (chapter 2) is warranted. In favour of this, we will offer a fairly comprehensive summary of socio-rhetorical analysis for the following reasons: 1) although SRA is finding increased acceptance within the scholarly community, it still remains relatively unfamiliar to many of those within the guild of biblical and pseudepigraphical studies; 2) although there have been at least two fairly comprehensive "guides" on SRA,¹ they both date from 1996, and as such, do not take into account the more recent developments in SRA—such as the inclusion of *topoi* analysis and conceptual blending; and 3) one of the objectives of this project will be to

¹ V. K. Robbins, *The Tapestry of Early Christian Discourse: Rhetoric, Society and Ideology* (London: Routledge, 1996); *idem*, *Exploring the Texture of Texts: A Guide to Socio-Rhetorical Interpretation* (Valley Forge: Trinity Press International, 1996).

make a contribution (not only to the study of the *Sibylline Oracles*, but also) to the development of socio-rhetorical analysis. As such, a thorough summary of the method will be necessary to show where this contribution (to the understanding of rhetorolects) fits into the socio-rhetorical discussion.

Second, there may be some concern that in a thesis entitled “A Socio-Rhetorical Analysis of the Development and Function of the Noah-Flood Narrative in *Sibylline Oracles* 1-2,” that concentrated discussion of the Noah-Flood narrative does not occur until the penultimate chapter of the thesis. This delay, however, while recognized, is simply to allow for the proper setting of the analytical context—which must be clear for a proper analysis of the Sibyl’s reworked flood narrative to take place.

In short, then, it can be seen that the structure of the discussion within this dissertation will naturally proceed from most general to most specific: from discussion of the method (chapter 2), to a general application of the method to the discourse of *Sib. Or.* 1-2 (chapters 3-4), to a socio-rhetorical discussion of the use of the flood narrative within the priestly and apocalyptic rhetorolects of the Second Temple period (chapter 5); and then finally to the discussion of the development and function of the Noah-Flood narrative in *Sib. Or.* 1-2 and its pertinent implications (chapter 6).

CHAPTER 1: THE *SIBYLLINE ORACLES* AND WHAT SCHOLARSHIP HAS MADE OF THEM

Oracles, Sibyls, and *Sibylline Oracles*

The importance of prophetic oracles (in both written and oral form) for the people of the ancient Greco-Roman world cannot be underestimated. Understood to be messages from the gods in human language,² they were, on a personal level, able to provide advice and solutions regarding the important issues and questions of the inquirer—what to do in the case of a particular illness, whom to marry, whether or not to travel, what sacrifice to make in order to appease the gods, what might happen in the future, etc. As D. S. Potter has pointed out, “Books of prophecy gave people some indication as to what would happen in the future, enabled them to understand the present, to see the events of their own time as part of a divine plan, and allowed them to share the experiences of their ancestors.” As such, the “prophecies that were found in books enabled their readers to travel through time and share, at second hand, the excitement of meeting a divinely inspired individual who had something to say that concerned their own lives.”³

On a national level, prophecies were often written down, collected, and then consulted and interpreted in times of national crisis or disaster—what ritual prescriptions and sacrifices should be undertaken to turn away the wrath of the gods, whether or not to go into battle, who should be declared king, where to found a city, etc. They were considered to be the words of the gods, and as such, were, when interpreted correctly, capable of guiding the nation through difficult times.

² David E. Aune, *Prophecy in Early Christianity and the Ancient Mediterranean World* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983), 23.

³ D. S. Potter, *Prophets and Emperors: Human and Divine Authority from Augustus to Theodosius* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1994), 58.

Furthermore, on a political level, they were, as a means of propaganda, particularly effective in impressing the working-class population, and as such were extensively used in the realm of civic politics in order to sway public opinion on important matters.⁴ Their appeal, however, did not end with the common folk, but extended well into the educated and governing classes. Nero, for instance, is said to have consulted the Delphic oracle. Plutarch actually served as a priest at the oracular shrine at Delphi. And in several places in his writing, Plato also speaks favourably of the value and merit of oracles.

Even the great heroes of Greco-Roman mythology are said to have sought advice from the various oracles. Apollodorus (*Library* 2.4.12), for instance, tells us that Hercules had consulted on several occasions the oracle at Delphi regarding quite a number of matters; Cadmus is said to have also consulted Delphi about where to found a city (3.4.1); and the Greek flood hero Deucalion and his wife Pyrrha are said to have consulted the oracle shortly after the deluge in order to determine what course of action to take in order to repopulate the earth (Ovid, *Metam.* 1.379-417).

Though the priests and priestesses who presided over the various oracular shrines would usually deliver their oracle in oral form, many of these were written down and compiled into what might be described as oracular books, which soon came to function as an important feature of the literate environment of the Roman Empire. As Potter has noted:

They provided material for discussion, comfort, and information both for members of the highest aristocracy and for the humble inhabitants of the cities and countryside. Their importance stems from the fact that they provided a format for the communication of difficult, interesting, and, at times, dangerous

⁴ M. P. Nilsson, *Cults, Myths, Oracles, and Politics in Ancient Greece* (New York: Cooper Square Publishers, 1972), 123.

ideas in such a way that people who lived in a world where the constant intervention of divine powers was taken as a fact of life could relate to them. They provided a constant reminder to people in all walks of life that the gods or God cared about them, their present circumstances, and their future.⁵

Although the credibility of oracles was occasionally questioned by such prominent literary figures as Cicero, Aristotle, and Aristophanes, and although their prominence and prestige was subject to a considerable amount of flux over the centuries, their popularity only really began to wane as the gods who inspired them began to fade away. In fact, oracles were so numerous and popular that the second century satirist Lucian of Samosata wrote that “at present oracles are delivered by every stone and every altar that is drenched with oil and has garlands and can provide itself with a charlatan—of whom there are plenty” (*Deor. conc.* 12).⁶

Initially the giving of oracles was usually associated with several prominent seers in the ancient world (i.e. Bakis, Musaeus⁷), or several prominent oracular shrines (Delphi, Dodona, Didyma, etc.); however, by the time of Augustus, the most celebrated type of oracle was that associated with the dread and revered Sibyl.⁸

The Sibyl and the Importance of Sibylline Oracles in the Greco-Roman World

Traditionally, the Sibyl has been regarded as a long-lived prophetess of antiquity who was known primarily for her ecstatically induced forecasts of doom and gloom

⁵ Potter, *Prophets and Emperors*, 96-97.

⁶ Cf. P. de Villiers, “Oracles and Prophecies in the Graeco-Roman World and the Book of Revelation in the New Testament,” *Acta Patristica et Byzantina* 8 (1997), 80.

⁷ T. Bulfinch, *The Age of Fable* (Garden City: Nelson Doubleday, 1968), 201, describes Musaeus as a “semi-mythological personage who was represented by one tradition to be the son of Orpheus. He is said to have written sacred poems and oracles.”

⁸ Potter, *Prophets and Emperors*, 78: “In earlier ages, the Sibyl had been but one of a number of similar figures (and probably not the most interesting of them); in the centuries after Augustus she emerged as the pre-eminent prophet whose words were thought to have survived from earlier times.”

concerning the rise and fall of individuals and nations. At the oracular shrine at Delphi, the Sibyl appears to have been in some way connected to the priesthood (Pausanias, *Descr.* 10.12.1), but on a general level it seems that she usually represented “a free, non-priestly prophetic guild.”⁹ As Parke has argued, to the Greek mind, “the Sibyls were divinely inspired prophetesses who spoke discursive utterances, usually forecasts, in spontaneous ecstasy.” Their words were “pious ejaculations, not answers to enquirers.”¹⁰

The Sibyl is first mentioned by Heraclitus, about 500 B.C.E., who described her as speaking “with frenzied lips,” and “uttering words mirthless, unembellished, unperfumed,” and yet reaching “to a thousand years with her voice through the god.”¹¹ Following Heraclitus, she is subsequently referred to by Euripides, Aristophanes, and Plato. In general, it can be said that the Sibyl was a well respected cultural figure who drew the praise of several prominent figures of the Greco-Roman world. As Potter has summarized it, “The Sibyl was thought by Ammianus to be remarkable, her works were studied by Pausanias, cited as authoritative by the author of a commentary on Alcaeus, and discussed with approval by Plutarch. Aelius Aristides and Dio Chrysostom also cited her with respect as a prophet whose words were to be treated with honor.”¹²

According to legend, there were up to ten Sibyls that existed in ancient times: Sambethe the Persian, the Libyan, the Delphian, the Italian, the Erythrean, Phyto the Samian, Deiphobe (also called Amaltheia, Erophile, and Taraxandra) the Cumean, the

⁹ E. Schürer, *The History of the Jewish People in the Age of Jesus Christ: 175 BC–AD 135*, (3 vols.; rev. and ed. G. Vermes, F. Millar, and M. Goodman; Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1986), 3:619.

¹⁰ H. W. Parke, *The Oracles of Zeus* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1967), 159.

¹¹ Cited in Plutarch, *Pyth. Orac.* 397A

¹² Potter, *Prophets and Emperors*, 96.

Hellespontian, the Phrygian, and Abounaea the Tiburtian.¹³ Among the most celebrated of these ten Sibyls seem to have been the Cumaean (perhaps in large part due to the influence of Virgil and Ovid), the Erythrean,¹⁴ who is said to have authored some of the extant Sibylline material (book 3) and who was held in great esteem by Augustine, and the Tiburtian, whose potential, although relatively unrealized in antiquity, eventually came to play a prominent role in the Middle Ages.¹⁵

The Sibyl was a peculiar figure among those of antiquity, and ancient sources recount a number of fascinating tales and snippets about her life and character, which, at the very least, give us some indication as to how she was culturally perceived and revered by the ancients. In his immortal epic recounting the adventures of the Trojan hero Aeneas, for example, Virgil describes the Cumaean as “the dread Sibyl, on whom the seer of Delos [that is, Apollo] breathes his great mind and soul, and unfolds the days to be” (*Aen.* 6.10-12). Apparently, she would frequently reveal her inspired mysteries by writing them down in the leaves on the floor of her cavern, but concerned about a wind rushing in and blowing the leaves into disarray (and thus leaving the oracle irreparably lost), Aeneas entreated her to prophesy his fate with her own lips (6.74-76). Virgil graphically recounts her delivery of an oracle on the fate of Aeneas and his people: “suddenly her countenance grew and her hue changed, and her tresses fell disordered: her bosom panted, her wild heart swelled with fury, and she

¹³ See, for example, Lactantius, *Inst.* 1.6 and lines 31-49 of the Prologue to the *Sibylline Oracles*.

¹⁴ Cf. Schürer, *History*, 3:620; H. C. O. Lanchester, “The Sibylline Oracles,” in *The Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament* (ed. R.H. Charles; Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1913), 2:369; H. N. Bate, *The Sibylline Oracles: Books III-V* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1918), 10.

¹⁵ B. McGinn, “*Teste David cum Sibylla*: The Significance of the Sibylline Tradition in the Middle Ages,” in *Women of the Medieval World: Essays in Honour of John H. Mundy* (ed. J. Kirshner and S. F. Wemple; Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1985), 24.

grew taller to the view, and her voice rang not of mortality, now that the god breathed on her in nigher presence" (6.47-50). Furthermore, Virgil writes that the Sibyl, "yet intolerant of Phoebus' [i.e. Apollo's] will, raved in limitless frenzy, straining to exorcize the mighty god from her soul: but all the more he curbed her foaming lips to weariness, subdued her fierce heart, and moulded her to his constraint" (6.77-80). Thus in such manner, it is said that "the Cumaean Sibyl chanted her mysteries of fear from her shrine, and moaned from out the cavern, shrouding truth in darkness" (6.98-100).

At the time of the voyage of Aeneas, the Sibyl is said to have already lived seven hundred years, with the expectation that she would live another three hundred. The story behind her remarkable old age, as recounted in the lines of Ovid, is said to derive from a poorly thought-out deal she had made with Apollo in which she was granted her request to attain birthdays as numerous as the grains of dust on her cavern floor. Unfortunately for her, the folly in her request was that she failed to stipulate that her body remain forever young. Thus, it is said that in the ensuing years her body would wither away to nothing, leaving only her voice—the feature by which she would be remembered throughout the subsequent generations.¹⁶

There is also a legendary tale of how the Sibyl appeared before Tarquinius Priscus, who, at the time, was the ruler of the Roman state, and offered to sell him nine books of her prophetic oracles. At first the ruler refused to purchase them, and so the aged woman went away and burned three of them. A short time later she returned to the ruler and offered him the remaining six books for the price of the original nine, but she was again refused, and went away and burned three more of the books. The Sibyl soon returned to the ruler a third time and offered him the remaining three books for

¹⁶ Ovid, *Metam.* 14.135-153.

the original amount of the nine. This time, however, the ruler's curiosity was aroused and he did not so eagerly refuse the woman, but read the books and was amazed by them. They were said to have contained the destiny of the Roman state, and as such, were kept in the temple of Jupiter Capitolinus, and were allowed to be inspected only by special officers, who, on certain occasions, would consult them and interpret selected oracles to the people.¹⁷

The fame and reverence attributed to the Sibyl was not an isolated phenomenon but was widespread throughout the Greco-Roman world. This can be seen, for example, in the tourist industry that eventually came to be associated with the Sibyl's cave at Cumae,¹⁸ and in the initiative of various regions such as Gergis, Erythrae, and Cyme, which, from time to time, imprinted the image of the Sibyl on their coins.¹⁹ The fame and reverence surrounding the figure of the Sibyl was indeed a widespread phenomenon, as were the prestige and authority attached to her written words—or, at the very least, the words written in her name—which Lanchester rightly describes as “pre-eminent among all similar literature in the authority which they wielded and the fascination which they exercised over the minds of men.”²⁰ In particular, the words of the Sibyl were considered to have been the inspired words of Apollo. They are referred to by Flavius Vopiscus as “the Books of Fate” (*Div. Aurel.* 19.1),²¹ and as such, are said to contain the “unchanging fate of the Commonwealth” (19.6). Likewise, in the same text (19.4), the consultation of the commands of the Sibyl is equated to making “use of the benefits of Apollo,” just as the heeding of the words of

¹⁷ Lactantius, *Inst.* 1.6.

¹⁸ Potter, *Prophets and Emperors*, 79-80.

¹⁹ Potter, *Prophets and Emperors*, 75 and 79.

²⁰ Lanchester, “The Sibylline Oracles,” 2:368.

²¹ Flavius Vopiscus, *The Deified Aurelian*, in vol. 2 of *Scriptores Historiae Augustae* (trans. D. Magie; LCL; repr., Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1980-1991).

the Sibyl is likened to submitting “to the bidding of the immortal gods.” Silius Italicus (*Pun.* 9.57-65) records that Paulus, in a passionate speech, proclaimed that the Sibyl, acting as Apollo’s priestess, and in her foreknowledge, proclaimed to the world contemporary events. This is not unlike what Varro meant when he said that the Sibyl “uttered prophecies which benefited mankind not only while she lived, but even after she had passed away” (*Rust.* 1.3).

From these it can also be seen that there is an intrinsic connection between the words of the Sibyl and political authority. Unfortunately, however, only a few fragments of the original Greco-Roman Sibylline Oracles have survived, and these only as a result of their incidental citation in a few second hand sources (such as Pausanias and Plutarch). Despite this lack, however, it does seem that enough has been written about them by the writers of antiquity to give us a good impression of their scope of influence, and their importance to the people of the ancient Mediterranean world. Suetonius, for instance, recounts how Augustus (in 12 B.C.E.) had collected some 2000 or more prophetic oracles, written in both Latin and Greek, from throughout the empire, and then destroyed by fire all but those considered to be of authentic Sibylline origin. These he stored in two gilt coffers under the pedestal of the Palatine Apollo, presumably to be consulted in times of personal or national crisis.²²

As Bate explains, their official state use “appears to have been twofold: they were consulted in times of danger, for predictions and warnings, and on the occurrence of unprecedented portents or disasters, for the discovery of appropriate rituals of propitiation.”²³ Even though the official collection of Sibylline Oracles at Rome was

²² Suetonius, *Aug.* 31.

²³ Bate, *The Sibylline Oracles*, 12.

kept secret and only consulted on important occasions, it seems that there also existed private collections of Sibylline verses which circulated without official sanction, and thus without control, and which could thus be complemented or increased at pleasure. Due to the improper use often made of them, private possession of such oracles eventually became illegal, and as such, they were frequently confiscated or destroyed by the authorities.²⁴

In general, the data—the well known stories and cultural understandings of the Sibyl, her prophecies, and her character; her fame and prestige throughout the Greco-Roman world; the authority of her words to instruct on both personal and national matters; the tourist industry that came to be associated with her; the imprinting of her image on various coins; the presence of a Sibylline canon at Rome; and the circulation of numerous private (and illegal) collections of Sibylline verses—all seem to suggest, in at least some sense, a notion or phenomenon in the public sphere which we might tentatively call “Sibyllism.” It seems there was a particular (and quite popular) cultural and ideological understanding (and mystique) associated with both the words and message of the Sibyl. That is, there was a certain cultured expectation as to the form, style, content, and “feel” of Sibylline verses, in addition to the character of the figure of the Sibyl herself.

Not only was there an expectation and understanding of how she should speak, but also of the themes, matters, and topics about which she should speak. As we have already mentioned, these were generally understood to include: previously undisclosed divine knowledge (which frequently pertained to the fates of individuals and nations); divine insight into the future; matters relating to politics and imperial authority; and

²⁴ Schürer, *History*, 3:627.

occasional predictions of various catastrophic events. There was not necessarily a certain expectation as to what the Sibyl would say about these matters, only that the Sibyl should speak about them.

This popular cultural and ideological understanding of the Sibyl and her words, in addition to this public fascination, would no doubt account for the apparently widespread and unsanctioned creation of any Sibylline forgeries (or modifications to existing oracles) which entered into circulation, and which achieved widespread and eager acceptance among the public—much to the displeasure of the Roman authorities. Thus, it is easy to see how “Sibyllism was by nature especially liable to exploitation in the interest of religious propaganda.”²⁵ So long as one’s words, written in the name of the Sibyl, conformed to the cultural and ideological understanding associated with her, they would be eagerly accepted in the public sphere—even if they offered imperial critique, or had the potential to undermine the imperial regime or any other prominent institution or authoritative structure.

Of course, a nation like Rome would understandably favour the specific oracles that favoured it, and it does seem that on a national level there was a fairly comprehensive evaluation process designed to weed out any forgeries; but in the common public sphere, the process of evaluation does not appear to have been as rigid. So long as one remained consistent with these topics, and did not stray too far from them, one would be able to create and put into circulation an oracle that might reasonably acquire a certain degree of acceptance. Indeed, Bate has summarized this phenomenon well:

²⁵ Schürer, *History*, 3:627.

The official adoption of the Sibyl by Rome herself, and the atmosphere of awe and secrecy with which her oracles were surrounded, lent to her name and words a prestige which it would be difficult to over-estimate; Rome completed and sealed with imperial authority the process of canonization which had begun in the folk-lore of Hellas. Hence came, in large measure, the temptation to utilize for purposes of propaganda a name so venerable. Since the Sibyl was a prophetess, any prophecy could be safely ascribed to her without fear of disproof; since she was so eminent and so ancient, any prophecy which could gain currency under her name was sure of eager and widespread acceptance.²⁶

Eventually, the success which Sibylline oracles achieved in their day led Jews, and later Christians, seeking to defend or propagate their faith, "to compose or adapt verses which they put forth under the name and authority of the ancient mysterious prophetesses known as the Sibyls, and in which lessons of monotheism and the like were put forth as the real teaching of the inspired teachers of the most hoar antiquity."²⁷

The Adaptation of the Sibyl and the Medium of Sibylline Oracles by Jews and Christians during the Second Temple Period

By the second century B.C.E., Jews of the Greco-Roman world had begun to adapt the medium of the Sibylline oracle for their own purposes; and by the middle of the first century C.E., Christian writers had begun to do the same, attributing their own words pseudonymously to the dread and revered Sibyl. As Marcel Simon has phrased it, "Les auteurs anonymes de ces écrits se dissimulent sous le masque des voyantes païennes; ils utilisent le prestige durable dont bénéficient les Sibylles dans tout le monde méditerranéen et le mettent au service du Dieu unique qui leur dicte leur

²⁶ Bate, *The Sibylline Oracles*, 15.

²⁷ Lanchester, "The Sibylline Oracles," 2:368.

message. Ils connaissent la technique et le contenu des Oracles Sibyllins païens et n'hésitent pas à leur emprunter certains éléments."²⁸

In some cases, this adaptation was simply a Jewish or Christian reworking of existing Greco-Roman oracles; in others, the adaptation was an original and creative intertwining of Greco-Roman themes, topics, values, and emphases with Jewish and/or Christian ones. Of the present collection that appears to have been put together and transmitted by Christians, Momigliano asserts that "we find Christian forgers using Jewish forgeries and adding their own more or less for the same purposes: anti-Roman feeling, apocalyptic expectations, and generic reflection on past history presented as future."²⁹

The Sibylline oracle was not the only form of Greco-Roman literature adapted by Jews and Christians during the Second Temple period. They had also adapted Greek epic poetry (Philo the Epic Poet, Theodotus), Greek drama (Ezekiel the Tragedian), and Greek philosophical systems (Aristobulus), among others. However, this adaptation of the figure of the Sibyl and her oracles is particularly remarkable when we consider that she could in many ways be likened to the witch of Endor described in 1 Sam 28—particularly in the way she was able to communicate and consult with the dead (cf. *Aen.* 6)—a practice which the Hebrew Bible explicitly condemned (Deut 18:9-14). Apparently, however, such image problems were not insurmountable, and the Sibyl came to be recognized by Jews and Christians as a credible prophetess to the Greco-Roman world, just as Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and the twelve minor prophets

²⁸ M. Simon, "Sur quelques aspects des Oracles Sibyllins juifs," in *Apocalypticism in the Mediterranean World and the Near East: Proceedings of the International Colloquium on Apocalypticism: Uppsala, August 12-17, 1979* (ed. D. Hellholm; Tübingen: Mohr, 1983), 219.

²⁹ A. Momigliano, *On Pagans, Jews, and Christians* (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 1987), 138.

had spoken reliably for the Jews. In the course of this adaptation, both the figure of the Sibyl and the content of her oracles underwent a drastic transformation.

First, the Sibyl came to be regarded as a daughter-in-law of Noah (*Sib. Or.* 3.827; 1.289-290; Prologue 33)—a detail that not only incorporated her into the biblical tradition,³⁰ but that gave her words “a very respectable authority, a quasi-Jewish (but not a totally Jewish) character, and an endless possibility to refer to the past as if it were the future.”³¹

Second, although the ecstatic nature of her prophecies was retained, the source of her inspiration was drastically altered. No longer did she derive her inspiration from Apollo, but instead drew her words directly from YHWH. Thus the Sibyl is able to proclaim:

I am not an oracle-monger of false Phoebus, whom vain
men call a god, and falsely described as a seer,
but of the great God, whom no hands of men fashioned
in the likeness of speechless idols of polished stone.³²

Third, the themes of which she spoke, although incorporating a large amount of Greco-Roman flavour (i.e. names of various Greco-Roman deities, places, figures and myths), were qualitatively different, in that they were superseded and supplemented by topics of Jewish and Christian interest, such as the Temple, Christ, ethical exhortation, universal history, and the judgment that will transpire at the end of the world. As Schürer has described it,

³⁰ J. R. Bartlett, *Jews in the Hellenistic World: Josephus, Aristeas, the Sibylline Oracles, Eupolemus*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 36.

³¹ Momigliano, *Pagans*, 139.

³² οὐ ψευδοῦς Φοίβου χρησμηγόρος, ὃν τε μάταιοι
ἄνθρωποι θεὸν εἶπον, ἐπεψεύσαντο δὲ μάντιν·
ἀλλὰ θεοῦ μέγαλοιο, τὸν οὐ χεῖρες ἔπλασαν ἀνδρῶν
εἰδωλοῖς ἀλάλοισι λιθοξέστοισιν ὅμοιον (4.4-7).

The Jewish or Christian authors allowed the ancient Sibyl to speak in Greek hexameters and in the language of Homer. The contents serve throughout to carry a religious message. The Sibyl prophesies the fate of the world from the beginning to the author's own time in order to link it to threats and promises for the near future. She reproaches the gentiles with the sin of their idolatry and with their wickedness, and exhorts them to do penance whilst there is time, for fearful chastisements will overtake the unrepentant.³³

Fourth, in a rather interesting development, her chastity and purity, virtually impeccable in traditional Greco-Roman descriptions of the Sibyl, seem to have been brought into disrepute in the Christian Sibyllines and in the Christian additions to Jewish Sibyllines. Thus, she is described as one who, although very wealthy, "shut out those in need," "committed lawless deeds knowingly" (2.340-345), and who, not being concerned with marriage, has "known innumerable beds" (7.153). Moreover, she describes herself as "utterly faithless," and as one who will one day be devoured and destroyed by the fire (7.157-158). These questionable lifestyle choices, however, would naturally lead to an opportunity for the Sibyl to cry out for repentance (2.344-345)—a feature that no doubt could be used as a rhetorical tool to give her message greater impact: if the greatly revered Sibyl required forgiveness from the Judeo-Christian God, in addition to a change in lifestyle, how much more so the rest of the population?

This adaptation of the Sibyl and the Sibylline medium seems to have been particularly useful for certain apologetic purposes. According to Bate, the Jewish oracles always had one of two motives, and sometimes both: the propagation of the Jewish faith and the enhancing of the credit and status of Judaism.³⁴ Likewise, as

³³ Schürer, *History*, 3:628.

³⁴ Bate, *Sibylline Oracles*, 18.

Potter explains, "texts of this sort were useful to a people forced to explain the standing of their faith in the face of persecution."³⁵

From a different angle, Nilsson has argued that the Jewish and Christian Sibyllines preach "hatred against Rome and foretell its fall." They were in this sense "a means of expression of the hatred of the underdog, the oppressed and the disinherited, of their hate of the ruling state and society. They contributed not a little to the dissolution of the Roman state."³⁶ Of course, it must be pointed out that this assessment is a little simplistic and only partially correct, as the *Sibylline Oracles* exhibits both positive and negative attitudes toward Rome. Needless to say, however, the underlying observation that the writers of the *Sibylline Oracles* offer commentary on their contemporary political situations is certainly well-founded.

In either case, the testimony of one of the premiere prophetic figures in the Greco-Roman world would certainly provide an almost instant credibility or authority to whatever words were placed on her tongue. That this adaptation of the medium proved effective can reasonably be assumed when we consider the size and the scope of the extant collection of Jewish and Christian *Sibylline Oracles* and its influence within the early and medieval church. As Collins has noted, "They stand as a striking monument to the attempt of Jews to find common ground with gentiles throughout the Near East in the Hellenistic age and formed a bridge to Hellenic and Roman culture which played a notable part in the growth of Christianity."³⁷

³⁵ Potter, *Prophets and Emperors*, 77.

³⁶ Nilsson, *Cults*, 142.

³⁷ J. J. Collins, "The Development of the Sibylline Tradition," *ANRW* 20.1:456.

The State of the Question Regarding the *Sibylline Oracles*

Scholarly work on the extant collection of *Sibylline Oracles* has been performed on a variety of levels and from a variety of angles. In the following section we will summarize briefly some of the important and pertinent insights that scholarship has shown us regarding the composition, nature, and content of the *Sibylline Oracles*. Included among these will be: 1) pre-critical perspectives of the Sibyl and her oracles in the Early Church and the Middle Ages; 2) the complexity of the textual tradition; 3) the *Sibylline Oracles*' redaction history and the modern collections; 4) the relationship between Greco-Roman Sibylline oracles and the extant Judeo-Christian Sibyllines; 5) the relation of the *Sibylline Oracles* to apocalyptic; 6) the *Sibylline Oracles* as conveyers of historical commentary; and 7) a brief mention of other types of study related to the *Sibylline Oracles*.

Some of these previous studies will be highlighted because they are directly germane to the issue at hand, and will thus provide a basis on which the present endeavour will interact and build. Others are mentioned simply to give indication as to the types of study that have been carried out on the *Sibylline Oracles*, and that thus give an indication as to the context into which the present endeavour might fit. In particular, it will be suggested that the bulk of study to date has been carried out through the perspective of various historical-critical methodologies. These have been helpful and have revealed much about the complexity of the *Sibylline Oracles*. However, it will be suggested that a socio-rhetorical approach to the text might prove useful in building on these previous results, and in providing possible answers to some of the questions pertaining to the *Sibylline Oracles* previously left unanswered.

Pre-critical Perspectives of the Sibyl and Her Oracles in the Early Church and the Middle Ages

From the second century onward, Christian writers display tremendous respect for the Sibyl and cite the Sibylline books extensively as the words of an authoritative pre-Christian, Greco-Roman prophetess of Christ. The only exception here is the writer of *Herm. Vis.* 2.4 which mentions only the Sibyl, but not the Sibylline books. In this he is "exceptional among the patristic writers in not taking the Sibyl as an inspired pagan witness for Christian doctrine but rather identifying with the Church the old woman who is described as appearing to be the Sibyl."³⁸

The first Christian citations of the extant Sibyllines are by Justin Martyr and Clement of Alexandria in the mid-second century C.E., but this was certainly only the beginning of the Christian use of these oracles. As Potter has summarized,

By the end of the century she is beginning to appear even more prominently. Theophilus of Antioch quotes extensive sections from sibylline oracles in a work addressed to a man named Autolycus, and, slightly earlier, Athenagoras had noted the value of sibylline prophecy in his address to Marcus Aurelius... On the Latin side, Tertullian gave the Sibyl a prominent place just before the climactic exposition of Christian doctrine in one version of his *Apology*, written in 197. This is evidently no more than the tip of an oracular iceberg.³⁹

Of all the early church fathers, Lactantius seems to have cited them the most extensively—at least fifty-seven citations of one line or more.⁴⁰ Most of these references appear to come from books 3 and 8, although he also referred occasionally to books 1-2 and 4-7, in addition to some other Sibylline material which does not appear in the extant collection (*Inst.* 7.19.2 and 7.24.2). Ogilvie suggests that

³⁸ Schürer, *History*, 3:650. See also D. P. O'Brien, "The Cumaean Sibyl as the Revelation-bearer in the Shepherd of Hermas," *J ECS* 5 (1997): 473-496.

³⁹ Potter, *Prophets and Emperors*, 87.

⁴⁰ M. L. Guillaumin, "L'exploitation des 'Oracles Sibyllins' par Lactance et par le 'Discours à l'assemblée des saints,'" in *Lactance et son temps* (ed. J. Fontaine and M. Perrin; Paris: Beauchesne, 1978), 187.

Lactantius' use of the *Sibylline Oracles* was one of his "most original weapons" to give evidence, from the "pagan" side, of the truth of Christianity.⁴¹ To this end, Lactantius makes use of the *Sibylline Oracles* in two main ways. First, in *Inst.* 7, he paraphrases them extensively to give an apocalyptic view of the future of the world; and second, in *Inst.* 4, he illustrates biblical texts with carefully chosen extracts from *Sib. Or.*⁴²—using them, in some sense, as a type of second canon.

Augustine also seems to have found value in the *Sibylline Oracles*, and in fact even includes an excerpt from *Sib. Or.* 8.217ff in *Civ.* 18.23. In addition to his citation of the words of the *Sibylline Oracles*, Augustine also speaks favourably of the Erythraean Sibyl, in particular about her strong stance against the worship of false or fabricated gods, and suggests accordingly that "she is clearly to be assigned to the number of those who belong to the City of God."⁴³

In general, it can be said that their value to the early church seems to have been at least two-fold. First, they are used in apologetics as an authoritative pre-Christian witness to the truth of Christianity. As O'Brien has observed, "Several prominent Apostolic and early Church Fathers regarded the pagan Sibyl as a pre-Christian witness to the truth of Christian prophecy. In their incorporation of the Sibyl figure, these doctors of the Church held that two modes of divine inspiration operated before the advent of Christianity, the prophets for the Hebrews and the Sibyl for the Greeks."⁴⁴ Second, they appear to have functioned to varying degrees as a type of second canon that was useful in the formulation and justification of certain points of doctrine. As Potter has noted, if "material was outside the canon, this reader would

⁴¹ R. M. Ogilvie, *The Library of Lactantius* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1978), 28.

⁴² Ogilvie, *The Library of Lactantius*, 31.

⁴³ Augustine, *Civ.* 18.23.

⁴⁴ O'Brien, "The Cumaean Sibyl as the Revelation-bearer," 495.

comb it for glimmerings of true doctrine, something that Christians did with sibylline oracles. Such a reader might also be interested in arriving at an additional canon of prophets who could be trusted at a secondary level as guides or supplements."⁴⁵ In fact, by approximately the sixth century C.E., the anonymous Christian author of the prologue to the *Sibylline Oracles* was able to write confidently:

they expound very clearly about Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, the divine Trinity, the source of life; about the incarnate career of our Lord and God and Saviour Jesus Christ; the birth, I mean, from an unchanging virgin, and the healings performed by him; similarly his life-giving passion and resurrection from the dead on the third day and the judgment which will take place, and the retribution for what we have done in the life. In addition to these things they clearly recount the things which are expounded in the Mosaic writings and the books of the prophets, about the creation of the world, the fashioning of man and the expulsion from the garden and again the new formation. In manifold ways they tell of certain past history, and equally, foretell future events, and, to speak simply, they can profit those who read them in no small way.⁴⁶

This same interest in the Sibyl and her oracles filtered its way down and into the Middle Ages. To a large degree, knowledge of the Sibyl was conveyed to the medieval audience through the texts of Lactantius, Augustine, and other church fathers, but also through partial translations of the *Sibylline Oracles* into Latin.⁴⁷ In the course of this transmission, it appears as if the Sibyl did not lose, but in fact only strengthened, the influence she exerted over the minds and emotions of her audience. As McGinn has pointed out, most medieval theologians, following Augustine's lead, were convinced that the Sibyl had met sufficient criteria to ensure her salvation.⁴⁸ Significantly, she is referred to with approval by Thomas Aquinas in a number of places as a pre-Christian

⁴⁵ Potter, *Prophets and Emperors*, 60-61.

⁴⁶ Prologue to *Sib. Or.* 15-28. For a more comprehensive overview of the use of the Sibyl by the early Church, see B. Thompson, "Patristic Use of the Sibylline Oracles," *RR* 6 (1952): 115-136.

⁴⁷ McGinn, "*Teste David cum Sibylla*," 17.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 20.

prophetess who was able to predict “much that was true of Christ.”⁴⁹ In fact, Aquinas even went so far as to say, “It is probable that the mystery of our redemption had been revealed to the Gentiles for many generations before Christ’s coming, as is evident from the Sibylline prophecies.”⁵⁰ Similarly, Abelard used the Sibyl not only as a prophetess of Christ but also as “an argument to Heloise for the possibility of women leading a life of special religious dedication... he even claimed that the Sibylline verses express the full total (*summa*) of Christian belief in the Savior.”⁵¹

The influence of the Sibyl during the medieval period and beyond, however, was not limited solely to the jurisdiction of the theologians and their apologetic writings, but also made its way into other areas of public and private life. About 1550, for example, selections from the Sibylline texts were even set to music by Orlando di Lasso with “daring chromatic invention” in his *Prophetiae Sibyllarum*.⁵² (Remarkably, the practice of putting Sibylline texts to music is one that has continued even to the present day.⁵³) But perhaps the most famous use of all is the prominent place which the guild of Sibyls occupies in Michaelangelo’s masterful painting in the Sistine Chapel (1508-1511)⁵⁴—a total of twelve Sibyls in all, a number intentionally designed to correspond to the twelve apostles and the twelve tribes of Israel.

In fact, the fascination with the Sibyl was so strong that this period even spawned its own series of authoritative Sibylline oracles. Most popular among these new Sibylline texts was the *Sibylla Tiburtina*, which McGinn describes as a “medieval

⁴⁹ ST 2-2.172.6 ad 1; 2-2.2.3 ad 7.

⁵⁰ *De Verit.* 14.11 ad 5.

⁵¹ McGinn, “*Teste David cum Sibylla*,” 18-19.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 20.

⁵³ See, for instance the album, M. Figueras, J. Savall, et al, *El cant de la Sibil·la* (Astree, 2002).

⁵⁴ For a more complete summary of the career of the Sibyl in the Middle Ages, see McGinn, “*Teste David cum Sibylla*”: 7-35.

best-seller,” since over one hundred and thirty Latin manuscripts are known, about 30 before the thirteenth century—not to mention versions of the text in Greek, Carshunic (Arabic in Syriac letters), Ethiopic, and Arabic proper.⁵⁵ Like its Judeo-Christian predecessors from around the turn of the era, this Sibylline text (or perhaps more properly, tradition, since it exists in a number of versions) shares the same interest in apocalyptic themes, such as a description of the future events of the end, imminent destruction and catastrophe, cosmic struggles, and the emergence of the last world emperor.

Another popular medieval Sibylline text was the *Prophecy of the Erythraean Sibyl*, which, like the *Sibylla Tiburtina*, was also pregnant with apocalyptic content, and which was thus of great use to a number of the major apocalyptic authors of the later Middle Ages. As McGinn has summarized: “Arnold of Villanova cited it on the approaching end of the Moslem religion; Angelo of Clareno found in it a prophecy of the career of the *pastor angelicus*, Celestine V; and John of Roquetaillade frequently referred to it.”⁵⁶

The authority and reverence attributed to the Sibyl, though strong during the first sixteen hundred years of the common era, would eventually meet with scepticism during the Renaissance and the Enlightenment. And even though there were some who tried to defend her from the accusations of her critics,⁵⁷ in the end the challenge to her authority and credibility would prove to be overpowering, and her remarkable career would finally come to an end. As McGinn has stated, “Having made this

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 24.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 34.

⁵⁷ W. Whiston, *A Vindication of the Sibylline Oracles* (London, 1715); and J. Floyer, *The Sibylline Oracles Translated from the Best Greek Copies, and Compared with the Sacred Prophecies* (London: R. Bruges, 1713).

adaptation from pagan prophetess to Christian seer, the Sibyl was not able to effect a similar transition to the modern world when the acids of historical criticism exposed the pious forgeries of the past.” Even so, he continues, on “the mythic level at least, the image of the Sibyl, the wise and beautiful old woman inspired by God, deserves our respect and consideration.”⁵⁸

The Complexity of the Textual Tradition

The matter of the transmission of the Sibylline manuscripts through the ages is complex, and the discernment of the various trajectories of transmission is extraordinarily difficult. The extant manuscripts appear mainly in Greek (although there are also several Latin versions as well). These manuscripts generally derive from three distinct groups: ϕ , which contain oracles 1-8 (although lacking 8.487-500) preceded by an anonymous prologue; ψ , which also contains books 1-8, although with book 8 preceding books 1-7, and without the anonymous prologue; and Ω , which contains books 9 (which is made up of book 6, a verse from book 7, and 8.218-428), 10 (which is identical to book 4 of the other manuscript groups), and 11-14 (which are oracles foreign to the other two groups). Since books 9 and 10 consist of material already found in the first collection, they are generally not included in modern collections and translations. Despite their omission, however, the numbering of books 11-14 is retained, resulting in the odd numbering scheme of the collection: 1-8 and 11-14.⁵⁹

⁵⁸ McGinn, “*Teste David cum Sibylla*,” 35.

⁵⁹ J. J. Collins, “The Sibylline Oracles,” in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha* (ed. James H. Charlesworth; Garden City: Doubleday, 1983), 1:321.

Of these three groups, the most important manuscripts appear to be: A: Codex Vindobonensis hist. gr. XCVI 6 (15th century), P: Codex Monacensis 351 (15th century), B: Codex Bodleianus Baroccianus 109 (15th century), S: Codex Scorialensis II Σ 7 (15th century), and D: Codex Vallicellianus gr. 46 (16th century) in group ϕ ; F: Codex Laurentianus plut. XI 17 (15th century), R: Codex Parisinus 2851 (15th century), L: Codex Parisinus 2850 (1475), and T: Codex Toletanus Cat 99.44 (c. 1500) in group ψ ; and M: Codex Ambrosianus E64 sup. (15th century), Q: Codex Vaticanus 1120 (14th century), V: Codex Vaticanus 743 (14th century), H: Codex Monacensis gr. 312 (1541), and Z: Codex Hierosolymitanus Sabaiticus 419 (14th century) in group Ω .⁶⁰

There are several discrepancies between these manuscripts, and scholars have accordingly sought to produce a derivative (but hypothetical) proto-text. The first edition of the *Sibylline Oracles* was published by Sixtus Birken in Basel in 1545. It was a partial edition based on manuscript P, and as such contained only books 1-8. The first complete edition was that of Alexandre, who in 1841 published books 1-8 and the prologue, and in 1853 books 11-14.⁶¹ To date, the two most notable editions are those of Rzach⁶² and Geffcken.⁶³ More recently, Kurfess has also produced a Greek text and German translation of books 1-11,⁶⁴ although the older texts by Rzach and Geffcken are generally preferred by most modern scholars.

Of these, opinion is divided as to which is the better edition. Kurfess considers the earlier text of Rzach to be the best critical edition, but also values the text of

⁶⁰ Collins, "The Sibylline Oracles," 1:321.

⁶¹ C. Alexandre, *Oracula Sibyllina* (2 vols.; Paris: F. Didot, 1841 and 1853).

⁶² A. Rzach, *Oracula Sibyllina* (Leipzig: Freytag, 1891).

⁶³ J. Geffcken, *Die Oracula Sibyllina* (GCS 8; Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1902).

⁶⁴ A. Kurfess, *Sibyllinischen Weissagen* (Berlin: Tusculum Bücherei, 1951).

Geffcken for its religio-historical apparatus.⁶⁵ According to Collins, Rzach in general prints emendations more readily, giving a smoother text—however, one which on occasion improves the manuscripts unduly. Geffcken, on the other hand, is much more cautious, and his work is more extensively informed by other oracular literature.⁶⁶ Accordingly, Collins based his influential translation in Charlesworth's *Old Testament Pseudepigrapha* on Geffcken's text, but has consulted the others where appropriate. Likewise, the editors of Schürer also prefer the critical merit of Geffcken's text, but note that along with the texts of Rzach and Kurfess, it is marred by the incorporation of dubious hypothetical readings into the text.⁶⁷

It is not the nature of the present endeavour to offer a systematic critique of the various editions, or to produce a separate attempt at the creation of a hypothetical prototype. Rather, it will suffice to say that for our purposes here, we will generally follow the text of Geffcken, since it is generally preferred by the majority of the scholarly community. Naturally, consideration will also be given to the texts of Rzach and others (e.g. Kurfess) if important textual discrepancies arise.

Redaction History and the Modern Collections

The complex history of Sibylline redaction and the wide range of sources on which the *Sibylline Oracles* drew has long been recognized. In fact, emphasis on redaction has characterized the majority of studies done on the *Sibylline Oracles*.

Study of redaction was done to a limited extent by many of those offering translations of the *Sibylline Oracles* into modern languages. Lanchester, for example,

⁶⁵ A. Kurfess, "Christian Sibyllines," in *New Testament Apocrypha* (ed. E. Hennecke and W. Schneemelcher; trans. R. McL. Wilson; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1965), 2:703.

⁶⁶ Collins, "The Sibylline Oracles," 1:321.

⁶⁷ Schürer, *History*, 3:628.

in his preliminary remarks to his translation of *Sib. Or.* 3-5, attempted to isolate the various Jewish strata of these books and thereby weed out any minor Christian glosses.⁶⁸ A similar breakdown and attempt to date the various parts of books 3-5 can be seen in Bate's translation as well.⁶⁹ Likewise, Kurfess has sought to isolate the Christian elements of the *Sibylline Oracles*. These Christian sections as he identifies them can be seen in his contribution to Hennecke and Schneemelcher's *New Testament Apocrypha*, where they are presented independently of the Jewish strata. According to Kurfess, the Christian sections can basically be identified as follows: 1.323-400; 2.34-55, 149-347; 6.1-28; 7.1-162; and 8.1-500.⁷⁰

Others have approached the issue of Sibylline sources and redaction more microscopically, offering specific articles and commentary on isolated segments of the text and so demonstrating the *Sibylline Oracles'* complex strata. Rowley, for example, has isolated the small section of verses from 3.388-400 and sought to show (based on certain emendations to the text and his interpretation of it) that this section (and by extension, the whole section between 3.97-828) stems from a period sometime after 129 B.C.E., but earlier than 122 B.C.E.—a proposed revision to the date of 140 B.C.E. generally assigned to the bulk of book 3 by many of the scholars who preceded him (Geffcken, Lanchester, Charles, etc.).⁷¹ Likewise, Nolland has suggested two distinct time slots into which 3.265-294 could best be fitted (a post 70 C.E. situation or the early Maccabean period) and from these concluded that what we find in these verses is “an expression of hope, thrown up by the dark days of the early Maccabean period,

⁶⁸ Lanchester, “The Sibylline Oracles,” 368-406.

⁶⁹ Bate, *Sibylline Oracles*, 21-27.

⁷⁰ Kurfess, “Christian Sibyllines,” 2:703-745.

⁷¹ H. H. Rowley, “The Interpretation and Date of Sibylline Oracles III 388-400,” ZAW 44 (1926): 324-327.

that a Messianic figure of the royal tribe would soon come as the eschatological Temple restorer.”⁷² Likewise, O'Neill has suggested that the reference in 5.256-259 to “an eminent man from heaven who was to return again to the place where he spread his hands on the fruitful wood” need not, as it normally is, be regarded as a Christian interpolation (see below), for it is better understood as “a genuine Jewish oracle about a great teacher [i.e. the Teacher of Righteousness from Qumran] who had been crucified and who was to come again as judge.”⁷³

Recently, Collins has offered a more complete, but hypothetical, unravelling of the Sibylline tradition that incorporates the salient insights of early twentieth-century Sibylline scholars. Collins' hypothesis may basically be summarized in relative chronological order as follows.

Sibylline Oracles 4 in its present form is a Jewish book that dates from the late first century C.E., and as such, is by no means the oldest book among the extant collection. It does, however, contain a substantially older oracle in lines 49-101. This older oracle, which may very well have had Greco-Roman origins, can be dated tentatively to the early third century B.C.E., and as such, is probably the oldest passage in the extant Sibylline corpus.⁷⁴

Sibylline Oracles 3 is the oldest complete book of the collection. In its final form it is entirely Jewish, with the possible exception of line 776, which appears to be a Christian gloss.⁷⁵ It is composite in nature, and is generally understood in terms of

⁷² J. Nolland, “*Sib. Or. III. 265-94, An Early Maccabean Messianic Oracle*,” *JTS* 30 (1979): 158-166.

⁷³ J. C. O'Neill, “The Man from Heaven: *Sib. Or. 5.256-259*,” *JSP* 9 (1991): 87-102.

⁷⁴ Collins, “Development,” *ANRW* 20.1:427-429; *idem*, “The Place of the Fourth Sibyl in the Development of the Jewish Sibyllina,” *JJS* 25 (1974): 365-380.

⁷⁵ Schürer, *History*, 3:635, suggests that this is possible but prefers a textual emendation, conjectured by Alexandre, in order to preserve the Jewish flavour of the verse.

three stages of development: the main corpus, which is made up of lines 97-349 and 489-829, and should be dated somewhere between 163-45 B.C.E.; a middle section, lines 350-488, which are, with the possible exception of 350-380, Gentile oracles added to *Sib. Or.* 3 in order to bring it up to date and to enhance its Sibylline aesthetic; and lines 1-96, which are generally considered to be part of a different book.⁷⁶

Sibylline Oracles 5 in its final form is also an entirely Jewish book, with the exception of a Christian interpolation in lines 256-259.⁷⁷ It is comprised of four central oracles (52-434) which can possibly be dated to the end of the first century C.E., as well as an introduction (1-51) and conclusion (435-530), which are presumably of a later date.⁷⁸

Sibylline Oracles 11 is also an entirely Jewish book in its present form, although dating of the book has been disputed. Collins has suggested a probable date at around the turn of the era, and has suggested that it was the only early Sibylline book which clearly originated in Alexandria. It differs, however, from the other early Egyptian *Sibylline Oracles* (3 and 5) with its pro-Roman stance, and as such is an important reflection of the diverse political attitudes within Egyptian Judaism.⁷⁹

Sibylline Oracles 1-2, which function together as one unit, was originally a Jewish oracle that underwent extensive Christian redaction. These Jewish and Christian components can basically be understood as follows: 1.1-323; 2.1-33, 154-176, and 187-189 are Jewish; 1.324-400; 2.34-153, 177-186, 190-192, 238-251, and 311-312 are Christian; and 2.193-237, 252-310, and 313-347 are either Christian or

⁷⁶ Collins, "Development," *ANRW* 20.1:430-436. For a radically different and exceptional view, see V. Nikiprowetsky, *La troisième Sibylle* (Paris: Mouton, 1970), who argues for the basic unity of book 3.

⁷⁷ For an exception to this view, see O'Neill, "The Man from Heaven," 87-102.

⁷⁸ Collins, "Development," *ANRW* 20.1:436-438.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 438-441.

Jewish, but probably Jewish. The Jewish stratum dates from approximately the turn of the era, somewhere between 30 B.C.E. and 70 C.E., while the Christian sections date somewhere around 150 C.E. The Jewish stratum of *Sib. Or.* 1-2 probably originated in Asia Minor, and as such, forms one of the very few documents which have survived from the Jews of Asia Minor of this period.⁸⁰

Sibylline Oracles 8 is another example of a Jewish oracle that underwent later Christian redaction. The book can basically be divided into two sections: 1-216 and 217-500. The first section is entirely Jewish, with the exception of 194-216, which is either Christian or a Christian modification of existing Jewish material. It dates to about 175 C.E. and appears to be a composite of various oracles. Collins suggests that lines 131-138 were clearly written in Egypt but that the remainder could have been written anywhere in the Near East that was subject to Rome. As such, *Sib. Or.* 8.1-193 should not necessarily be regarded as a unified product of a single time and place. The second section, with its interest in christology, is obviously Christian. It is a collection of various oracles, though not necessarily of separate authorship. It certainly dates to before the end of the third century C.E. (since it was known to Lactantius), although indications of the book's provenance are otherwise negligible.⁸¹

Sibylline Oracles 6 is more a hymn than it is an oracle. It managed to find its way into the collection, even though it lacks any reference whatsoever to the Sibyl. Along with *Sib. Or.* 7, it is the only Sibylline book composed *de novo* by Christians. It is cited by Lactantius, and thus affords a date prior to 300 C.E., although apart from that citation, indications of date and provenance are wanting.⁸²

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 441-446.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 446-448.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 449.

Sibylline Oracles 7 contains a portion of material which may very well have been taken over from Greco-Roman Sibyls; however, in its final form, the content is clearly Christian,⁸³ albeit of a syncretistic nature.⁸⁴ It is also cited by Lactantius, thus indicating a date before 300 C.E., although there is nothing within the text to suggest a more specific date. The provenance of the book is also elusive, although it might tentatively be located somewhere in Syria or the Jordan Valley.⁸⁵

Books 12-14 form a coherent tradition that is in continuity with book 11. Like several of the earlier oracles, they originated in Egypt, probably Alexandria. Like book 11, books 12-14 are Jewish in authorship,⁸⁶ but relatively devoid of theological interest. The dating of these books has proven difficult, although generally speaking, they are relatively late,⁸⁷ with *Sib. Or.* 14 possibly running into the sixth or seventh century C.E.⁸⁸

Thus, as we have seen from this brief overview of the development of the Sibylline tradition, the twelve extant books of the *Sibylline Oracles* are by no means a consistent and unified body of literature of a single author, time or place. Rather, it must be stressed that they are a collection of independent and heavily redacted oracles that were only eventually gathered into three distinct, but overlapping, manuscript groups as their importance and relevance became recognized.

In the course of their transmission, the modern collection of *Sibylline Oracles* has come to be arranged and numbered in a certain order (1-8, 11-14), although, as

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 450.

⁸⁴ J. G. Gager, "Some Attempts to Label the *Oracula Sibyllina*, Book 7," *HTR* 65 (1972): 91-97.

⁸⁵ Collins, "Development," *ANRW* 20.1:449-451.

⁸⁶ For an exceptional view, see Bate, *Sibylline Oracles*, 17, who seems to regard books 11-14 as largely Christian.

⁸⁷ Collins, "Development," *ANRW* 20.1:452-454.

⁸⁸ W. Scott, "The Last Sibylline Oracle of Alexandria," *CQ* 9 (1915): 223-224.

we have seen, it must be emphasized that this numbering is by no means reflective of the actual chronological development of these texts. As Bate has stated, "This numeration... does not represent the contents or order of any actual manuscript, but is the result of a fusion of three types of text, and is adopted merely for convenience's sake."⁸⁹ In fact, as we have already mentioned, the fusion of the manuscript groups into the modern collection as we know it (1-8 and 11-14) only came together during the last two hundred years in the work of Alexandre, and is not, as such, a product of antiquity.

The Relationship Between Greco-Roman Sibyllines and the Extant Judeo-Christian Sibyllines

In discussion of Jewish and Christian *Sibylline Oracles*, it seems to be generally assumed that they are simply a one to one reflection of their Greco-Roman counterparts, without considering how the Jewish and Christian adaptation of this authoritative medium may have changed both the form and the discourse exhibited therein. This is perhaps due in large part to the fact that very little of the Greco-Roman Sibyllines has survived, with the exception of a few fragments. As a result, the delineation of what a Greco-Roman Sibylline is, and even characterizations of Greco-Roman oracles generally, is often derived from the extant collection of Jewish and Christian Sibyllines.

Parke, for instance, on the basis of a lack of extant Greco-Roman Sibylline oracle prototypes, has assumed such a one to one correspondence under the rationale that, if Jewish (and eventually Christian) writers wanted to convince readers that their compositions were actually composed by the Sibyl, "they had to assume the literary

⁸⁹ Bate, *Sibylline Oracles*, 16.

conventions expected of a Sibyl. The matter to be conveyed was sometimes more appropriate to a Hebrew prophet, but the manner had to approximate generally to the style of a pagan prophetess.”⁹⁰ Such an assessment, however, is only an assumption that may in fact be problematic, particularly because it fails to consider how Jews and Christians may have fundamentally transformed the medium of the Sibylline oracle when they adapted it for their purposes.

Rather, it may have been the case that the Jewish and Christian *Sibylline Oracles* were quite different from their Greco-Roman counterparts, and so there exists a need to somehow create a non-circular way by which Jewish and Christian Sibyllines can be evaluated in relation to their Greco-Roman counterparts. This is especially pertinent considering that the textual evidence of Greco-Roman Sibyllines is slim, and only a couple of Sibylline fragments of Greco-Roman origin have survived—and these, only in a secondary way through citations in other sources such as Plutarch and Pausanias. Schürer points out that these citations “are brief and scanty and do not provide a sufficient idea of the content of the original oracles.” At best, what survives is only sufficient to show that the oracles often carried a gloomy political message, and that they were often grouped unsystematically into disorganized collections.⁹¹

Generally speaking, it seems that the Roman Sibylline books were quite different in character from the preserved collection of *Sibylline Oracles*, which typically predict disasters rather than prescribe solutions.⁹² (Although there are certainly occasional and indirect prescriptions in the *Sibylline Oracle*, these are usually

⁹⁰ H. W. Parke, *Sibyls and Sibylline Prophecy in Classical Antiquity* (London: Routledge, 1988), 6.

⁹¹ Schürer, *History*, 3:626.

⁹² J. J. Collins, *Seers, Sibyls and Sages in Hellenistic-Roman Judaism* (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 183.

superseded or employed in the modified interests of the Jewish and Christian writers and redactors.)

As Collins has observed, the overall impression given by the Jewish and Christian books is very different from that conveyed by the extant Greco-Roman oracles.⁹³ On a specific level, Collins has pointed out at least two “obvious” innovations of the Jewish Sibyl that appear to have been foreign to her Greco-Roman counterparts: her emphasis on moral exhortation, and, in particular, her concern with universal history—features which, he suggests, give the oracles of the standard collection their distinctive shape.⁹⁴

True, Parke has argued that, “the Sibyl does not normally start her prophecy from some point in contemporary historic time and continue straight into the future. She begins with some primevally early epoch and leads on in chronological sequence through succeeding ages.”⁹⁵ But, as we have already pointed out, Parke’s conclusion is based largely on his circular assumption that the Jewish Sibyl closely imitated Greco-Roman prototypes and not on the extant Greco-Roman fragments or on the testimonies of ancient writers. As Collins points out, this sort of *ex eventu* prophecy is seemingly absent from any extant Greco-Roman Sibylline fragments and is better attested in, and is in fact a dominant feature of, contemporary Jewish apocalyptic.⁹⁶ This is not to say that the concept of universal history was foreign to the Greco-Roman mind, for certainly it was not,⁹⁷ but only that it did not factor significantly into Greco-

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 188.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 189-190.

⁹⁵ Parke, *Sibyls and Sibylline Prophecy*, 7.

⁹⁶ Collins, *Seers, Sibyls and Sages*, 191.

⁹⁷ The concept of universal history is attested in Greco-Roman literature as early as Hesiod, *Works and Days*. For more on the concept of universal history see A. Momigliano, “The

Roman Sibyllines (or even oracles generally), which as a general rule only seem to highlight a specific moment in time.⁹⁸ As Momigliano further explains, “Pagan Sibylline oracles seldom went beyond individual events; they seldom pursued what we might call the great currents of world history.”⁹⁹

In addition to her concern for universal history, the Judeo-Christian Sibyl also differed from her Greco-Roman counterparts in her emphasis on moral exhortation, and in particular, her emphatic condemnation of idolatry, homosexuality, etc.—items which would have been inoffensive to at least some Greco-Roman audiences. Likewise, the notion of a final judgment, which was generally absent from the Greco-Roman conception of time but prominent in apocalyptic is also found in the Jewish and Christian Sibyllines.¹⁰⁰ As such, it would not be unreasonable to echo further the words of Collins that the Jewish and Christian Sibyls

transformed the pagan oracles into a new literary form, characterized by a sweeping view of universal history and a concern with ethical teaching which was alien to the pagan sibyl. The pseudonymous authors of these books were not peripheral to the tradition. It was they who rescued the sibyl from a dying culture and made her into a reputable prophet in the Christian Middle Ages.¹⁰¹

It would be overtly problematic to construct our understanding of Greco-Roman Sibylline oracles solely on the assumption that the Judeo-Christian Sibyllines would have been mirror images of their Greco-Roman counterparts (e.g. Parke), even though the Judeo-Christian Sibyllines are, for the most part, the only Sibylline oracles that remain.

Origins of Universal History,” in *The Poet and the Historian: Essays in Literary and Historical Biblical Criticism* (ed. R. E. Friedman; Chico: Scholars, 1983), 133-155.

⁹⁸ This matter will be taken up further in a subsequent chapter.

⁹⁹ A. Momigliano, “From the Pagan to the Christian Sibyl: Prophecy as History of Religion,” in *Nono contributo alla storia degli studi classici e del mondo antico* (Rome: Ediz. di Storia e Letteratura, 1992), 13.

¹⁰⁰ Collins, *Seers, Sibyls and Sages*, 191.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 197.

McGinn has jested about the unfortunate loss of all but a few fragments of Greco-Roman Sibylline verses: "Perhaps we should not lament the loss of the rest unduly. Filled as she was by the god, the Sibyl was usually too distraught to write very well or even very intelligently. Her literary productions were famed for their rough and obscure style, and... her art did not improve with age."¹⁰² However, if only just a few more of them had survived, and in some sort of complete form, we would at least have a more concrete impression of them and accordingly have a far more complete understanding of exactly how they were transformed by Jews and Christians.

From a different angle, De Villiers has suggested that "The Sibylline Oracles are eminent examples of how pagan oracular forms influenced both Jews and Christians extensively."¹⁰³ And this is certainly true to an extent; however, it must again be emphasized how Jews and Christians have to an even greater extent influenced, and in fact, transformed the oracular form and content of the Sibyl. As Collins has noted, it seems that while

sibyls and sibylline prophecy had a long and illustrious history in pagan antiquity, their influence on the Christian West was due primarily to the way the tradition was developed in the Jewish and Christian Pseudepigrapha. It is true, of course, that both Jews and Christians propagated oracles in the name of the sibyl because of her reputation in the pagan world. But in the process they changed the kind of oracles attributed to the sibyl, and thereby extended her reputation long after the gods of antiquity had faded away.¹⁰⁴

The Relation of the *Sibylline Oracles* to Apocalyptic

Although the extant Judeo-Christian *Sibylline Oracles* appear to depart significantly from their Greco-Roman counterparts, they do, by contrast, demonstrate a significant

¹⁰² McGinn, "*Teste David cum Sibylla*," 10.

¹⁰³ P. de Villiers, "Obscure Symbols in the Book of Revelation in the Light of Graeco-Roman Pagan Oracles and Prophecies," *Acta Patristica et Byzantina* 10 (1999), 78.

¹⁰⁴ Collins, Seers, *Sibyls and Sages*, 181.

degree of resemblance to much of the apocalyptic literature with which they were contemporaneous—and in particular, those that have been traditionally described as historical apocalypses.

Like the so-called historical apocalypses, the *Sibylline Oracles* contain frequent surveys of history in the form of *ex eventu* prophecy, in addition to a number of other common features such as pseudonymity, dualism, and various eschatological features, such as judgment, cataclysmic destruction, and the expectation of a definitive kingdom. These similarities were enough to lead Vielhauer to suggest (albeit with some reservations) that the Jewish Sibyllines represent “the Apocalyptic of Hellenistic Diaspora Judaism.”¹⁰⁵ Despite the similarities that do exist between the two, few have ventured to classify the Sibyllines as apocalyptic in genre but have instead given them the status of “related literature” (that is, apocalyptic only in a limited sense).¹⁰⁶ In this sense, Rowley has argued that “they are not fundamentally apocalyptic,” but do contain certain passages that are of “importance for the study of the growth and development of the ideas of the apocalyptists.”¹⁰⁷

There are important differences that distinguish it from the more conventional apocalyptic texts with which it was contemporaneous, and scholars have sought to articulate these in a number of different ways. Rowland, for instance, describes the *Sibylline Oracles* as a “parallel phenomenon to apocalyptic” but is quick to dissociate the two on the basis of the propagandistic nature of the *Sibylline Oracles*:

¹⁰⁵ P. Vielhauer, “Apocalypses and Related Subjects: Introduction,” in *New Testament Apocrypha* (ed. E. Hennecke and W. Schneemelcher; trans R. McL. Wilson; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1965), 2:600.

¹⁰⁶ J. J. Collins, “The Jewish Apocalypses,” *Semeia* 14 (1979), 46-47; and A. Y. Collins, “The Christian Apocalypses,” *Semeia* 14 (1979), 97-98 and 105.

¹⁰⁷ H. H. Rowley, *The Relevance of Apocalyptic: A Study of Jewish and Christian Apocalypses from Daniel to Revelation* (Revised edition; London: Lutterworth Press, 1963), 74 and 77.

The fact that the device is used as a means of propagating a particular religious point of view should make us a little wary of seeing it in quite the same light as the other apocalypses. It is not just that we are dealing with the peculiar phenomenon of a pagan rather than a Jewish religious authority, but also there is the difference that these oracles do not claim to be disclosures vouchsafed by the God of Israel but predictions inspired by lesser divine powers which happened to coincide with divine mysteries. Thus, while formally the Sibylline Oracles are related to Jewish apocalyptic literature, they are to be regarded as a type of religious propaganda—literature lacking some of the key elements of the apocalyptic texts.¹⁰⁸

Of course this rationale does seem flawed in at least two ways: 1) the standard collection of Judeo-Christian *Sibylline Oracles* cannot be differentiated from apocalyptic texts on the basis that they propagate a religious point of view, since apocalyptic texts by their very nature also do the same—as do all other religious texts; and 2) the observation that the *Sibylline Oracles* “do not claim to be disclosures vouchsafed by the God of Israel but predictions inspired by lesser divine powers which happened to coincide with divine mysteries” is explicitly flawed: in *Sib. Or.* 4.4-6, for example, the Sibyl is clear that she is not “an oracle-monger of false Phoebus,” but a seer of “the great God.”¹⁰⁹ Likewise, in the other oracles, this is certainly implied.

Collins, perhaps more appropriately, has sought to delineate these differences in terms of the structure of the genres themselves. Despite the similarities that exist between the *Sibylline Oracles* and the apocalypses, Collins has argued on the basis of his widely accepted definition of apocalyptic that the *Sibylline Oracles* are not apocalypses because they claim direct inspiration of the Sibyl, and thus lack any sort of heavenly mediator figure that is characteristic of apocalyptic.¹¹⁰ “In the Sibyllines, however, the supporting framework is all on the horizontal axis—the authority of the

¹⁰⁸ C. Rowland, *The Open Heaven: A Study of Apocalyptic in Judaism and Early Christianity* (London: SPCK, 1982), 21.

¹⁰⁹ See above, n. 31.

¹¹⁰ Collins, “The Jewish Apocalypses,” 46.

sibyl, the allusions to historical events, the expectation of a kingdom. The vertical axis of the apocalypses is missing. There is no interest in angels and demons or in the cosmology of the heavenly world. Consequently, the oracles lack the mystical dimension of the apocalypses, and the difference is reflected in the eschatology.”¹¹¹

From an alternate angle, Vielhauer differentiated between the two on the basis of a difference in function: “While the Apocalypses are fundamentally a conventicle-literature designed to strengthen a particular community, the Jewish Sibyllines originated as missionary propaganda writings which were turned, from the very beginning, towards those outside; their ‘Sitz im Leben’ is originally the mission of Diaspora Judaism to the heathen.”¹¹²

Schmithals has taken this idea a step further and suggested why this difference in function might necessitate a difference in apocalyptic form and content—namely, that only the apocalyptic concepts that were considered by the writers to be appropriate in a Hellenistic context were incorporated into the discourse of the various books:

The “Sibyllines” do not pursue any self-presentation of apocalyptic piety, but rather place apocalyptic motifs at the service of the comprehensive Jewish mission and propaganda. Apocalyptic conceptions which were not serviceable for such propaganda in the Hellenistic context recede into the background: the figure of the Messiah, the hope of the resurrection, and dualism; moreover, judgment and renewal occur in the sphere of the one cosmos, outside of which there is no reality for Greek thought. Hence one cannot gather from the Sibylline Oracles a complete picture of an explicitly apocalyptic piety. Nevertheless they show how extensively the apocalyptic movement did in general influence Jewish thought in the period before and after Christ’s birth.¹¹³

¹¹¹ J. J. Collins, *The Apocalyptic Imagination: An Introduction to Jewish Apocalyptic Literature* (2d ed.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 125-126.

¹¹² Vielhauer, “Apocalypses and Related Subjects,” 2:601.

¹¹³ W. Schmithals, *The Apocalyptic Movement: Introduction and Interpretation* (trans. J. E. Steely; Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1975), 192-193.

Even so, the observation that they do contain a number of conceptual aspects of apocalyptic that were considered to be appropriate for use in a Greco-Roman context is especially pertinent—particularly if we are to eventually pursue a rhetorical approach in our study of the *Sibylline Oracles*.

In summary, despite the differences that do exist between the *Sibylline Oracles* and the contemporary apocalyptic literature, “it would be difficult to deny that the Sibyl was a blood relation of the apocalyptic seer and remained so throughout her career.”¹¹⁴ There is an obvious connection with apocalyptic, but there remains a need to articulate further the nature of this relationship—perhaps through the perspective of a different methodology to the ones that have been employed to date in the study of the *Sibylline Oracles*.

The *Sibylline Oracles* as Conveyers of Historical Data and Commentary

The various writers and redactors of the *Sibylline Oracles* have long been recognized for their inconsistent accuracy (and often ambiguity) in their conveyance of historical data—some of them are relatively precise, while others are fairly sketchy (*Sib. Or.* 14, for example, is described by Schürer as “fairly worthless”¹¹⁵). Despite this frequent inconsistency, however, many scholars have recognized the value of the *Sibylline Oracles* for their historical commentary and reaction to certain contemporary events.

Momigliano has suggested that the Jews began to write Sibyllines in the second century B.C.E. for any number of reasons—to express reaction (not necessarily hostile) to “pagan” powers, whether Hellenistic or Roman, or to express

¹¹⁴ McGinn, “*Teste David cum Sibylla*,” 16.

¹¹⁵ Schürer, *History*, 3:646.

apocalyptic expectations. But more than anything, he suggests that the *Sibylline Oracles* were meant to convey to Jews and proselytes—"and pagans who cared to read"—a reflection on, or reaction to, historical events. As such, he describes them as a "cheap philosophy of history supported by apocalyptic expectation."¹¹⁶

Momigliano suggests that the historical commentary in the *Sibylline Oracles* is significant for the simple reason that "Jews stopped writing history after A.D. 100 and the Christians did not write political history before the fifth century."¹¹⁷ As such, they filled a valuable historiographic gap:

the Christian composers of Sibylline texts continued the work of their Jewish predecessors or contemporaries in the same spirit of critical evaluation of the past and visionary conjecture of the future. The very existence of the Jewish-Christian Sibylline Books is evidence for an underground reaction to the political and social events of the Roman Empire, an underground reaction which probably implies some sort of exchange between Jews and Christians and certainly presupposes a Christian interest in what Jews thought about the Roman Empire... I do not know of any other set of texts which brings us nearer to an anonymous, religiously inspired, public opinion in the Roman Empire.¹¹⁸

Similarly, others, such as Potter, have suggested that the Sibyllines can be read in such a way as to convey valuable historical information. In the case of Potter, this pertains especially to the surveys of imperial history contained in five of the twelve extant Sibylline books: 5, 8, and 12-14.

Potter suggests that as they now stand, these five texts are collections of earlier oracles that were written at various places and at various times and took something like their present form at roughly the time of the last event they predict.¹¹⁹ The accuracy of the oracular lists contained in these books could vary a great deal for reasons relating to composition and authorial learning: *Sib. Or.* 12-13 seem to be little

¹¹⁶ Momigliano, *On Pagans, Jews, and Christians*, 138.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 138.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 139-140.

¹¹⁹ Potter, *Prophets and Emperors*, 138.

changed from texts that originally circulated in the mid third century C.E.; *Sib. Or.* 5 and 8 contain a strange amalgam of material from a variety of dates; and *Sib. Or.* 14 offers a “completely incomprehensible” list of rulers that introduces a detailed description of the Arab conquest of Egypt.¹²⁰ This varying accuracy is due in large part, says Potter, to original authors who “were more familiar with the history of Rome than the one who included these various passages in his poem with no sense as to who the people described in them might be: to him they are symbols.”¹²¹

As such, this ubiquitous character of the original oracles lends them their particular value as historical evidence. As Potter explains,

This is especially true as there is no reason to assume that oracles were composed by people who were actively opposed to the imperial regime. There is no way to know what prompted an author to write, or what prophecy was originally connected with the bits of verse that were included in the present compilations. As their purpose could simply have been to date and lend authenticity to some remark of purely local interest, they are not a priori the work of people who were contemplating the end of the Roman Empire. For this reason they should be taken as a fair reflection of the way that the inhabitants of the Greek world interpreted the messages that they were receiving from the imperial government.¹²²

Other Types of Study Related to the *Sibylline Oracles*

Beyond the aforementioned approaches to the study of the *Sibylline Oracles*, scholars have also approached them from a variety of other angles. There has, for instance, been a reasonable amount of work done on the intertextual relationship between the *Sibylline Oracles* and the literary environment in which they were written. In general, this has been done to a large degree by many of those who have offered marginal notes or critical apparatus in their textual editions or translations which highlight how

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 138.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 140.

¹²² *Ibid.*, 140.

the writers of the *Sibylline Oracles* have been influenced by, and drawn upon, the textual traditions of their literary environment—which, on a general level, includes texts of Greco-Roman, Jewish, and Christian origin, and beyond. Notable in this regard are the text of Geffcken and the translation of Collins.

Others have given further in-depth analysis to specific examples of intertextuality. Kurfess, for example, has highlighted the intertextual relationship between the Greek writers Homer and Hesiod and the first book of the *Sibylline Oracles*,¹²³ in addition to the use of a significant excerpt from Pseudo-Phocylides in a Christian section of book two.¹²⁴

Likewise, there have been several studies of various topics and themes that present themselves within the verses of the *Sibylline Oracles*. Chester, for example, has surveyed the relatively positive attitude exhibited by the Sibyl toward the Jerusalem Temple in books 3 and 5, and contrasted it with the more negative attitude exhibited in book 4.¹²⁵ Klausner has surveyed the presence of Messianic ideas and expectation within books 3-5.¹²⁶ Collins has summarized briefly (in conjunction with a number of other Second Temple texts) the theme of kingship and kingdom within books 3-5.¹²⁷ Perhaps most significant for our purposes here, Lewis has briefly

¹²³ A. Kurfess, "Homer und Hesiod im 1 Buch der Oracula Sibyllina," *Philologus* 100 (1956): 147-153.

¹²⁴ A. Kurfess, "Das Mahngedicht des sogenannten Phoklides im zweiten Buch der Oracula Sibyllina," *ZNW* 38 (1939): 171-181.

¹²⁵ A. Chester, "The Sibyl and the Temple," in *Templum Amicitiae: Essays on the Second Temple Presented to Ernst Bammel* (ed. W. Horbury; JSNTSup 48; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1991), 37-69. On this subject, see also Simon, "Sur quelques aspects des Oracles Sibyllins juifs," 228-231.

¹²⁶ J. Klausner, *The Messianic Idea in Israel from its Beginning to the Completion of the Mishnah* (3d ed.; trans W. F. Stinespring; London: George Allen and Unwin, 1956), 370-381.

¹²⁷ J. J. Collins, "The Kingdom of God in the Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha," in *The Kingdom of God in 20th-Century Interpretation* (ed. W. Willis; Peabody: Hendrickson, 1987), 84-86.

surveyed (again, in conjunction with other Jewish and Christian literature) the theme of Noah and the flood, mainly as it appears in books 1-3.¹²⁸

No doubt there have been other studies of the *Sibylline Oracles* that are both similar and different from those highlighted here, however, this is not the place to summarize them all. Instead, we have simply offered mention of those that might be most directly or indirectly germane to the project at hand, or that give one an idea of the types of study that have been previously carried out on the *Sibylline Oracles*. For a complete and encompassing listing of the studies on or directly related to the *Sibylline Oracles* between 1850-1999, see DiTommaso's extensive bibliography.¹²⁹

Reflections on the State of the Question

Although there have to date been a number of studies on or relating to the *Sibylline Oracles*, our knowledge of the corpus remains somewhat limited. In large part, this is due mainly to the priority given by scholars thus far to *Sib. Or.* 3-5 (and in particular 3) over the other nine extant books. This attention seems to be due to at least two reasons: 1) the wide-spread influence in the English speaking world of the partial translations of books 3-5 by Bate and Lanchester from the beginning of the twentieth century; and 2) the assumption that books 3-5 are the oldest books in the standard collection—an assumption that might be enough to lead some to consider them to be the most important books in the collection. However, the consequent evaluation of some of the more understudied Sibyllines as “less important” is, as such, arbitrary. Rather, all of these texts are worthy of further scholarly consideration, for each says

¹²⁸ J. P. Lewis, *A Study of the Interpretation of Noah and the Flood in Jewish and Christian Literature* (Leiden: Brill, 1968).

¹²⁹ L. DiTommaso, *A Bibliography of Pseudepigrapha Research: 1850-1999* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001), 795-849.

and evidences much about the diversity and developments within Second Temple Judaism and early Christianity.

For example, as Collins has already pointed out, the Jewish stratum of *Sib. Or.* 1-2 may in fact be one of the few written documents that has survived from the Jews of Asia Minor from around the turn of the era and may thus provide us with a rare glimpse into the ideas and beliefs current among the Jews of Asia Minor during this period.¹³⁰ Likewise, as Charlesworth has shown, the Christian strata of the *Sibylline Oracles* possibly reflect a search for identity and self-definition on the part of a number of different early Christian groups.¹³¹

Despite this limitation, however, studies to date have shown us much about the complexity inherent to this corpus. The grouping of literature known as the *Sibylline Oracles* is by no means a consistent or unified body of literature in any respect (except for the person to whom they are attributed), whether it be in terms of the individual texts contained therein or the perspectives and positions they endorse or the political, historical, or geographical climate in which they were written.

The results of the analysis of the development of the *Sibylline Oracles* have been able to lead to a number of important insights about the people and historical situations that underlie the writing of these different layers. Of particular interest here is the incredible diversity that these texts represent in terms of the various forms of Jewish, Christian, Greco-Roman, and possibly even Gnostic movements from which they stem. Also important among these studies is the recognition of the diversity that

¹³⁰ Collins, "The Development of the Sibylline Tradition," 442-443 and 455-456.

¹³¹ J. H. Charlesworth, "Christian and Jewish Self-Definition in the Light of the Christian Additions to the Apocryphal Writings," in *Jewish and Christian Self-Definition* (ed. E.P. Sanders, et al.; London: SCM Press, 1980), 2:27-55.

existed within the Judaism of the Second Temple period, and even within the Judaism of similar geographic regions.¹³²

These studies have also highlighted the propagandistic nature of the *Sibylline Oracles*, particularly in regard to the various political and religious attitudes these texts exhibit towards Rome (and other nations) and the Jerusalem Temple. These studies have also examined the relationship between the *Sibylline Oracles* and apocalyptic. In doing so, they have noted the significant similarities and differences between the two, and have been able to distinguish between the two in terms of genre and function.

To date, the bulk of these understandings of the *Sibylline Oracles* have been yielded through the use of various historical-critical approaches to the text. In particular, these have been useful in highlighting and analyzing many of the “static” components contained within the text (historical context; the complexity of the textual tradition itself [i.e. as an evolving body of literature] and of the individual oracles themselves; its relation to other contemporary texts, historical events, people, and places, etc.).

As a result of this focus on the static, historical-critical components of the *Sibylline Oracles*, there has to date been little consideration given to, and thus little analysis of, the “dynamic” (or active) elements that are often at work within texts—namely, the rhetorical nature of these texts, and the fact that they are written (or compiled) for the purpose of persuading an audience to either affirm an existing ideological stance or to promote some sort of ideological shift.

¹³² J. J. Collins, for instance, has been able to suggest much about the state and diversity of Egyptian Judaism (*The Sibylline Oracles of Egyptian Judaism* [SBL Dissertation Series; Missoula: Scholars' Press, 1974]).

In this sense there has been very little undertaken in terms of a rhetorical approach to the text of the *Sibylline Oracles*. Some have ventured to undertake various analyses of certain topics or themes present in the *Sibylline Oracles* (i.e. Chester, Klausner), but again, there has been very little undertaken from the vantage point of rhetorical *topoi*—the mental resource zones that are alluded to and developed within the text (for a further definition see chapter 2). In the same way, much has been made of the propagandistic nature of the *Sibylline Oracles*, but little has been done in terms of an analysis of the ideological movement that these texts embody or try to evoke.

Likewise, scholarly analysis of the relationship between the *Sibylline Oracles* and apocalyptic has tended to emphasize the similarities and differences between the two, but, apart from this, has only peripherally examined the question of why the affinity exists between them. Points of similarity and difference with apocalyptic have been highlighted, and reasons have been given as to why the *Sibylline Oracles* should or should not be classified as apocalyptic, but the question of why these similarities exist has been little discussed. A starting point can certainly be seen in Schmithals' observation that "The 'Sibyllines' do not pursue any self-presentation of apocalyptic piety, but rather place apocalyptic motifs at the service of the comprehensive Jewish mission and propaganda."¹³³ However, it seems that the approach of a different method might prove fruitful, and allow us to build on the notion that this observation conveys—a notion of particular interest to a socio-rhetorical approach to the text—namely, that the writers of *Sib. Or.* used, where appropriate, apocalyptic conceptions drawn from their own Judeo-Christian traditions (but which would not necessarily be

¹³³ Schmithals, *The Apocalyptic Movement*, 192-193.

out of place in their Greco-Roman environment), and incorporated them into a well-established and authoritative Greco-Roman medium for the purpose of persuading their audience to either adopt or maintain a particular perception, course of action, and/or set of values and ideals.

Of course, we must also reiterate that in doing so the Jewish and Christian writers also contributed to a change in the very nature of Sibylline oracles themselves. As we have already noted, Collins has highlighted some possible elements of this transformation (universal history, moral exhortation, final judgment); however, it seems that in order to build on these observations, there is a need to articulate an approach that will allow us a better glimpse into how exactly the Jewish and Christian Sibyls transformed the oracles of their Greco-Roman counterparts. In particular, there is a need to move beyond the identification of features, and to ask the question, perhaps from the vantage point of a different methodological perspective, Why do these differences exist?

CHAPTER 2: SOCIO-RHETORICAL METHOD AND ITS APPROPRIATENESS FOR THE STUDY OF THE *SIBYLLINE ORACLES*

The words and symbols that comprise the *Sibylline Oracles* are not timeless or of neutral value, but are historical productions that reflect certain historical circumstances and geographical settings, in addition to certain social and cultural beliefs, traditions, norms, and practices. Neither, however, do these texts simply recount historical circumstances in the world and reflect social and cultural values. They also create a picture of and react to their own worlds (at least as it appears to them, or how they would like it to be) and thus respond either affirmatively or negatively to existing social and cultural norms and values. As such, they are by their very nature rhetorical, and thus, ideological productions.

Rhetorical productions exhibit certain techniques and strategies (conscious or unconscious) that have at their core the desire and purpose of persuading the implied audience (whoever they may be) to adopt or maintain a certain course of thought, speech, attitude, or action. When the rhetoric is successful, the audience is persuaded to adopt that course in terms of these four modes of being, and as such, an ideological shift occurs in which one redefines the culture of which he or she is a part, or rejects his or her current culture outright in favour of another. Likewise, if the rhetoric is unsuccessful, or if it is successful in confirming the norm, then the audience will continue to maintain or affirm the existing dominant culture (at least until something more appealing comes along).

Despite the multi-faceted nature of the *Sibylline Oracles*, there has to date been little study of it as such in a comprehensive way that shows the *Sibylline Oracles* to be a rhetorical production and therefore takes into account all of these factors. As we have seen, valuable work has been done on the *Sibylline Oracles* towards the

understanding of it as an historical production, particularly in terms of its complex redaction history and evolution. As we have already seen, Collins and others, for example, have effectively sought to explore the strata of the *Sibylline Oracles*, have examined the relationship between the *Sibylline Oracles* and the genre of apocalyptic, and have approached the text from a variety of other historical-critical angles. This has provided the substance of our understanding of the *Sibylline Oracles* so far.

There are, however, aspects beyond its history of composition and other similar historical-critical matters that have to date received little or no attention, such as the *Sibylline Oracles* as rhetorical and ideological productions. As such, there seems to be welcome opportunity for a multifaceted interpretative approach such as socio-rhetorical analysis—which assembles into one interpretative grid the relevant insights from a variety of methodological disciplines—and the fruitful diversity of results that such an approach is capable of yielding.

The “Textural” Emphasis of Socio-Rhetorical Analysis¹³⁴

In its initial stages, socio-rhetorical analysis (SRA) could perhaps best be described as a multi-disciplinary approach that focused on the analysis of the various “textures,” or dimensions, of specific texts. This complex analysis of the text’s inner, inter-, social and cultural, ideological, and sacred textures differentiated it from many of the traditional and contemporary ways of interpreting texts which often gave the impression that texts were simply flat, one-dimensional images, instead of complex interweavings of historical, rhetorical, theological, cultural, and ideological elements.

¹³⁴ This section is an examination of socio-rhetorical analysis found up to the time of the publication of V. K. Robbins’ two 1996 books (see above, n. 1). Since then there have been further methodological developments, which will be discussed in a later portion of the chapter.

The initial impetus behind the development of SRA was the premise that texts are most properly viewed as an intricate interweaving of complex patterns and images that create and evoke certain meanings in certain contexts. Vernon Robbins, who has brought this approach most fully into scholarly consideration, has identified five types of “texture” that can be discerned within any text: 1) *inner texture*, which resides in features in the language of the text itself (repetition, creation of beginnings and endings, argumentation, and the like);¹³⁵ 2) *intertexture*, which pertains to the text’s representation of, reference to, and use of phenomena in the world outside the text being interpreted (material and physical objects, historical events, texts, customs, values, roles, institutions, and systems);¹³⁶ 3) *social and cultural texture*, which includes exploring the social and cultural location of the language and the type of social and cultural world the language evokes or creates;¹³⁷ 4) *ideological texture*, which concerns the way the text itself and interpreters of the text position themselves in relation to other individuals and groups;¹³⁸ and 5) *sacred texture*, which exists in texts that somehow address the relation of humans to the divine.¹³⁹

Inner Texture

The analysis of a text’s inner texture concerns the specific details of the text itself and its inner workings. Accordingly, it usually begins with a thorough examination of its repetitive texture (that is, the repetition of key words, ideas, and images within the text), which will alert the reader to the major and minor themes within the text, and how they relate and interact with one another. Robbins suggests that this can be accomplished

¹³⁵ Robbins, *Exploring*, 7-39.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, 40-70.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, 71-94.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, 95-119.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, 120-131.

through the creation of a systematic diagram that will exhibit the text's repetitive words and phrases.¹⁴⁰ Such an exercise provides valuable initial insight into the overall picture of the text, its natural divisions, as well as the progression, or forward movement of themes, within it.

An examination of the narrational texture¹⁴¹ of the text will reveal the various voices through which the text speaks. This may involve the voice of a narrator, voices attributed to characters within the text, voices of various written texts that speak within the text, and the like. Ideally, this analysis will reveal some kind of pattern that moves the discourse programmatically forward—a pattern which, in conjunction with the analysis of repetitive texture, may give us a closer look at the units or scenes of the discourse.

Analysis of the text's argumentative texture¹⁴² will highlight the inner reasoning of the text. In some cases, this inner reasoning may be primarily explicit and logical—presenting assertions and supporting them with rationales, clarifying them, and even anticipating counter arguments; in other cases, this reasoning may be largely implicit and qualitative—using images, descriptions, analogies, and the like, to function in a persuasive manner; while in other cases, these two types of reasoning may in some way be intertwined.

Finally, examination of the text's sensory-aesthetic texture¹⁴³ will highlight the prominent range of senses that the text embodies and evokes (thought, emotion, sight, smell, touch and sound), and the manner in which the text evokes or embodies them (reason, intuition, imagination, humour, and the like). Attention to the sensory-

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 8-14.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 15-21.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, 21-29.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, 29-36.

aesthetic texture of the text will reveal dimensions that provide tone and colour to the text.

Intertexture

Whereas the inner texture pertains to the internal dynamics of the text itself, the intertexture refers to how the discourse invokes and incorporates materials from the outside world (that is to say, the threads from the outside world the writer has woven together in order to achieve the final product of his or her text—i.e. written texts, oral tradition, historical events, customs, roles, values, institutions, physical objects, and the like).

To this end, Robbins has identified four types of intertexture that may be found within any given text. First, is the oral-scribal intertexture of a text,¹⁴⁴ which concerns the determination of the interweaving of threads from other literary sources and traditions that have been incorporated by the writer(s), and whether this usage takes the form of recitation (the transmission of speech or narrative from either oral or written tradition), recontextualization (the use of wording from particular texts without indication that these words are written elsewhere), reconfiguration (the recounting of a situation in a manner that makes the later event “new” in relation to a previous event), narrative amplification (composition containing recitation, recontextualization, and reconfiguration), thematic elaboration (the elaboration of an issue through use of rationales, arguments from the opposite, analogies, examples, and authoritative testimonies), or some combination thereof.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 41-58.

Second is cultural intertexture,¹⁴⁵ which concerns the cultural threads (myths; word and concept patterns and configurations; values, scripts, codes or systems) that have been incorporated in the development of the text and its themes, and examines whether this usage takes the form of a reference (a word or phrase that points to a personage or tradition known to people on the basis of tradition), allusion (a statement that presupposes a tradition that exists in textual form, but without attempting to recite it), or echo (a word or phrase that subtly or indirectly evokes, or potentially evokes, a concept from cultural tradition).

Third is social intertexture,¹⁴⁶ which concerns the knowledge commonly held by persons of a particular region (common social knowledge) that has been interwoven into the text. This type of knowledge may appear in terms of social roles (servant, fisherman, soldier, shepherd), identities (Roman, Jew, Greek), institutions (synagogue, church, empire), codes (honour, hospitality), and relationships (patron, friend, kin), whose meanings can be explored with the aid of texts, inscriptions, archaeological data, sculptures, paintings, and other similar phenomena outside of the text itself.

Fourth is historical intertexture,¹⁴⁷ which pertains to the text's representation of specific events that have occurred at specific times and at specific locations. Specifically, the study of historical intertexture takes a variety of issues into account, such as whether or not the text being studied is the only information about the event, or whether there are other accounts not dependant on this textual account. Likewise, it is also concerned about the nature of the data—that is, whether they are records of

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 58-62.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 62-63.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 63-68.

various kinds or literary accounts—since interpreters often place higher trust in some literary forms than others.

Accordingly, by examining the various facets of the intertexture of the text, one can begin to understand many of the aspects of the social, cultural, and literary worlds of the writer(s) that either explicitly or implicitly contributed to the development of the text.

Social and Cultural Texture

Robbins has suggested that the social and cultural texture of a text emerges in terms of specific social topics (which reveal the religious responses to the world), common social and cultural topics (which exhibit the overall perception in the text of the context in which people live in the world), and final cultural categories (which show priorities among topics such as what constitutes being lawful, expedient, holy, valiant, and so on).¹⁴⁸

First, specific social topics reveal the religious responses to the world, which can in large part be understood in terms of Wilson's seven-fold taxonomy of the different kinds of religious perceptions of, and responses to, the world:¹⁴⁹ 1) *conversionist*, a religious perception that is characterized by a view that the world is corrupt because people are corrupt, and thus, if people can be changed, the world can be changed; 2) *revolutionist*, a religious perception that declares that only the destruction of the world, and specifically, its social order, will be sufficient to save people; 3) *introversionist*, a religious perception that views the world as irredemably evil and considers salvation to be attainable only by the fullest possible withdrawal from

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 71-94.

¹⁴⁹ B. Wilson, *Magic and the Millennium: A Sociological Study of Religious Movements of Protest Among Tribal and Third-World Peoples* (New York: Harper & Row, 1973), 22-26.

it; 4) *gnostic-manipulationist*, a religious perception that seeks only a transformed method of coping with evil because salvation is possible in the world, and evil may be overcome if people learn the right means (i.e. by improving techniques) to deal with their problems; 5) *thaumaturgical*, a religious perception that focuses on the individual's concern for relief from present and specific ills by special dispensations; 6) *reformist*, a religious perception that views the world as corrupt because its social structures are corrupt, and thus, if the structures can be changed so that the behaviours they sanction are changed, then salvation will be present in the world; and 7) *utopian*, a religious perception that seeks to reconstruct the entire social world according to divinely given principles, rather than simply to amend it from a reformist position.¹⁵⁰

Second, common social and cultural topics exhibit the overall perception of the context in which people live in the world. They exhibit broad insights about systems of exchange and benefit.¹⁵¹ These systems include the pivotal values of honour (the claim to worth along with the social acknowledgment of worth) and shame (a person's sensitivity to what others say, think, and do with regard to his or her honour) and the related patterns of challenge and response;¹⁵² the ancient Mediterranean personality (which could be described as primarily "dyadic," or group-embedded and group oriented);¹⁵³ the ancient Mediterranean perception of "limited good" (the perception that literally all goods in life—from wealth to honour to love—exist in finite, limited quantity

¹⁵⁰ Though Wilson's taxonomy is actually a typology of religious sectarianism, it has been used in this dissertation in a more general sense that does not necessarily imply sectarianism. For an application of this taxonomy to certain Second Temple apocalyptic texts, see P. F. Esler, "Political Oppression in Jewish Apocalyptic Literature: A Social-Scientific Approach," *Listening* 28 (1993): 181-199; and S. B. Reid, *Enoch and Daniel: A Form Critical and Sociological Study of the Historical Apocalypses* (Berkeley: Bibal Press, 1988).

¹⁵¹ Robbins, *Exploring*, 71.

¹⁵² B. J. Malina, *The New Testament World: Insights from Cultural Anthropology* (2d ed.; Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1993), 28-62.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, 63-89.

and are always in short supply);¹⁵⁴ the rules of religious purity (which point out what or who is in or out of place, in or out of phase, sacred or profane, clean or unclean);¹⁵⁵ and kinship (which refers to the patterns of social norms that regulate human relationships).¹⁵⁶ The fruitful use of these categories can be seen in the results arising from analysis of NT materials by members of the SBL Context Group, who have employed tools derived from the social sciences and cultural anthropology in order to determine the meanings explicit and implicit in the text that are made possible and shaped by the social and cultural systems inhabited by both authors and audiences.¹⁵⁷

In other words, through the use of social-scientific models one is able to highlight the structures and patterns of behaviour that may have been typical of a given society, the norms which expressed the “oughts” for this sort of behaviour, and how such behaviour supported and fulfilled a useful social function. Through the use of a model a tentative reading scenario is created that is able to illuminate certain implicit social and cultural features (such as the values of honour and shame, kinship and marriage, rules of purity, and the like) which may have underlain the creation of a given text, and which thus make its meaning intelligible.¹⁵⁸

Third, final cultural categories are those topics that most decisively identify one’s cultural location, which, in contrast to social location, concern the manner in which people present their propositions, reasons, and arguments both to themselves

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 90-116.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 149-183.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 117-148.

¹⁵⁷ J. H. Elliott, *What is Social-Scientific Criticism?* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993), 8.

¹⁵⁸ Malina, *New Testament World*, 21. For examples of the application of social-scientific and cultural anthropological models to certain New Testament texts, see Bruce J. Malina and Richard L. Rohrbaugh, *Social-Science Commentary on the Synoptic Gospels* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992); and B. J. Malina and J. J. Pilch, *Social-Science Commentary on the Book of Revelation* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2000).

and to other people. These topics separate people in terms of dominant culture, subculture, counterculture, contraculture, and liminal culture. *Dominant culture* rhetoric presents a system of attitudes, values, dispositions and norms that the speaker either presupposes or asserts are supported by existing social structures. *Subculture* rhetoric imitates the attitudes, values, dispositions and norms of dominant culture rhetoric but claims to enact them better than members of the dominant status. *Counterculture* (or alternative culture) rhetoric rejects explicit and mutable characteristics of the dominant culture or subculture rhetoric to which it responds by providing a relatively self-sufficient system of action that is grounded in a well-developed supporting ideology. *Contracultural* (or oppositional culture) rhetoric is primarily a reaction-formation response to some form of dominant culture, subculture, or counterculture rhetoric; it does not form an alternative response developed on the basis of a different system of understanding but simply reacts in a negative way to certain values and practices in other cultures. Finally, *liminal* culture rhetoric exists at the outer edge of identity—that is, it exists among individuals and groups that have yet to establish a clear social and cultural identity in their setting.¹⁵⁹

Ideological Texture

Ideological texture concerns the particular alliances and conflicts that the language in a text and the language in an interpretation evoke and nurture. It concerns the way the text itself and interpreters of the text position themselves in relation to other individuals and groups. As such, it differs from social and cultural texture by the manner in which

¹⁵⁹ Robbins, *Exploring*, 86-88; H. K. Bhabha, "Postcolonial Criticism," in *Redrawing the Boundaries: The Transformation of English and Literary Studies* (ed. S. Greenblatt and G. Gunn; New York: Modern Language Association of America, 1992), 443-445; K. A. Roberts, "Toward a Generic Concept of Counter-Culture," *Sociological Focus* 11 (1978): 111-126.

it extends beyond social and cultural location into the particular ways in which people advance their own interests and well-being through action, emotion, and thought.¹⁶⁰ To this end, there appear to be at least two ways to analyze the ideological texture of a text.

The first is by analyzing the social and cultural location of the implied author of the text. In order to accomplish this, Robbins suggests a framework based on a taxonomy of nine items developed by T. F. Carney which are able to highlight the spectrum of social and cultural data that the implied author has built into the language of the text. These are: previous events, natural environment and resources, population structure, technology, socialization and personality, culture, foreign affairs, belief systems and ideologies, and political-military-legal systems.¹⁶¹

The second is through the analysis of the ideology of power in the discourse of the text. To this end, there are at least five steps that can be followed: 1) define the systems of differentiations that allow people in prominent positions to act upon the actions of people in a subordinate position; 2) articulate the types of objectives held by those who act upon the actions of others; 3) identify the means for bringing these relationships into being; 4) identify the forms of institutionalization of power; 5) analyze the degree of rationalization of power relations.¹⁶²

¹⁶⁰ Robbins, *Exploring*, 4.

¹⁶¹ T. F. Carney, *The Shape of the Past: Models and Antiquity* (Lawrence: Coronado Press, 1975); Robbins, *Exploring*, 111-112.

¹⁶² Robbins, *Exploring*, 113.

Sacred Texture

The sacred texture¹⁶³ of a text is concerned primarily with how theological elements from the world contemporary with the text have been interwoven into the text. Specifically, these elements speak of the nature of the relation between the human and the divine, and can generally be understood in terms of the following categories: deity (description of the nature of God), holy person (those people in the text who have a special relationship to God or to divine powers), spirit being (special divine or evil beings who have the nature of a spirit rather than a fully human being), divine history (the influence and involvement of divine powers in the historical process), human redemption (the transmission of benefit from the divine to humans as a result of events, rituals, or practices), human commitment (the portrayal of those who are faithful followers and supporters of people who play a special role in revealing the ways of God to humans), religious community (the formation and nurturing of religious community), and ethics (the responsibility of humans to think and act in special ways in both ordinary and extraordinary circumstances), among others.

The Reconfiguration of these Five Categories to Three

Some scholars, such as L.G. Bloomquist, have found it more useful to rearticulate these five categories outlined by Robbins as three: namely, inner, inter-, and ideological texture. In this configuration, sacred texture is categorized under intertexture, as are Malina's social and cultural models of ancient Mediterranean values and norms. Likewise, the taxonomies of the different types of religious responses to

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*, 120-131.

the world (Wilson) and different types of cultural responses (Roberts) are employed more fruitfully in the discerning of ideological texture.

The reason for this reconfiguration stems largely from a different understanding of ideological texture. As Bloomquist has noted,

As analysis of ideological texture stands in Robbins' work, it is primarily an extension of social and cultural texture. I would suggest that ideological texture is manifest in the rhetorical goal of texts, namely, where authors attempt to get an audience, real or fictive, to do or understand something, and that not just negatively or for reasons of coercive power. While other textures in socio-rhetorical analysis discern static pictures of the inner world of the text, or of the intersecting relations of the text and its players to the textual, social, cultural, and historical world around it or to the great cosmic scenario on which the drama is played out, or of the social and cultural scenarios on which the drama is played out, ideological texture is the arena for the exploration of movement away from, or back to, or just around the scenarios suggested in the static views. As such, the text attempts to move an audience to new static positions in which people will find themselves, or putative movement in which people are re-confirmed in a place which they have not left.¹⁶⁴

According to this understanding, the reason that people and groups choose or are persuaded to make such ideological shifts is due largely to their realization of the inadequacy of a facet, or perhaps even the entirety, of one's current ideological system to provide meaning in one's existing context. As Bloomquist further explains,

If a culture is not able to meet the needs, however, the conflict or problem or gap leads to movement and choices that attempt to deal with the problem, either by reconfiguring the culture or moving to a different one. The movements and choices that people participate in or make lead them out of or into a different relationship vis-à-vis other individuals, groups, or ideas, rather than simply leaving them where they are, which is entirely explicable in terms of social and cultural texture. Thus, a programmatic analysis of ideological texture will involve some way to get at choices and movements.¹⁶⁵

Bloomquist suggests that this type of approach to ideology has been clearly begun in Wilson's cultural anthropological description of how religious movements respond to

¹⁶⁴ L. G. Bloomquist, "Paul's Inclusive Language: The Ideological Texture of Romans 1," in *Fabrics of Discourse: Essays in Honor of Vernon K. Robbins* (ed. D. B. Gowler, L. G. Bloomquist, and D. F. Watson; Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 2003), 171.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 172.

problems and difficulties posed in their own social, cultural, and sacred worlds.¹⁶⁶ Someone brought up in a particular culture might begin to question it against various criteria and experiences as she matures and deem it to be naïve or inconsistent. This questioning will eventually lead her either to address these deficiencies within her culture (reconfiguration) or simply adopt a new culture that more adequately addresses these deficiencies—that is, she will make a transition (either gradually or immediately) to a culture that is more consonant with her experience, and which she believes might be more useful in explaining and responding to the world's problems. A person with a terminal illness, for example, might shift from, say, a reformist culture to a thaumaturgical culture since it might offer a kind of hope that he might not otherwise have. Likewise, someone might become disillusioned with a thaumaturgical culture if he is seeking only physical healing but is not himself physically healed. Now it may be that, depending on which direction this ideological shift leads, the new explanatory system reflects other, long-standing forms of dominant culture, or perhaps it is a sectarian one which reflects subcultural, countercultural, or contracultural ideas and practices.¹⁶⁷

As such, it is important to stress here that ideological texture concerns the ideological movement that occurs within the text—that is, a shift (or proposed shift) from one culture (and its accompanying beliefs, systems, etc.) to another. It is not simply concerned with a particular “static” ideological position but with the dynamics of a shift from one position to another.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 171.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 173.

The Topical Emphasis of Socio-Rhetorical Analysis

The emphasis on the “textural” analysis of texts characterized the method for most of the 1990s and still remains a useful and meaningful interpretative approach. There have, however, been subsequent developments within socio-rhetorical analysis that have shifted the emphasis beyond mere “textural” analysis of texts, to what might be described as “topical” analysis—that is, an analysis of the *topoi* and the configurations of *topoi* which comprise texts, and which enable them to create and evoke meaning within a particular context.¹⁶⁸

The term *topos* (plural *topoi*) can loosely be translated into English as “topic,” although a more meaningful translation would be “place.” It is in this sense that the ancient Latin rhetorician Cicero speaks of *topoi* as the “common places, from which to dig out our proofs” (*De or.* 2.34.146, Sutton and Rackham), and, in another place, as “the store-chambers in which arguments are arranged ready for use” (*Fin.* 4.10, Rackham).¹⁶⁹ In fact, they are, in the context of rhetoric, the mental common places “from which every device for every speech whatever is derived” (*De or.* 2.34.146), regardless of whether this speech takes place in the context of the ceremony

¹⁶⁸ For a thorough summary of these stages of development see L. G. Bloomquist, “Rhetoric, Culture, and Ideology: Socio-Rhetorical Analysis in the Reading of New Testament Texts,” in *Rhetorics for a New Millenium*, (ed. J. Hester, forthcoming). See also, V. K. Robbins, “Beginnings and Developments in Socio-Rhetorical Interpretation.” Online: <http://www.religion.emory.edu/faculty/robbins/Pdfs/SRIBegDevRRA.pdf>; and D. B. Gowler, “The End of the Beginning: The Continuing Maturation of Socio-Rhetorical Analysis,” in *Fabrics of Discourse: Essays in Honor of Vernon K. Robbins* (ed. D. B. Gowler, L. G. Bloomquist, and D. F. Watson; Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 2003), 1-24.

¹⁶⁹ In the same way, Aristotle (*Rhet.* 2.26.1) describes a *topos* as a head or genus under which many enthymemes or rhetorical arguments fall or are collected. W. D. Ross (*Aristotle: A Complete Exposition of His Works and Thought* [New York: Meridian Books, 1959], 59) calls them “the pigeon-holes from which dialectical reasoning is to draw its arguments.” A *topos* is therefore “a ‘place’ or ‘region,’ the place where you may look for something you want with the certainty of finding it, or a store which may be drawn upon to meet an occasional requirement” (E. M. Cope, *An Introduction to Aristotle’s Rhetoric* [1867; repr.; Hildesheim: Georg Olms Verlag, 1970], 125).

(epideictic rhetoric), the law courts (forensic rhetoric), or philosophical or political debate (deliberative rhetoric), or any other social context (*De or.* 2.36.152).

In short, the value of rhetorical *topoi* stems from the fact that their use “saves one from always having to drone out the same stock arguments on the same subjects” (*Fin.* 4:10). To illustrate this value, Cicero compares familiarity with these common places to the haunts of game:

It is everything to be familiar with the ground over which you are to chase and track down your quarry. When you have mentally encompassed all that area, if only you are quite hard to practical dealings, nothing will escape you, but every detail of an affair will come up with a rush and fall into your net (*De or.* 2.34.147).

Cicero’s illustration confirms what Aristotle had noted regarding topics, namely, that the mere reference to them “causes the things themselves to be remembered” (*Top.* 8.14.163b, Forster).

Specifically, each social context has its own set of distinctive *topoi* that are appropriate for use within that context. Within these social contexts, there are certain *topoi* that are considered to be “true” and accurate—either because they are true, or because they are simply assumed to be true, even if they are not. As Tredennick has stated:

They are not scientific but dialectical, since they are based upon premises which are not necessarily true, but merely probable as being generally accepted. They are valuable both as an equipment for serious debate and as a supplement to scientific discussion, since they help... to establish facts or judgments which do not admit of actual demonstration.¹⁷⁰

Miller defines a *topos* as “a conceptual space without fully specified or specifiable contents.” As such,

¹⁷⁰ Aristotle, *Posterior Analytics* (trans. H. Tredennick; LCL; repr.; Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989), 234, n. b.

it is a region of productive uncertainty. It is a "problem space," but rather than circumscribing or delimiting the problem, rather than being a closed space or container *within* which one searches, it is a space, or a located perspective, *from* which one searches. I am thinking here of the linguistic notion of "semantic space."... Such semantic networks may be conditioned both by the peculiarities of community history and by apparently logical relationships (like opposition and inclusion).¹⁷¹

A *topos* is, in other words, "a location of thought that evokes a constellation of networks of meanings as a result of social, cultural, or ideological use"—use which "makes a *topos* recognizable and effective in a context of communication."¹⁷² *Topoi* are, then, the essential rhetorical "building blocks" of a text and its argument(s). They are common and well-known mental "resource zones" that are elaborated upon and incorporated into the argumentative fabric of a text in order to generate and communicate new configurations of meaning.¹⁷³

Once these topical patterns have developed into common use, they will be used over and over in various manifestations and will be effective by virtue of their recognizability.¹⁷⁴ But though these *topoi* enter into common use and are easily recognizable, the images and meanings associated with these spaces may vary from use to use, depending on the context in which the *topos* is used, and the purpose for which the *topos* is used. What is useful in one context may not have the same value, or draw upon the same connotations in another. They inevitably become localized and, as such, create particular mental images, and have particular meanings in

¹⁷¹ C. R. Miller, "The Aristotelian *Topos*: Hunting for Novelty," in *Rereading Aristotle's Rhetoric* (ed. A. G. Gross and A. E. Walzer; Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2000), 141.

¹⁷² "Guidelines for Socio-Rhetorical Commentary," produced by the members of the Religious Rhetoric of Antiquity project, Ashland, OH, August 2002.

¹⁷³ Bloomquist, "Rhetoric, Culture, and Ideology."

¹⁷⁴ B. Warnick, "Two Systems of Invention: The Topics in *Rhetoric* and *The New Rhetoric*," in *Rereading Aristotle's Rhetoric* (ed. A. G. Gross and A. E. Walzer; Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2000), 110.

particular contexts. Specifically, it is the elaboration of these recognizable *topoi* which promotes further understanding in a particular context.

Rhetorolects and Their Configurations of *Topoi*

What do these configurations and reconfigurations of *topoi* produce? To date, most attention has focused on the way *topoi* are evidenced in literary genres. According to Robbins, texts generally take on a particular literary form (or like the Ascension of Isaiah, can be seen to be a composite of literary genres). In the New Testament, for example, we find three major literary genres: biographical-historiography, epistles, and apocalypse—four if we understand the Letter to the Hebrews to be a sermon instead of an epistle. Likewise, we also find testaments, oracles, wisdom, poetry, and a number of other literary genres in other examples of Second Temple Literature.

Of greater interest for SRA, however, are the ways in which *topoi* and their argumentative use constitute rhetorical modes of discourse. To this end, Robbins has identified six types of ancient Mediterranean discourse that feature prominently in the New Testament and other early Christian speech and writing: wisdom, miracle, prophetic, priestly, apocalyptic, and pre-creation discourse¹⁷⁵—although presumably there were other discourse types that were used in other contexts and by other groups. Thus while it is true that texts can be classified in terms of genre, these same texts can be seen rhetorically to be composed of an interweaving of *topoi* that were already in use in various ancient Mediterranean discourse types.¹⁷⁶

¹⁷⁵ They can be identified as Christian in that they are fundamentally Christian adaptations and modifications of contemporary existing Jewish or Greco-Roman discourse.

¹⁷⁶ This important distinction, although at times subtle, can be illustrated with the example of the NT text of 1 Thessalonians. The literary genre of this text is clearly that of an epistle, as it contains many of the standard literary features of ancient letter writing—the *exordium* (1:2-10), the *narratio* (2:1-3:10), the *probatio* (4:1-5:22), and the *peroratio* (5:23-28).

In SRA, the technical term used to describe each type of discourse mode is *retorolect*, which, simply defined, “is a form of language variety or discourse identifiable on the basis of a distinctive configuration of themes, topics, reasonings, and argumentations.” By their nature,

retorolects interpenetrate one another and interact with one another like dialects do when people from different dialectical areas converse with one another. The interaction of retorolects in early Christianity created new configurations of speech as the movement grew. Every early Christian writing contains a configuration of retorolects that is somewhat different from every other writing. These differences, interacting with one another, create the overall rhetorical environment properly called early Christian discourse.¹⁷⁷

Each of these retorolects draws upon and modifies a particular set of *topoi* that would create meaning in a particular context. Robbins suggests that the primary *topoi* related to the six types of early Christian discourse are as follows: in wisdom discourse, it is the productivity of God;¹⁷⁸ in prophetic discourse, it is the will of God;¹⁷⁹ in miracle discourse, it is the power of God;¹⁸⁰ in priestly discourse, it is divine sacrifice that produces holy benefit for believers, if believers reciprocally live a life of sacrificial action;¹⁸¹ in apocalyptic discourse, it is God’s holiness in relation to God’s world and all

The discourse of the epistle itself, on the other hand, can at times be clearly seen to be apocalyptic (D. F. Watson, “Paul’s Appropriation of Apocalyptic Discourse: The Rhetorical Strategy of 1 Thessalonians,” in *Vision and Persuasion: Rhetorical Dimensions of Apocalyptic Discourse* [ed. G. Carey and L. G. Bloomquist; St. Louis: Chalice Press, 1999], 61-80). In short, 1 Thessalonians can be described as an epistle that employs apocalyptic discourse towards its rhetorical goal.

¹⁷⁷ V. K. Robbins, “The Dialectical Nature of Early Christian Discourse,” *Scriptura* 59 (1996), 356.

¹⁷⁸ V. K. Robbins, “Recent Developments in Socio-Rhetorical Interpretation” (unpublished), 13.

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 20.

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 23.

¹⁸¹ Robbins, “Beginnings and Developments,” 42. This is similar to the major *topos* Robbins outlined originally for suffering-death discourse—namely, God’s exchange of special benefit with humans through participation in suffering and death either through punishment and/or death among a large group of people, or through suffering-death ritual in a gathered community (“Recent Developments,” 24-25).

humanity in it,¹⁸² and in precreation discourse, it is God's intimate relation to all that God has created.¹⁸³

There are also several other major and minor *topoi* that are typically associated with each of these discourse types. If we take the example of apocalyptic, for instance, which is the most directly applicable to the interests of this project, we find a broad range of other *topoi* that characterize apocalyptic discourse.¹⁸⁴ O'Leary, for example, suggests that the three major *topoi* associated with apocalyptic are Authority, Time, and Evil.¹⁸⁵ Likewise, Carey has listed a number of other apocalyptic *topoi* that are "possible fuel" for apocalyptic argumentation: heavenly and hellish visions, revelations concerning final things, dialogues with angels, cosmic portents, *ex eventu* prophecy, judgment scenes, and the like.¹⁸⁶ As such, it can be seen that each type of discourse has its own distinctive "texture"—that is, its own pool of *topoi*, vocabulary, and style on which it draws in order to give it its distinctive shape and feel, and which thus distinguishes it from other types of discourse.

In terms of argumentation, people may, generally speaking, develop the *topoi* characteristic of these discourse types in any number of ways: through pictorial-narrative statements (communication of mental pictures), enthymematic-syllogistic statements (communication of thoughts), or, most commonly, some varying

¹⁸² Robbins, "Recent Developments," 27.

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*, 28.

¹⁸⁴ It is important to note here that we are not speaking of, or trying to define, apocalyptic in the sense of genre, but are speaking of apocalyptic rhetorically, and are thus only identifying certain *topoi* (mental resource zones) that are characteristic or typically employed in apocalyptic discourse.

¹⁸⁵ S. D. O'Leary, "A Dramatistic Theory of Apocalyptic Rhetoric," *QJS* 79 (1993): 385-426.

¹⁸⁶ G. Carey, "Introduction: Apocalyptic Discourse, Apocalyptic Rhetoric," in *Vision and Persuasion: Rhetorical Dimensions of Apocalyptic Discourse* (ed. G. Carey and L. G. Bloomquist; St. Louis: Chalice Press, 1999), 11.

combination or interweaving of the two.¹⁸⁷ The argumentation of apocalyptic rhetoric, for example, is highly dependant on graphic pictoral-narrative images rather than enthymematic-syllogistic statements—it is inductive rather than deductive; it is more pathetic than it is logical. In wisdom discourse, however, the style of the argumentation is quite the opposite. It is based primarily on the communication of logical thoughts, although certainly these thoughts are illustrated and supported with pictoral-narrative images.¹⁸⁸ In socio-rhetorical terms, this identification of *topoi* and the analysis of their configuration and function within the argumentation of the discourse results from the examination of the discourse's inner texture.

In terms of the intertexture of these rhetorolects, it can be seen that the *topoi* selected and employed in the argumentation of each discourse type emerge out of a particular social, cultural, historical, and religious location, and as such, can be seen to be reflective and exhibit certain characteristics of this location—norms, values, myths, roles, texts, reference points, etc.—both in terms of the *topoi* selected and in terms of how these *topoi* are understood.

Finally, the analysis of the discourse's ideological texture will bring to light what authors have done with these pre-existing *topoi*: alter, confirm, nuance, reshape, etc. As Bloomquist has noted, "Rhetorically, authors employ them in ways that reconfigure them (changing them from one static identity to another) or what is done with them (changing how they have been employed or could otherwise be used in argumentation

¹⁸⁷ "Guidelines for Socio-Rhetorical Commentary."

¹⁸⁸ For a differing view, see L. G. Bloomquist, "The Role of the Audience in the Determination of Argumentation: The Gospel of Luke and the Acts of the Apostles," in *Rhetorical Argumentation in Biblical Texts: Essays from the Lund 2000 Conference* (Emory Studies in Early Christianity; ed. A. Eriksson and T. Olbricht; Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 2002), 157-173, who argues that the argumentation of wisdom discourse uses pictoral language primarily.

to that point).¹⁸⁹ As such, the author's use of these *topoi* is not simply a reflection of the writer's social location (intertexture) but can be understood in terms of ideological development.

In particular, these *topoi* are reworked and configured in such a way as to create a particular perception of and response to the world, as well as an argument to persuade the audience to adopt (or maintain) this particular stance to the world. Robbins has made a preliminary identification of these configurations. In wisdom discourse, for example, we generally find a gnostic-manipulationist view of the world, since it presupposes that proper insight into life can equip people to live satisfactorily in the world.¹⁹⁰ In miracle discourse, we find a thaumaturgical response to the world, since it presumes that when certain guidelines are followed (belief and prayer), special acts of divine benevolence (healing and restoration) will be granted.¹⁹¹ In apocalyptic discourse, we find revolutionist discourse, since it argues that people's lack of righteous response to God's benevolence brings God's vengeance upon the unrighteous in a dramatic intervention by God into the affairs of the world.¹⁹² And in prophetic discourse, we find a reformist response to the world, since it presupposes that people on earth can change the system of behaviour by confronting it, attacking it, and enacting different behaviour that offers God's blessing to people.¹⁹³

¹⁸⁹ Bloomquist, "Paul's Inclusive Language," 173.

¹⁹⁰ Robbins, "Dialectical Nature," 358. A clear example of a gnostic-manipulationist approach is the biblical book of Proverbs.

¹⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 359. For an important discussion of miracle discourse and thaumaturgical healing see the article by L. G. Bloomquist, "First Century Models of Bodily Healing and their Socio-Rhetorical Transformation in Some New Testament Traditions." Online: <http://www.ars-rhetorica.net/Queen/VolumeSpecialIssue/Articles/Bloomquist.pdf>.

¹⁹² Robbins, "Dialectical Nature," 359.

¹⁹³ *Ibid.*, 360.

The Blending of Rhetorolects

Important for the analysis and interpretation of the different modes of argumentation within the rhetorolects of early Christian discourse is the consideration of the particular social locations out of which the reasoning contained within these rhetorolects emerged. Included among these locations are: people's bodies, households, villages, synagogues, temples, cities, kingdoms, and empires. In short, it can be said that the cognitions and reasonings of early Christian discourse emerged out of the "lived experiences" of the people of the first century Mediterranean world.¹⁹⁴

Useful in this regard have been the insights of critical spatial theory¹⁹⁵ which have been used by a number of biblical scholars to highlight the importance and understanding of how "space" within ancient Mediterranean texts is represented, classified, and manipulated. There are essentially three ways this happens.

First, spatial representation can be understood in terms of three different categories: a) perceived space, which pertains to the actual physical geography of the world;¹⁹⁶ b) conceived space, which pertains to the social order that is imposed on physical geography;¹⁹⁷ and c) lived space, which pertains to an individual's own experience and his/her understanding of it within his/her own perceived and conceived spaces.¹⁹⁸

¹⁹⁴ Robbins, "Recent Developments," 31-32.

¹⁹⁵ See, for example, H. Lefebvre, *The Production of Space* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991); R. D. Sack, *Human Territoriality: Its Theory and History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986); E. W. Soja, *Postmodern Geography: The Reassertion of Space in Critical Social Theory* (New York: Verso, 1989); and S. Toulmin, *Cosmopolis: The Hidden Agenda of Modernity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990). For an example of the use of critical spatial theory within the guild of biblical studies, see J. W. Flanagan, "Ancient Perceptions of Space/Perceptions of Ancient Space," *Semeia* 87 (1999): 15-43.

¹⁹⁶ Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 33; Soja, *Postmodern Geography*, 74-79.

¹⁹⁷ Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 33.

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 33.

A second key to understanding ancient perceptions of space pertains to how these spaces were classified. In particular, we are referring here to the ways in which humans invest space with meaning or label it for some purpose. A sample inventory of classification systems (all of which are binary opposites) might include: public / private, sacred / profane, honourable / shameful, clean / unclean, fixed / fluid, centre / periphery, and civilization / nature—all of which are intended to have dramatic impact on how we and others think of and behave in regard to a certain space.¹⁹⁹

A third key to deciphering spatial understanding is to examine the ways in which space has been manipulated by persons and events. This may be as simple as identifying the physical places where people work, worship, do business, execute legal decisions, and gather for important public announcements. Significantly, however, these mundane practices take on different purposes, meanings, and intentions depending on where in space and time they occur and who is performing the action in question. In this way, the substance of the act derives meaning from the rank, authority, or status of the person involved, as well as the physical and symbolic space involved.²⁰⁰

In addition to the insights of critical spatial theory, SRA also incorporates the insights of cognitive theory about “conceptual blending”²⁰¹ in order to help clarify the relation of these social places to the cultural, ideological, and religious (mental) spaces in the six major early Christian rhetorolects.²⁰² At its most basic level, conceptual

¹⁹⁹ J. H. Neyrey, “Spaces and Places, Whence and Whither, Homes and Rooms: ‘Territoriality’ in the Fourth Gospel,” *BTB* 32 (2002), 61.

²⁰⁰ V. H. Matthews, “Physical Space, Imagined Space, and “Lived Space” in Ancient Israel,” *BTB* 33 (2003), 13.

²⁰¹ See, for example, G. Fauconnier and M. Turner, *The Way We Think: Conceptual Blending and the Mind’s Hidden Complexities* (New York: Basic Books, 2002).

²⁰² Robbins, “Recent Developments,” 34.

blending involves four elements: two input spaces, which contain elements from two different cognitive arenas; a generic space, which “reflects some common, usually more abstract, structure and organization shared by the inputs and defines the core cross-space mapping between them”;²⁰³ and, a blended space, which contains only selected elements from each input space. As a result, the blend has emergent structure of its own that is not located in either of the input spaces, and through it cognitive work (that helps to sustain the reasoning of the discourse) gets accomplished in the blend.²⁰⁴

According to Robbins, the sensory-aesthetic experiences of the body in various social places (household, city, temple, kingdom) in the world create the contexts in which people grow in cognitive and conceptual abilities that interpret the social places they experience as cultural, ideological, and religious spaces.²⁰⁵ To use the example of apocalyptic discourse, which is most directly germane to the present endeavour, Robbins has suggested that

Early Christian apocalyptic rhetorolect blends human experiences of the emperor and his imperial army with God's heavenly temple city, which can only be occupied by holy, undefiled people. In the space of blending, God functions as a heavenly emperor who gives commands to emissaries to destroy all the evil in the universe and to create a cosmic environment where holy bodies experience perfect well-being in the presence of God. Apocalyptic rhetorolect, then, features destruction of evil and construction of a cosmic environment of perfect well-being. The goal of this blending is to call people into action and thought guided by perfect holiness. The presupposition of the rhetorolect is that only perfect holiness and righteousness can bring a person into the presence of God, who destroys all evil and gathers all holiness together in his presence. Apocalyptic redemption, therefore, means the presence of all God's holy beings

²⁰³ G. Fauconnier, *Mappings in Thought and Language* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 149.

²⁰⁴ S. Coulson and T. Oakley, “Blending Basics,” *Cognitive Linguistics* 11 (2000), 180.

²⁰⁵ Robbins, “Recent Developments,” 35.

in a realm where God's holiness and righteousness are completely and eternally present.²⁰⁶

Since apocalyptic and each of the other five early Christian rhetorolects present their own unique configurations of social, cultural, and ideological language, as well as storytelling and argumentation that evoke certain pictures, emotions, cognitions, and reasonings, each of these rhetorolects made vital contributions to the new culture of discourse that characterized early Christianity—particularly as they were inter-blended in some capacity with one or more of the other rhetorolects.²⁰⁷

According to Robbins, people have the potential to blend every rhetorolect with every other rhetorolect, either on the terms of one dominant rhetorolect, or a particular blend of multiple rhetorolects. To refer back to the example of apocalyptic rhetoric, Robbins states:

Christian apocalyptic rhetorolect features Christ's initial coming to earth to produce a new beginning and Christ's return to earth to produce a new world. When apocalyptic rhetorolect blends with wisdom rhetorolect, God's speech through Christ produces new beginnings and good endings. When apocalyptic rhetorolect blends with prophetic rhetorolect, God and Christ call people into new beginnings. When apocalyptic rhetorolect blends with miracle rhetorolect, God's power working in and through Christ produces bodily beginnings. When apocalyptic rhetorolect blends with precreation rhetorolect, Christ's primordial divinity with God produces eternal beginnings in believers that turn endings into a time of joy and celebration. When apocalyptic rhetorolect blends with priestly rhetorolect, Christ's sacrifice produces holy beginnings for believers.²⁰⁸

Combined, these six rhetorolects as a system of discourse were able to address both the microcosmic details about individual bodies on earth, as well as the macrocosmic details about God's uncreated realm. In order to do so, they interacted with *topoi* that addressed issues, concerns, emotions, insights, knowledge, and mysteries that cover a

²⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 37-38. For Robbins' understanding of the blended spaces and locations in the other five early Christian rhetorolects, see *art. cit.*, 35-38.

²⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 38.

²⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 42. For Robbins' articulation of the blended rhetorics in each of the other five rhetorolects, see *art. cit.* 39-42.

wide spectrum reaching from mundane daily activities to the widest reaches of God's unknown realm of being. Of course, there were many topics and issues that first century Christian discourse did not address; however, as Robbins has noted, "the spectrum was so wide reaching that it successfully launched a new culture of discourse in the Mediterranean world that expanded and became continually more nuanced and complex throughout twenty centuries in the history of the world."²⁰⁹

The Tailoring of Socio-Rhetorical Method for the Study of the *Sibylline Oracles*

Brief as it is, this overview of socio-rhetorical method suffices to explain that this multidisciplinary approach is ideally suited to the study of the complex group of texts that make up the extant collection of *Sibylline Oracles*, and, more specifically, as the means to study how the Genesis flood narrative has been developed and used within this body of literature.

It is important, however, to keep in mind that the "new" culture of early Christian discourse that Robbins describes was only one of many contemporary cultures of discourse from around the ancient Mediterranean that existed alongside of, and interacted with, one another. Accordingly, since the *Sibylline Oracles* have an intrinsic relationship with Jewish, Christian, and Greco-Roman rhetoric, it will be necessary in the next chapter to broaden what Robbins has outlined about the six rhetorical modes of discourse. In this respect, special emphasis will be given to the rhetorical understanding of apocalyptic, since the *Sibylline Oracles* could, in many respects, be considered to be apocalyptic rhetoric.

²⁰⁹ Robbins, "Recent Developments," 43.

Specifically, it will be suggested that what Robbins has outlined as apocalyptic discourse is better understood as a subset of a more general ancient Mediterranean discourse type, which we will refer to as mantic discourse—a discourse mode that also, in addition to Judeo-Christian apocalyptic discourse, came to be localized in a variety of other cultures. Among these was the Greco-Roman world, where mantic discourse came to be localized in a form which we may tentatively describe here as Greco-Roman “oracular” discourse—a rhetorical mode out of which the original Greco-Roman Sibylline Oracles (and oracles generally) came to emerge.

It is well accepted that the extant collection of *Sibylline Oracles* is fundamentally different from their Greco-Roman counterparts. As such, the importance of the discussion in the next two chapters (of mantic discourse and its various localizations in the ancient Mediterranean world) will be to illustrate the rhetorical, cultural, and ideological shift that occurred within the medium of the Sibylline oracles as a result of their adaptation by Jews and Christians during the Second Temple Period.

CHAPTER 3: THE ANALYSIS OF MAJOR *TOPOI* IN *SIBYLLINE ORACLES* 1-2

In the previous chapter we suggested that rhetorical *topoi* are the basic categories or mental spaces through which people think, understand, and speak about the world, their experience, and the phenomena about them. Fauconnier and Turner describe these mental spaces as “small conceptual packets constructed as we think and talk for the purposes of local understanding and action.”²¹⁰ In this sense, they are the key reference points for navigating through the phenomena of the world (similar to the markings on a map). Rhetorically speaking, they are the key reference points that drive the discourse forward, and which lead the reader/listener toward the rhetorical end of the argument.²¹¹

For our purposes, we will be interested in determining: 1) what major *topoi* are rhetorically evident in *Sib. Or.* 1-2;²¹² 2) whether these rhetorical *topoi* are also present in the rest of the *Sibylline Oracles* as well as in other ancient Mediterranean and related discourses; and 3) whether or not these *topoi* come to be used differently in the *Sibylline Oracles* from other ancient Mediterranean discourse.

In order to begin to analyze the configurations of major *topoi* present in *Sib. Or.* 1-2, we will consider as a starting point the work of Stephen O’Leary, who has specified a template of three major rhetorical *topoi* that can be said to characterize

²¹⁰ Fauconnier and Turner, *The Way We Think*, 40.

²¹¹ In some cases, there is a sense in which *topoi* could be considered to be typological in nature, since what is being spoken about is understood in terms of something else—whether it be the “old” that is used to speak about the “new,” the past that is used to speak about the future, or the familiar to speak about the unfamiliar.

²¹² Presumably there are many rhetorical *topoi* in *Sib. Or.* 1-2, and though there are many ways to identify these *topoi*, I will be interested in dealing with only the major (or indispensable) rhetorical *topoi* upon which the discourse as a whole is built, and which move the discourse programmatically towards its rhetorical goals—rhetorical *topoi* that can in most cases be seen when we consider the inner texture of *Sib. Or.* 1-2.

apocalyptic rhetoric—namely, time, evil, and authority²¹³—and which function in dialectical relation with one another.²¹⁴ To begin with such a template for an analysis of the major rhetorical *topoi* of *Sib. Or.* 1-2 is only reasonable since, as we have already suggested in chapter 1, there is a clear relationship between the discourse of the *Sibylline Oracles* and the apocalyptic rhetoric with which they were contemporary.

In using this template, however, we will not simply repeat what had been set out by O'Leary, but will build upon his work by 1) shifting from O'Leary's emphasis on how these *topoi* function within subsequent (and particularly recent) interpretations of the discourse of ancient apocalyptic texts in order to focus the discussion on how these *topoi* function within the discourse of the texts themselves—particularly *Sib. Or.* 1-2, and by extension, the rest of the *Sibylline Oracles*; 2) adding to these three *topoi* the *topoi* of divine communication and catastrophe, which, as we shall see, play such an integral role in *Sib. Or.* 1-2; and 3) suggesting why these five mental resource zones—time, evil, authority, divine communication, and catastrophe—function as *topoi* within *Sib. Or.* 1-2, and in particular, showing how they fit into the argument of *Sib. Or.* 1-2—how they blend with one another in order to drive the discourse forward. These five rhetorical *topoi* are common to all cultures and societies but come to have special emphasis and to be articulated and configured uniquely in *Sib. Or.* 1-2. To this end, the centrality of these *topoi* can certainly be seen when we consider elements of the inner and intertexture of *Sib. Or.* 1-2.

²¹³ O'Leary, "A Dramatistic Theory of Apocalyptic Rhetoric," 386.

²¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 401.

The Periodization of History (Time)

The *topos* which O'Leary had labeled "time," we will here rename as the "periodization of history" (although it could just as easily be labeled as "periodization of time" or simply "history"), since history seems to capture an important spatial dimension that time does not—a dimension that is especially pertinent to apocalyptic and other mantic discourse. O'Leary himself, for example, has described apocalyptic rhetoric as "*an epochal discourse: a systematic symbolic division of historical time that accords weight to actions and events in history by mediating the relationship of the past, present, and future.*"²¹⁵

This *topos* is common to all human society and culture, regardless of whether it is understood in terms of local or global proportion. In this respect, the present reality, experiences, and situations of the author and readers are understood only with reference to the past, and to some degree, in anticipation of the future—they can never be understood independent of them. In this sense, the experience of the past affects how one perceives the present, and directs one's anticipation of the future. In some cases, the past can be seen to provide a model (ideal or otherwise) of what things should or could be like in the present or future. In other cases, knowledge of the past and future enable one to better understand the present, one's place in it, and how one is to live in it.

The recollection of past history is designed to show progression and/or regression. In particular, its purpose is to demonstrate how the present circumstance has come to be—how humanity has come to move from one stage to the next—a demonstration that may or may not have an implicit value judgment attached. In this

²¹⁵ O'Leary, "A Dramatistic Theory of Apocalyptic Rhetoric," 385.

sense, both the temporal and spatial aspects of the *topos* of history become immediately apparent: The (chronological) recollection of past history allows for the understanding of how the spatial elements in the world have come to be (and may project where the flow of history will lead in the future).

In *Sib. Or.* 1-2, the *topos* of history is immediately present at the outset of the Sibyl's discourse when she proclaims that:

Beginning from the first generation of articulate men
down to the last, I will prophesy all in turn,
such things as were before, as are, and as will come upon
the world through the impiety of men (1.1-4).²¹⁶

In many respects, this can be regarded as a summary statement that is indicative of both the temporal and universal aspects of the Sibyl's articulation of the *topos* of history. Repetitively and progressively speaking, this *topos* can be seen further in the Sibyl's presentation of her tenfold survey of history which is made up of a programmatic series of beginnings and endings, which in turn function as a part of a much larger series of beginnings and endings.

The first generation stems from Adam and Eve. They are said to have been great-hearted mortals, described in terms of lengthy day and lovely life, for they did not die worn out with troubles, but as if overcome by sleep (1.65-86). These are succeeded by a second generation of mighty men of sleepless mind and insatiable personality. They were a highly skilled generation, concerned with fair deeds, noble pursuits, and shrewd wisdom, that nevertheless went under the dread house of Tartarus (1.87-103). The third generation is described as being mighty in spirit and

²¹⁶ Ἀρχομένη πρώτης γενεᾶς μερόπων ἀνθρώπων
ἄρχις ἐπ' ἑσχατίης προφητεύσω τὰ ἕκαστα,
ὅπποσα πρὶν γέγονεν, πόσα δ' ἐστίν, ὅπόσῃ δὲ μέλλει
ἕσσεσθαι κόσμῳ διὰ δυσσεβείας ἀνθρώπων.

proud of heart, but who were eventually destroyed by wars and battles (1.104-108). These were followed by a fourth generation, whom the Sibyl describes as being late of fulfillment, bloodthirsty, and indiscriminate. Like the previous generation, they too were partially destroyed by wars and battles, with those remaining being removed from the earth by God himself (1.109-119). After these came a fifth, but far inferior, race of humans—known for their insolence, crookedness, and slanderous tongues. Their generation is said to have suffered many evils, and to come eventually to an end with the great flood of Noah. After this came the sixth generation of humans whom the Sibyl suggests is the first golden, excellent one, since the time of the first formed human. They will be concerned with justice, labour, and fair deeds. They are a blessed race that will be free of disease, and will eventually die with honour, smitten by sleep (1.283-306). After these will come a seventh generation. Referred to by the Sibyl as the Titans, they are described as grievous, mighty, and proud of heart (1.307-323). Finally, the tenth generation²¹⁷ of humans will arise. Characterized by madness, violence, and a lack of justice, they too, like the fifth generation, will be brought to an end through a global destruction.

In this articulation of history, the Sibyl seems to show the greatest affinity with Hesiod, on whose five-fold division of history (*Op.* 109-174) she is greatly dependent.²¹⁸ Hesiod divides history into five distinguishable periods which are in turn appropriately named after a particular type of metal (gold, silver, bronze, and iron) that is indicative of their respective moral and physical characteristics (the only exception in

²¹⁷ The descriptions of the eighth and ninth generations have been omitted by the Christian redactor.

²¹⁸ Kurfess, "Homer und Hesiod im 1 Buch der Oracula Sibyllina," 147-153.

this method of naming is Hesiod's fourth age which is simply described as a race of demi-gods (or godlike heroes)).

The Latin poet Ovid also seems to bear similarity to Hesiod (and thus the Sibyl) with his articulation of history into periods appropriately named after various metals (*Metam.* 1.88-261), although perhaps for the sake of style, he seems to omit the race of demi-gods outlined by Hesiod. Significantly, however, he does include a version of the Greco-Roman flood story, which he places at the very end of the iron generation (1.262-452), an inclusion that finds a clear parallel in *Sib. Or.* 1-2, which places the flood at the very end of the fifth generation.

The actual ten fold scheme offered by the Sibyl, as well as her emphasis on a definitive end, finds parallels in the apocalyptic rhetoric of *1 Enoch*, and in particular in the rhetoric of the *Apocalypse of Weeks* (*1 En.* 93 and 91), where these ten periods are labeled in terms of "weeks"—the first week beginning with Enoch's day, and the tenth week concluding, like the Sibyl's, with a final judgment and series of catastrophes. In this sense, the discourse of the Enochic *Apocalypse of Weeks* can also (like *Sib. Or.* 1-2) be seen to be composed of a series of smaller beginnings and endings which function together as part of a much larger beginning and ending.

Within other examples of apocalyptic discourse, a similar ten-fold division of history can also be found in 11QMelch 7-8. The *Animal Apocalypse* (*1 En.* 85-90) also offers a similar vision of the unfolding of history, but does not explicitly divide it into ten periods. Likewise, the *Apocalypse of Clouds* (*2 Bar.* 53-76) articulates history in terms

of twelve periods—ten of which are a recounting of the past, one of which is the present, and one of which is future.²¹⁹

Within the rest of the Sibylline corpus, the *topos* of history is articulated most similarly in book 4. Here like *Sib. Or.* 1-2, the Sibyl also offers a ten generation scheme of history but interestingly enough seemingly blends these ten generations into a listing of four successive world empires. Thus she states that the Assyrians will hold the world in their dominion for six generations (4.49-53), the Medes for two (4.54-64), the Persians for one generation (4.65-87), and the Macedonians also for one (4.88-101).

In a number of the other extant Judeo-Christian *Sibylline Oracles*, the *topos* of history is also articulated in terms of various dynastic lists. This is most obvious in *Sib. Or.* 12 and 13, for example, where we find a haphazard rhetorical chronicling of the reigns of Augustus to Alexander Severus and Gordian III to Odenath, respectively. In this respect, both the temporal and universal threads of the articulation of the *topos* of history can be seen to run throughout Judeo-Christian Sibylline discourse.

This articulation of the *topos* of history in terms of the flow of history, and particularly in the form of dynastic lists, is a rhetorical feature that also seems to find several parallels in other ancient, but not specifically Mediterranean, discourse, and

²¹⁹ According to F. L. Borchardt, apocalyptic rhetoric tells a story about time itself; however, it tells a story about “not just any beginning, middle, and end, but rather about *the* beginning, *the* middle, and *the* end” (*Doomsday Speculation as a Strategy of Persuasion: A Study of Apocalypticism as Rhetoric* (Studies in Comparative Religion 4; Queenston: Edwin Mellen Press, 1990), 2). By doing so, apocalyptic rhetoric makes time “orderly (not arbitrary), immanent (not transcendent), historical (not exclusively present), social (not individual), linear (not cyclical), and closed (not open-ended). It imposes both order and meaning on history” (*op. cit.*, 23). In apocalyptic rhetoric, the course of events “is anything but arbitrary, nor is the design irretrievably hidden in the mind of God. History is knowable in its entirety, and every moment is significantly related to every other. The rhetoric of Doomsday is nothing less than a cosmology that unites the story of the universe with the history of human affairs” (*op. cit.*, 23).

particularly in the Akkadian prophecies, such as that illustrated by the following excerpt from the discourse referred to by Grayson and Lambert²²⁰ as Text A:

A prince will arise and rule for eighteen years.
 The land will rest secure, fare well,
 (and its) people will enjoy prosperity.
 The gods will ordain good things for the land,
 favourable winds will blow.
 The... and the furrow will yield abundant crops.
 Sakkan (the god of beasts) and Nisaba (the god of grain) will...in the land.
 There will be rain and floods.
 The people will enjoy themselves.
 But that prince will be put to the sword in a revolution.
 A prince will arise and rule for thirteen years.
 There will be an Elamite attack on Akkad
 and the booty of Akkad will be carried off.
 The shrines of the great gods will be destroyed.
 Akkad will suffer a defeat.
 There will be confusion, disturbance and disorder in the land.
 The nobility will lose prestige.
 Another man who is unknown will arise,
 seize the throne as king and put his grandees to the sword...

Here, like the bulk of the *Sibylline Oracles*, the *topos* of history is understood in terms of a series of successive periods—in this case a successive listing of rulers and a description of their reigns.

In contrast to *Sib. Or.* 1-2, however, the temporal aspect of the *topos* of history in the discourse of Greco-Roman oracles appears to be interested primarily in the future, rather than in the flow of history from beginning to end. Even though there is a sense in which the *topos* of history in many Greco-Roman oracles may generally be said to be concerned with all time (past, present, future), its primary interest does seem to be in the future. More specifically, this interest in the future usually only concerns the indefinite future (and usually only a specific point in the indefinite future), but not the End, or the culmination of history, as in apocalyptic discourse. It is not

²²⁰ A. K. Grayson and W. G. Lambert, "Akkadian Prophecies," *JCS* 18 (1964): 7-30.

eschatological in the sense of the “last things,” but only in terms of its interest in the way future events will unfold.

Accordingly, it can be seen in the written examples of oracles that although the god of the oracle may know the course of history, it is generally not revealed as such, but only in minute snippets. In Lucan’s account of the opening of the oracle at Delphi, for example, all of history is laid before the priestess, and she is asked to sift through it in search of the answer to the inquiry; however, as soon as she finds it this knowledge of past, present, and future is immediately snatched away from her. She is permitted only to reveal the specific answer to the inquiry and nothing more.²²¹ And so, while the whole course of universal history may be known by the god who inspires the prophet or prophetess, it is never revealed as such but remains the monopoly of the gods. As such, the discourse of oracles seems to lack the universal feel of apocalyptic, but is rather more explicitly “personal” or localized.

In much the same way, the *topos* of history in Greco-Roman Sibylline discourse also seems to be articulated primarily in terms of a specific moment in time and a specific locale. And so, while the Sibyl may have “uttered prophecies which benefited mankind not only while she lived, but even after she had passed away” (Varro, *Rust.* 1.3), her words uttered long ago were usually understood to be only snippets of divine foreknowledge that proclaimed to the world contemporary events (Silius Italicus, *Pun.* 57-65). As Momigliano further explains, “Pagan Sibylline oracles [unlike Jewish and Christian *Sibylline Oracles*] seldom went beyond individual events; they seldom pursued what we might call the great currents of world history.”²²²

²²¹ Lucan, *Phars.* 5.65-235. For a summary of the entire oracle, see Appendix A.

²²² Momigliano, “From the Pagan to the Christian Sibyl,” 13.

It is interesting to note how the various rhetorical cultures of the ancient Mediterranean articulate the periodization of (world) history. As we have seen, a number of Jewish texts, for example, seem to articulate the periods of history symbolically in terms of weeks (i.e. Daniel, *1 Enoch*). The *Sibylline Oracles*, on the other hand, seem to follow the Greco-Roman articulation of describing the periods of history in terms of generations (or races) of humans (e.g. Hesiod, Ovid). Having said that, it seems that what the writer of *Sib. Or.* 1-2 has done is to blend this Greco-Roman articulation into an essentially Judeo-Christian apocalyptic framework of history (that is, an apocalyptic understanding of history articulated in Greco-Roman terms). Thus while the *topos* in *Sib. Or.* 1-2 differs in its articulation of history into periods from Greco-Roman *Sibylline Oracles*, it does maintain its Greco-Roman flavour in terms of how these periods are understood.

The *Topos* of Corruption (Evil)

What O'Leary has usefully described as "evil," we will here more generally label as "corruption." Certainly, evil can be understood to be one aspect, or one articulation, of corruption; however, in addition to being understood in the sense of 1) something that is evil, bad, or in some way associated with some other negative moral connotation, corruption can also be understood to mean 2) something that is unnatural, out of place, or other than what it should be; or 3) something that is defective or that does not function in the manner that it should, depending on the context in which it is used.

Rhetorically speaking, the evaluation of things as either corrupt or incorrupt is a function characteristic of all religions and societies, and an integral part of how people evaluate and understand themselves, the world, and their place within it. More specifically, it can be said that one of the major differences between societies is in

terms of what they consider to be corrupt, how they determine what is corrupt and what is not, and how they respond to corruption. Accordingly, what is corrupt in one society may not be the same as another—the result of which can be some form of tension, conflict, or judgment. It results in judgment, for example, if the individual or group doing the evaluating has greater authority than those being evaluated. Alternatively, if the ones doing the evaluating do not have a greater functional authority, then this judgment will be pushed off from the present to sometime in the future and may invoke the services of other worldly or supernatural authorities to bring about this judgment.

In *Sib. Or.* 1-2, the *topos* of corruption can be seen to be interwoven throughout the entirety of the discourse, particularly when we consider the frequency of the words and phrases that underlie this *topos* and contribute to its development. The word κακός (“evil”) and related terms,²²³ for example, can be seen repetitively to occur at least twenty-five times throughout the text.²²⁴ Likewise, a number of other words associated with this *topos* also appear repetitively: words for “impious” or “impiety,” for example, occur at least five times;²²⁵ “shame” or “shameless” occur nine times;²²⁶ “deceive” or “deceit” five times;²²⁷ “lawlessness” six times;²²⁸ “idol” or “idolatry” four times;²²⁹ and so on.²³⁰

²²³ κακοπράγμονες (“evildoers”; 1.177), κακογνώμων (“of evil mind”; 2.144), etc.

²²⁴ 1.36, 41, 46, 106, 122, 154, 169, 174, 177, 203, 318, 339, 397, 399; 2.111, 115, 123, 127, 144, 146, 162, 216, 255, 294, 304.

²²⁵ δυσσεβίας (1.4); δυσσεβίη (1.114); δυσσεβέας (1.117); δυσσεβέων (2.244); ἀσεβείς (2.254).

²²⁶ αἰδῶ (1.35); αἰδώς (1.149); ἀναιδῶς (1.74; 2.43); ἀναιδέα (1.130; 2.345); ἀναιδείην (1.175); ἀναιδείη (2.33); ἀναιδέσιν (2.263).

²²⁷ δολόω (1.40); ἀπάτη (1.59); δόλος (2.114); ψευδαπάτη (2.144, 166).

²²⁸ ἀθεμίστως (1.169); ἀνόμοις (1.350); ἔκνομον (2.94); ἔκνομα (2.98, 343); ἀθέσμως (2.282).

²²⁹ εἰδώλων (2.17); εἰδωλα (2.59); εἰδωλοθύτων (2.96); εἰδωλολάτραι (2.259).

²³⁰ This listing is by no means exhaustive, but only a representative sample that demonstrates the thoroughgoing emphasis on corruption within *Sib. Or.* 1-2.

In terms of plot, *Sib. Or.* 1-2 begins with the creation of a world that is free of corruption (1.5-37) and a human race that is free of licentiousness, shame, and evil-heartedness (1.35-36). In much the same way, the discourse also concludes with an envisioning of a world that is also free of corruption (2.313-338). In between, however, the discourse speaks of the fall of humanity (1.38-64), as well as a listing of the ten generations of humanity which are described in terms of various states or degrees of corruption, and in particular, in terms of their moral (or immoral) inclinations. The first generation, for example, is characterized as a great-hearted, industrious, and long-lived race who were loved and blessed by God (1.65-73); however, they are also described as a shameless and divisive lot who ridiculed their fathers, dishonoured their mothers, plotted against their brothers, and inevitably made war with one another (1.74-78). In continuity with this first generation, the next four generations are in turn characterized by deteriorating moral quality. By the fifth generation, they are deemed so corrupt that there is but one righteous person left, Noah; accordingly, God sent a great flood to destroy them. In stark contrast, the generation after the flood is described as a “golden age” that is characterized by the administration of justice, in particular, as pertaining to labour and fair deeds (1.295-296). These too, were a race of blessed ones to whom God gave noble minds and confided his counsels (1.303-306). The succeeding ages, however, follow the pattern of the first five, and eventually lead to a similar judgment during the tenth generation.

The description of the corruption is most intense in the tenth generation where it reaches its pinnacle. *Sibylline Oracles* 2.254-283 gives a comprehensive listing of the types of people who would be considered corrupt. Included among these are: the impious, murderers, thieves, vandals, adulterers, lawless and violent ones, idol

worshippers, the faithless, blasphemers, the shameless, the unjust, the deceitful, the arrogant, those who mistreat orphans and widows, those who ill-treat their parents, the promiscuous, those who have had abortions, and those involved with sorcery.²³¹

This in turn contrasts with the ideal virtues expressed in the text, such as the Sibyl's description of Noah, who she states was "most upright and true, a most trustworthy man, concerned for noble deeds" (1.125-126).²³² Likewise, we might also include in this respect the parameters for the contest for entry into heaven, that repetitively emphasizes the virtues of justice, mercy, moderation, and honesty (2.56-148).

In other Judeo-Christian *Sibylline Oracles* the emphasis on moral corruption is also readily apparent. Similar to what we find in *Sib. Or.* 1-2, the word κακός ("evil") and related compound terms can be seen to recur at least eighty-seven other times throughout books 3-11. Likewise, terms for "impiety" (27 times), "shamelessness" (21 times), "deceit" (10 times), "lawlessness" (17 times), and "idolatry" (16 times). Through these words and others like them, the denunciation of various moral, religious, and political practices and values is scattered all throughout the discourse of the *Sibylline Oracles*. Often these corrupt values and practices come to be associated with various cities and nations. In *Sib. Or.* 5.162-178, for example, the Sibyl lucidly describes Rome as an unjust and evil city, as having a "murderous heart" (μιαιφόνον ἦτορ) and an "impious spirit" (ἄσεβη θυμόν), and as being associated with sorcery (φαρμακίην), adulteries (μοιχεῖαι), and "illicit intercourse with boys" (παίδων μίξις ἄθεσμος).

²³¹ A similar scheme of generations articulated in terms of deteriorating moral quality can also be seen in Hesiod, *Op.* 109-174 and Ovid, *Metam.* 1.88-261.

²³² μούνος δ' ἐν πάντεσσι δικαιοτάτος καὶ ἀληθής
ἦν Νῶε, πιστότατος καλοῖς τ' ἔργοισι μεμνηώς.

In certain Babylonian texts, such as Grayson and Lambert's Text A, the various listings of dynasties are frequently described by their evaluation as either "good" or "bad," although given the fragmentary nature of these texts and our limited understanding of them, it is difficult to determine exactly what is meant by the articulation of the *topos* in this way.

The *topos* of corruption, however, need not always be understood to be an inevitable downward spiral of deterioration. The *Apocalypse of Clouds* (2 Bar. 53-76), for example, offers a description of a succession of periods that are described in an alternating fashion as either good or bad—characterized by truth or deceit—in much the same fashion as certain Babylonian texts (see, for example, Text A, cited above). Yet, in *Sib. Or.* 1-2 this is certainly the case. In this respect, the *Sibylline Oracles* find a degree of commonality with much of the other apocalyptic rhetoric with which it was contemporary, such as in 1 *En.* 93 and 91, where we also find two successive cycles that feature a progressive deterioration of human morality followed by an appropriate judgment of that corruption.

Unlike the *Sibylline Oracles*, however, which seems to view the dominant culture (Rome or otherwise) as the embodiment of corruption, in Greco-Roman Sibylline discourse the *topos* of corruption seems to be understood in terms of anything that is counterproductive to the cause of the (Roman) dominant culture. Thus in the Greco-Roman Sibylline oracles, corruption is understood more in a political sense (i.e. as a corruption of the social order), than in an explicitly religious sense, as corruption of the divinely ordained order of authority or rule of the emperor. Thus the Roman Sibylline books, for example, were consulted during the time of Marcus Aurelius to see

what course of action should be taken against barbarian advances, give the emperor the advantage in battle, and thus end the war (Flavius Vopiscus, *Div. Aurel.* 18.5).

Authority

The *topos* of authority is a feature integral to all societies, regardless of whether it is understood in terms of family, politics, religion, or social structures. However it is understood, it suggests some sort of (formal or informal) hierarchical structure—whether it be in terms of power, justice, decision-making, credibility, and the like. In particular, it is about ordering in the universe, as well as of one's place in the ordering of the structures within which one lives and exists.

In *Sib. Or.* 1-2, the *topos* of authority is perhaps best understood in terms of God's infinite authority and its relationship to the cosmos and the historical process. This emphasis on divine authority can be seen in terms of the repetitive texture that is threaded throughout the discourse. The jurisdiction of God's authority, for example, is without limits. In this respect, God is said to be "the universal ruler" (ὁ παντοκράτωρ; 1.66; 2.220, 330), as having authority over nature (1.217-241), and as having control over famines, pestilence, and thunderbolts (2.23). He is described as the commander of the imperishable angels (2.214-220) and as the judge of ancient phantoms, titans, and giants (2.230-232). He is even said to have authority over individual human bodies. Thus he is able to raise the dead (2.221-226) and to take control of the Sibyl's speech (2.1-5).

God is also said to oversee all (πανεπίσκοπος; 2.177) and to participate in the historical process. Thus he is understood not only to be the creator of the physical world (1.158), but also to have created it through the spoken word (1.8, 19), and to

have been the animator of the physical world as well (1.22, 209). He is described as “the judge of mortals” (θνητῶν ὁ δικασπóλος; 2.220) and has authority to judge those in authority (2.23-24). He likewise is said to be the one who will bring punishment upon the wicked (2.283-312). As such, he brought the flood of Noah upon the earth and will eventually bring a flood of fire upon it (2.196-213).

In terms of location, he is said to live in the sky (2.27, 177) and to rule from on high (1.347)—an implicit spatial indicator of authority that can be seen extensively in *Sib. Or.* 1-2. In at least seven places, for example, he is described in some way as “heavenly,”²³³ and in at least four others he is described as the “most high.”²³⁴

Furthermore, the duration of God’s authority is indicated by the repetitive claims to be “immortal,”²³⁵ “imperishable,”²³⁶ and “everlasting” (αἰὲν ἔόντος, 2.287)—an authority that contrasts sharply with the human authority that is described as “mortal” (βροτοί, 1.157) and as “perishing” (ὀλλυμένοις, 1.163).

In the majority of the other *Sibylline Oracles*, this emphasis on God’s infinite authority and its relationship to the cosmos can also be seen clearly. This is perhaps most evident in the early verses of book 4, where God is described as one who has authority over day and night, the sun, moon, and the stars, over land and sea and the life that inhabits them (4.13-17). In other places, he is further described as having authority over human bodies. Thus, he is able to inspire and compel the Sibyl to prophesy (3.2-7; 3.295-299) and he will raise the dead in the last days (4.182). He is described as having authority over nations and kings and their politics, able to raise up

²³³ οὐράνιον (1.158); ἑπουρανίῳ (1.216, 2.284); ἀμβροσίν (1.275); οὐρανίου (1.364); οὐράνιος (2.151); ἑπουράνιος (2.222).

²³⁴ ὑψίστοιο (1.331, 362; 2.245); ὑψιστος πάντων (2.177).

²³⁵ ἀθάνατος (1.45, 50, 53, 56, 73, 122, 152, 167, 232, 331; 2.214, 219, 287).

²³⁶ ἀφθιτος (1.158; 2.219, 241, 284, 287, 330, 331).

one nation and to bring down another. He is described as having authority over the historical process, able to guide history towards a definitive goal and to prophesy of the days and things that are to be (3.298-299; 4.48). He is also described as having authority over the heavenly realms. In this respect, he will be exalted in Egypt above Isis and all other Egyptian deities (5.484-511). As the one who “thunders on high” (ὕψιβρεμέτης), he can also be seen to supplant Zeus—traditionally known for his hurling of thunderbolts—the greatest of the Greco-Roman deities (5.433).

The *topos* of authority is also prevalent within the discourse of Greco-Roman oracles, which frequently addressed the social and political matters relating directly to worldly authority—that is, the various power struggles and structures that characterize human society and interaction. Thus, by their very nature they address matters of kingship, the rise and fall of nations, the founding of cities and countries, struggles between kin, the victories and defeats of battle, and the like. For this reason Herodotus, for example, speaks of instances where oracles were useful in the ordering of state and property (*Hist.* 4.161). He also mentions how the Delphic oracle ordained Gyges to be king of the Lydians (1.13), how the oracle foretold the end of Croesus’ empire at the hands of the Persians (1.86), and other similar political phenomena.

Occasionally, oracles can also to some extent be seen to address the authority of the gods over nature and their periodic involvement in human affairs. Accordingly, they frequently prescribe solutions to appease the wrath of the gods, such as the example told by Herodotus of the Spartans who consulted the oracle at Delphi in order to determine what sacrifice would give them mastery over Tegea in war (*Hist.* 1.67). In all of these cases, the authority inherent to the deity who inspires the oracle is clear. As Lucan explains, “A great and mighty god is he, whether he merely predicts the

future or the future is itself determined by the fiat of his utterance" (*Phars.* 5.93-94, Duff).

In much the same way, the discourse of Greco-Roman Sibylline oracles also claims an intense interest in the matters of state. As a written collection, the Sibylline books were "famed for their benefits to the state" (Flavius Vopiscus, *Div. Aurel.* 18.5), and were said to contain the unchanging fate of the commonwealth (19.6). Likewise, the Cumean Sibyl is said to have spoken of the unfolding of the fate of Aeneas and his people (Virgil, *Aen.* 6).

In much the same way, apocalyptic rhetoric also understands the *topos* of authority in terms of the political, social, and religious systems and structures that it claims to address. Accordingly, the book of Daniel, for example, shows an intense interest in the interplay and succession of earthly kingdoms and authorities, as do a number of other examples of apocalyptic discourse (Apocalypse of John, *1 Enoch*, etc.). However, like the *Sibylline Oracles*, apocalyptic discourse moves beyond this interest in earthly authority and also takes an interest in God's authority over the cosmos and the historical process. Thus, in the apocalyptic discourse of Daniel and the Apocalypse of John, for example, we eventually witness the replacement of these earthly kingdoms and their related socio-economic structures with God's heavenly kingdom. In this way, the deficiencies and corruption inherent to the worldly structures and systems of authority (that is, the human authority that characterizes the world) are greatly emphasized and contrasted with an ideal world under some form of divine governance (heavenly authority) that is free of these deficiencies and corruption. Intrinsically linked here, of course, is the notion of God's authority to judge the world,

which, although exhibited at various points throughout history, will eventually culminate in a definitive final judgment of the world at the end of time.

Divine Catastrophe (Act of God)

Catastrophe is a phenomenon and experience that is universally understood in some form by all humanity. It may be personal, local, regional, or global in scope, and may find the root of its cause in nature (plague, drought, earthquake, flood), human initiative (war, genocide, etc.), the divine, or some combination thereof. In every case, it has a dramatic impact on how a person or culture comes to view, understand, and function in the world.

For example, a people that has had a long history of catastrophe will naturally view the world (as well as their relation to the divine) differently from one that has been relatively free of catastrophe. A tribe that has endured years of plague, famine, and war will naturally have a different outlook than one that has enjoyed peace and prosperity. In the same way, a nation that is the victim of a human-made catastrophe (i.e. a war and its associated destruction and devastation) will naturally come to view and understand circumstances differently from the nation that is at the root of that catastrophe.²³⁷

In *Sib. Or.* 1-2, the articulation of the *topos* of catastrophe takes the form of an intense emphasis on the description of destructive and catastrophic events and their

²³⁷ The case in point that will be discussed in a later portion of the chapter is, of course, the difference between the Judeo-Christian understanding of the *topos* of catastrophe and the Greco-Roman understanding—a contrast that ultimately emerges in the comparison between the thaumaturgical rhetoric of Greco-Roman Sibylline oracles that sought to maintain the dominant culture of the Roman Empire, and the revolutionist rhetoric of Judeo-Christian apocalyptic discourse that spoke of its overthrow.

effects.²³⁸ In particular, the cataclysmic events described are understood in large part to be global in scope and to have far-reaching effects. The rhetoric of *Sib. Or.* 1-2 exhibits two great examples of global catastrophe—the flood of Noah during the fifth generation (1.217-260), and the flood of fire that will transpire during the tenth generation (2.196-213)—both of which give the impression of a complete undoing of creation. The most intense of these is the flood of fire:

And then a great river of blazing fire
will flow from heaven, and will consume every place,
land and great ocean and gleaming sea,
lakes and rivers, springs and implacable Hades
and the heavenly vault. But the heavenly luminaries
will crash together, also into an utterly desolate form.
For all the stars will fall together from heaven on the sea.
All the souls of men will gnash their teeth,
burning in a river, and brimstone and a rush of fire
in a fiery plain, and ashes will cover all.
And then the elements of the world will be bereft—
air, land, sea, light, vault of heaven, days, nights.
No longer will innumerable birds fly in the air.
Swimming creatures will no longer swim the sea at all.
No laden ship will voyage on the waves.
No guiding oxen will plow the soil.
No sound of trees under the winds. But at once all
will melt into one and separate into clear air (*Sib. Or.* 2.196-213).²³⁹

²³⁸ Words that could be translated “destroy” or “destruction” (and variants), for example, appear at least sixteen times in *Sib. Or.* 1-2 (ὀλέεσκον, 1.108; ἐξολέσω, 1.131; ἐξαπόλησθε, 1.153; ὀλεθρον, 1.288, 313; καταλύσει, 1.332; φθοραὶ, 2.9; θυμοφθόρος, 2.113; ὀλοόφρονα, 2.135; ὀλοή, 2.138; ἀπώλεσιν, 2.172; ἀπώλεσε, 2.233; ἔφθειρεν, 2.236; ὀλέσσει, 2.249; ὀλοῦνται, 2.254; ὀλοώτεροι, 2.267). Similarly, a number of related terms also repeat several times throughout the discourse: wars (4) (πολέμους, 1.78; ὑσμῖναι, 1.107; πολεμοί, 1.115, 2.156); death (4) (θάνατος, 1.82, 2.81, 307, 308); perish (7) (ὀλλυμένοις, 1.163; ἀπολείται, 1.194, 2.33; ἀπολλυμένων, 1.390; ὀλείται, 2.18; ὀλοῦνται, 2.173; ἀπολλυμένου, 2.189); famines (2) (λιμοί, 2.23, 156); pestilence (2) (λοιμοί, 2.23, 156); affliction (2) (πῆμα, 2.116; θλίψεις, 2.156); and battle (3) (μάχαι, 1.107, 115, 2.117); among others.

²³⁹ καὶ τότε δὴ ποταμός τε μέγας πυρὸς αἰθομένοιο
ρεύσει ἀπ’ οὐρανόθεν καὶ πάντα τόπον δαπανήσει,
γαῖάν τ’ ὠκεανόν τε μέγας γλαυκὴν τε θάλασσαν
λίμνας καὶ ποταμούς πηγὰς καὶ ἀμείλιχον Ἰαίδη
καὶ πόλον οὐράνιον. ἀτὰρ οὐράνιον φαστῆρες
εἰς ἓν συρρήξουσιν καὶ εἰς μορφὴν πανέπημον.
ἄστρα γὰρ οὐρανόθεν τε θαλάσση πάντα πεσεῖται·
ψυχὰς δ’ ἀνθρώπων πᾶσαι βρύξουσιν ὁδοῦσιν

Of course the presence of catastrophe is not simply confined to these generations, but can also be seen, in a repetitive fashion, to have brought to an end several of the other generations outlined by the Sibyl. For example, an undescribed “final ruin” is said to have been cast from heaven upon the first generation (1.78-79); and the third and fourth generations are said to have been destroyed by wars, slaughters, and battles (1.107, 115-116). In the seventh generation, it would seem that the threat of catastrophe is present, although averted as a result of the invocation of God’s promise to never again destroy the earth by flood (1.315-323). Likewise, even though a description of the eighth and ninth generations has been omitted by the Christian redactor, it would be only reasonable to suggest that they might also, consistent with the preceding generations, have been affected by some sort of catastrophe.

In the other Judeo-Christian Sibylline books, a similar emphasis on the description of the *topos* of catastrophe and its effects is also present, where, spatially speaking, the *topos* is understood on both local and global levels. Global catastrophe, as found in *Sib. Or.* 1-2, is usually understood in terms of both the flood of Noah (4.49-53; 7.7-10) and the destruction of the world by fire during the last days (3.761; 4.171-178; 7.118-131). These global catastrophes can be seen to punctuate the endless

καίόμεναι ποταμῶ καὶ θείῳ καὶ πυρὸς ὀρμῇ
 ἐν δατέδῳ μαλερῶ, τέφρα δέ τε πάντα καλύψει.
 καὶ τότε χηρεύσει στοιχεῖα πρόπαντα τὰ κόσμου
 ἄηρ γαῖα θάλασσα φάος πόλος ἡματα νύκτες·
 κούκετι πωτήσονται ἐν ἡέρι ἅπλετοι ὄρνεις,
 οὐ ζῶα νηκτὰ θάλασσαν ὅλως ἔτι νηγήσονται,
 οὐ ναῦς ἔμφορτος ἐπὶ κύμασι ποντοπορήσει,
 οὐ βόες ἰθυντήρες ἀποτρεύουσιν ἄρουραν,
 οὐκ ἦχος δένδρων ἀνέμων ὑπο· ἀλλ’ ἅμα πάντα
 εἰς ἐν χωνεύσει καὶ εἰς καθαρὸν διαλέξει.

references to local catastrophes that are central to the entire Sibylline corpus. *Sib. Or.* 3.295-333, for example, speaks of a series of disasters that will befall Babylon, Assyria, Egypt, Gog and Magog, and Libya; *Sib. Or.* 4.115-129 speaks of the destruction of Jerusalem; *Sib. Or.* 5.52-92 speaks of a great flood that will befall Egypt; *Sib. Or.* 5.111-117 speaks of a similar flood that will destroy the Persians, Iberians, and Babylonians; and *Sib. Or.* 8.37-49 and 123-130 speak of the impending destruction that will befall Rome.²⁴⁰

In Judeo-Christian apocalyptic discourse, the emphasis is also on the often vivid and graphic details of the catastrophic event itself, and in particular, the function of the event within the scheme of the historical process. To this end, the *topos* of catastrophe can usually be seen to occur in conjunction with God's authoritative decision to judge the world and the corruption inherent to its social, political, and religious structures. It is not catastrophe for its own sake but catastrophe with a purpose—namely, to deal with corruption and evil. Significantly, it is out of this cataclysmic destruction that a new golden age is inaugurated that is free of the corruption and injustices that characterize the present world. In short, it is catastrophe that acts as a transition point in time, the end of one world age and the inauguration of another, such as what we find in the Apocalypse of John, where the destruction of the present world can be seen to inaugurate the beginning of a new heaven and earth, a situation that we also find in *1 Enoch*, Daniel, and many other examples of apocalyptic discourse.

²⁴⁰ This is, of course, only a minute sampling of the use of catastrophe within the Sibylline corpus. Words that could be translated “destroy” or “destruction” (and variants), for example, appear at least one hundred and nineteen times in *Sib. Or.* 3-11. Similarly, a number of related terms also repeat several times throughout the discourse: war (55), death (13), perish (44), famine (17), pestilence (12), affliction (17), and wrath (16), among others.

In a similar fashion, in the Babylonian example we have previously cited (Text A), it would seem that we also find a repetitive reference to catastrophe:

A prince will arise and rule for eighteen years...
 But that prince will be put to the sword in a revolution.
 A prince will arise and rule for thirteen years.
 There will be an Elamite attack on Akkad...
 Another man who is unknown will arise,
 seize the throne as king and put his grandees to the sword...

In particular, catastrophe in this case seems to function as a transition point in history—ending the rule of one prince and inaugurating the rule of another.

By contrast, in the discourse of Greco-Roman oracles, the *topos* of catastrophe is usually articulated in terms of divine advice, insight, and solutions either to prevent or to deal with catastrophe. In some cases, the catastrophe concerned may be a crisis of a personal nature; in other cases, it may be of a corporate or national nature. Occasionally this *topos* is articulated in terms of various forecasts of impending doom and destruction, but usually the discourse of oracles is associated with insight to prevent or to best cope with personal or national catastrophe. In Lucan's *Civil War*, for example, the expected response was advice on self-preservation. Here Appius is said to have "feared to commit himself to the lottery of battle," and accordingly ventured to the shrine of Apollo at Delphi, where he "appealed to the gods to reveal the issue of events" (*Phars.* 5.93-94).

Thus it can also be seen here why oracular discourse can usually be said to take on a thaumaturgical flavour, since the divine insight contained in oracular discourse, when understood and implemented correctly, is able to ensure the well-being and survival of the particular individual(s) or nation(s). Failure to heed the advice of the oracle or to understand it correctly (such as the case with Appius), on the other hand, might result in certain disaster.

In much the same way, Greco-Roman Sibylline oracles also seem to articulate the *topos* of catastrophe not so much in terms of a description of the effects and purpose of catastrophe, but more in terms of advice as to how to avoid or deal with it. It is true that Plutarch in one place speaks of Sibylline oracles in terms of forecasts of catastrophe that are said to include “the bursting forth of fires from the mountain, boiling seas, blazing rocks tossed aloft by the wind, and the destruction of... great and noble cities” (*Pyth. orac.* 398E, Babbitt). However, this does not seem to be representative of most Greco-Roman Sibylline oracles. More frequently, the interest in Greco-Roman Sibylline discourse seems to be for the advice that it could offer in terms of how to deal with various catastrophes. They might, for instance, suggest how one might appease a deity, or perhaps prescribe a particular course of action to take while in battle—in general, actions that ensure well-being and survival. Thus, Flavius Vopiscus tells us that the Sibylline books were consulted “whenever any serious commotion arose” (*Div. Aurel.* 19.2). Similarly, Varro (*Rust.* 1.3) states that “for so many years later we are wont officially to consult her books when we desire to know what we should do after some portent.” In some cases, victory in battle is said to hinge on consultation of and obedience to the Sibylline books (*Div. Aurel.* 21.4). Tacitus reports how a motion was made to consult the Sibylline books during a serious flood crisis (*Ann.* 1.76). On another occasion, Tacitus reports how the words of the Sibyl were consulted in order to determine an appropriate means to appease the wrath of the gods. (*Ann.* 15.44). As Collins has observed, Roman Sibyllines typically prescribe solutions rather than predict disasters.²⁴¹

²⁴¹ Collins, *Seers, Sibyls and Sages*, 183.

Divine Communication

The *topos* of divine communication is the mental space that makes possible the consideration (and thus assent or rejection) of the interplay of the other major *topoi* we have outlined. For example, a person in the ancient world would most likely not even have considered the credibility of a future telling of history (let alone a coming judgment and destruction of the earth by flood or fire) if it did not come from outside the realm of human thinking or speculation.²⁴² In this sense, the *topos* is not simply a generic feature of the genre, but the space that, as we shall see in the next section, allows for the unique blending of the other *topoi* within the Sibyl's argument.

There is some sense in which this *topos* is explicitly religious, although this is not to say that it is a *topos* that does not have an effect outside of the religious sphere, for certainly it may. In particular, it stems from the ancient Mediterranean religious understanding that God or the gods know the answers to the mysteries that plague the human mind and that, from time to time, they would (on their own initiative or at human request) make these mysteries known to humanity. Thus, the sacred texture of SRA is helpful as a category for analysis of this *topos*.

In *Sib. Or.* 1-2, one gets the impression that the Sibyl's rhetoric is sacred rhetoric, since the Sibyl is not speaking on her own initiative but on the initiative of the great God. As such, it would seem that the rhetoric does not stand on its own merit but

²⁴² This is suggested most simply on a literary level by the sheer abundance of prophecies, oracles, apocalypses, and other mantic writings from the ancient world that demonstrate a preoccupation with future events or figures. As Aune has noted, the purpose of these types of writings was to provide the kind of information that was not accessible in any other way (*Prophecy*, 56). In the contemporary world, however, the need for divine communication to give legitimacy to speculations about the future has diminished as a result of unparalleled advances in the areas of science and technology that have brought, for example, the possibility of global destruction and the end of the world within the realm of human possibility.

on the merit of the deity who inspires the rhetoric. In this sense, the *topos* of divine communication in *Sib. Or.* 1-2 is the rhetorical feature that gives the discourse its credibility and rhetorical force.

If, for example, *Sib. Or.* 1-2 were simply a recollection of past history, then the *topos* of divine communication would not be necessary. But since the *topos* of history in *Sib. Or.* 1-2 pertains also to the unveiling of the future, the discourse must necessarily originate with someone who knows the future, that is, God or those to whom God chooses to reveal it. Likewise, it is the divine highlighting of corruption that removes any ambiguity about the identification of what is in fact corrupt; and it is the divine revelation of an impending future global catastrophe that causes people to take its imminence seriously. In short, it is this *topos* of divine communication that functions to give the content of the discourse its certainty, that solidifies and holds together the author's argument.

In *Sib. Or.* 1-2, the *topos* of divine communication appears right at the outset of the discourse where the Sibyl states that:

Beginning from the first generation of articulate men
down to the last, I will prophesy in turn,
such things as were before, as are, and as will come upon
the world through the impiety of men.
First God bids me tell truly how the world came to be (1.1-5).²⁴³

Likewise, it is explicitly reiterated in *Sib. Or.* 2.1-5, where the Sibyl states that:

When indeed God stopped my most perfectly wise song
as I prayed many things, he also again placed in my breast
a delightful utterance of wondrous words.
I will speak the following with my whole person in ecstasy

²⁴³ Αρχομένη πρώτης γενεᾶς μερόπων ἀνθρώπων
ἄρχις ἐπ' ἔσχατίης προφητεύσω τὰ ἕκαστα,
ὅπποσα πρὶν γέγονεν, πόσα δ' ἔστιν, ὅποσά δὲ μέλλει
ἔσσεσθαι κόσμῳ διὰ δυσσεβίας ἀνθρώπων.
πρῶτον δὴ κέλεται με λέγειν θεὸς ὡς ἐγενήθη ἀτρεκέως κόσμος.

for I do not know what I say, but God bids me utter each thing.²⁴⁴

Thus, in *Sib. Or.* 1-2, the claim is that the discourse is itself direct divine speech that comes through the mouth of the Sibyl via divinely inspired ecstatic utterance—a phenomenon that Aune describes as “possession trance.”²⁴⁵ This claim to divinely inspired speech is also present in a number of the other Sibylline books. In 11.321, for example, the Sibyl refers to herself as “the divinely possessed seer” (θεόληπτον), and in 11.323 as “the true inspired voice” (ἐπητύμον ἔνθεον ὁμήν).

Similarly, in *Sib. Or.* 3.163-164, the Sibyl claims to “prophecy concerning every land and remind kings of the things that are to be.”²⁴⁶ In 8.2-3, she claims to “show forth the wrath of God to the last age, prophesying to all men, city by city.”²⁴⁷ And, in 3.811, the Sibyl describes herself as “prophesying the disclosures of God to all mortals,”²⁴⁸ a statement which, when taken alongside the others, suggests not only the universal scope of the prophecies, but also the global audience to whom she speaks. In this respect, it would seem that the content of the *Sibylline Oracles*, at least as it is presented, was clearly knowledge that was only available to God until its disclosure through the Sibyl. As the Sibyl of book 3.819 says, “he did not reveal to me what he had revealed before to my parents.”²⁴⁹

²⁴⁴ Ἡμος δὲ κατέπαυσε θεὸς πολυπάνσοφον ὠδὴν,
πολλὰ λιταζομένης, καὶ μοι πάλιν ἐν στήθεσσι
ἐνθετο θεσπεσίων ἐπέων πολυγηθέα φωνήν.
πάν δέμας ἐκπληχθεῖσα τάδ' ἔσπομαι· οὐδὲ γὰρ οἶδα
ὅττι λέγω, κέλεται δὲ θεὸς τὰ ἕκαστ' ἀγορεύειν.

²⁴⁵ Aune, *Prophecy*, 33.

²⁴⁶ προφητεύσαι κατὰ πάσαν γαῖαν καὶ βασιλεῦσι τὰ τ' ἔσσομέν' ἐν φρεσὶ θεῖναι.

²⁴⁷ ἔσχατον εἰς αἰῶνα θεοῦ μηνύματα φαίνω

πάσι προφητεύουσα κατὰ πόλιν ἀνθρώποισιν.

²⁴⁸ πάσι προφητεύσαι θεοῦ μηνύματα θνητοῖς.

²⁴⁹ γὰρ ἐμοὶ δήλωσεν, ἃ πρὶν γενετῆρσιν ἐμοῖσιν.

Likewise, the intensity, accuracy, and truthfulness which stem from the Sibyl's divine inspiration are further emphasized in *Sib. Or.* 4.18-23:

He it is who drove a whip through my heart within,
to narrate accurately to men what now is,
what will yet be, from the first generation
until the tenth comes. For he himself will prove everything
by accomplishing it. But you, people, listen to the Sibyl in all things
as she pours forth true speech from her holy mouth.²⁵²

In short, because these words come directly from God, they may for certain be accounted true (3.828-829).

This claim seems to find comparable parallels in the Greco-Roman understanding of the origins of Sibylline speech and oracular rhetoric, where Apollo is said to completely possess the seer and to speak directly through his or her mouth. In the delivery of the Sibyl's oracle containing the mysteries of the fate of Aeneas and his people, for example, Virgil graphically tells us of her inspiration that, "suddenly her countenance grew and her hue changed, and her tresses fell disordered: her bosom panted, her wild heart swelled with fury, and she grew taller to the view, and her voice rang not of mortality, now that the god breathed on her in nigher presence" (*Aen.* 6.47-50). Furthermore, Virgil writes that the Sibyl, "yet intolerant of Phoebus' will, raved in limitless frenzy, straining to exorcize the mighty god from her soul: but all the more he

^{251b} Ω ὑψιβεμέτα μακάρισθ', ὃς ἔχεις τὰ Χερουβίμ
ἰδρυμένος, λίτομαι, παναληθέα φημίξασαν
παῦσον βαιόν με· κέκμηκε γὰρ ἐνδόθεν ἦτορ.
ἀλλὰ τί μοι κραδίη πάλι πάλλεται ἡδὲ γε θυμός
τυπτόμενος μᾶστιγι βιάζεται ἐνδόθεν αὐδὴν
ἀγγέλλειν πᾶσιν; αὐτὰρ πάλι πάντ' ἀγορεύσω,
ὅσσα θεὸς κέλεται μ' ἀγορευέμεν ἀνθρώποισιν.
²⁵² Οὗτός μοι μᾶστιγα διὰ φρενὸς ἤλασεν εἴσω,
ἀνθρώποις ὅσαν νῦν τε καὶ ὀππόσα ἔσσεται αὐτῖς
ἐκ πρώτης γενεῆς ἄχρις ἐς δεκάτην ἀφικέσθαι
ἀτρεκέως καταλέξαι· ἅπαντα γὰρ αὐτὸς ἐλέγξει
ἐξανύων. σὺ δὲ πάντα, λεῶς, ὑπάκουε Σιβύλλῃ
ἐξ ὀσίου στόματος φωνὴν προχεοῦση ἀληθῆ.

curbed her foaming lips to weariness, subdued her fierce heart, and moulded her to his constraint" (6.77-80). Thus in such manner, it is said that "the Cumaean Sibyl chanted her mysteries of fear from her shrine, and moaned from out the cavern, shrouding truth in darkness" (6.98-100).

A segment from Lucan's *Pharsalia* also provides a classic example of how the prophetic deity Apollo is thought to force his way into the body of his human mouthpiece:

As fully as ever in the past, he forced his way into her body, driving out her former thoughts, and bidding her human nature to come forth and leave her heart at his disposal. Frantic she careers about the cave, with neck under possession; the fillets and garlands of Apollo, dislodged by her bristling hair, she whirls with tossing head through the void spaces of the temple; she scatters the tripods that impede her random course; she boils over with fierce fire, while enduring the wrath of Phoebus. Nor does he ply the whip and goad alone, and dart flame into her vitals: she has to bear the curb as well, and is not permitted to reveal as much as she is suffered to know. All time is gathered up together: all the centuries crowd her breast and torture it; the endless chain of events is revealed; all the future struggles to the light; destiny contends with destiny, seeking to be uttered. The creation of the world and its destruction, the compass of the Ocean and the sum of the sands—all these are before her (*Phars.* 5.93-94, Duff).

In this respect it can be seen that in the Greco-Roman world the mode of inspiration is generally understood to be complete possession.²⁵³ That is, the god (usually Apollo) is said to enter into and assume complete control of the prophet or prophetess and to use them as his mouthpiece—a process that was understandably feared and dreaded by those through whom Apollo spoke. However, it was perhaps this total possession that gave the oracle its greatest credibility, since it meant that the words were not just those of a (fallible) mediator, but the very words of the god of prophecy himself, and so could be trusted without question. As Aune notes, the basic

²⁵³ A similar understanding can also be seen in Hesiod when he states in the introduction to his *Theogonia* that the Muses (the prophetic daughters of Zeus) breathed a sacred voice into his mouth (33-35).

assumption was that if a God was actually speaking through an individual, that person's own mind must become inactive in order that his or her speech organs might become instruments of the divinity.²⁵⁴ Accordingly, oracular speech, though often difficult to understand, was considered to be "an absolutely reliable means whereby the will of the gods is communicated" to humanity.²⁵⁵ Furthermore, because the faculties of the human medium are transcended, little importance is placed on the identity of the medium (i.e. the name of the priest or priestess is frequently not given), since the god is speaking directly to the recipient. Although some, such as the Sibyl, seem to have been more highly regarded than others, oracles were frequently given through anonymous prophets and prophetesses.

For this reason, the Sibylline books that were kept by the governing officials in Rome were regarded as "the Books of Fate" (Flavius Vopiscus, *Div. Aurel.* 19.1), and were said to contain the unchanging fate of the commonwealth (19.6). In the same way, the consultation of the Sibyl's words was equated with making use "of the benefits of Apollo," and obedience to the commands of the Sibyl was likened to submitting "to the bidding of the immortal gods" (19.4, Magie).

Similar to the discourse of the *Sibylline Oracles* and Greco-Roman oracles, in the Babylonian text commonly referred to as the Marduk Prophetic Speech,²⁵⁶ there is also the parallel of direct divine speech, where the discourse itself is spoken by the god Marduk in the first person, apparently without even the aid of a human mouth or voice.

In apocalyptic, by contrast, no such possession trance occurs. Rather, in Judeo-Christian apocalyptic discourse, the *topos* of divine communication, rather than

²⁵⁴ Aune, *Prophecy*, 47.

²⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 51.

²⁵⁶ Text D of Grayson and Lambert, "Akkadian Prophecies," 7-30.

direct divine speech, seems to take the form of what Aune describes as “vision trance,” a state in which audio and/or visual experiences imperceptible to others are perceived by the intermediary.²⁵⁷ In apocalyptic discourse this usually takes the form of an angelically guided tour of heaven or the reception of a dream or vision by a holy person, followed by an accompanying explanation or interpretation by a divine intermediary (3 *Baruch*, *Apoc. Zeph.* 4); or, the communication of a message through an angel to a holy person, who in turn relays the message to an audience (1 *En.* 72.1; 4 *Ezra*). As such, greater emphasis is placed on the *ethos*, or credibility, of the human agent, since he or she must be absolutely trustworthy and reliable so as to convey accurately, and without error, what was revealed to him or her.²⁵⁸ In apocalyptic rhetorical discourse, therefore, the human recipient is rarely anonymous but is usually depicted (albeit pseudonymously) as a divinely favoured and credible figure from Jewish or Christian tradition (e.g. Enoch, Isaiah, Ezra, Baruch, Paul).

The Interplay of *Topoi* in *Sibylline Oracles* 1-2

An examination of the repetitive and progressive texture of *Sib. Or.* 1-2 reveals a number of major rhetorical *topoi* within the discourse of the text—namely, the periodization of history, corruption, authority, catastrophe, and divine communication. Similar rhetorical *topoi* can also be found in the remainder of the *Sibylline Oracles* as well as in a variety of other ancient Mediterranean discourses—a consistency that would seem to indicate that these are in fact common rhetorical *topoi* from the ancient

²⁵⁷ Aune, *Prophecy*, 33.

²⁵⁸ A good illustration of this is found in 3 *Bar.* 1.7 where Baruch tells the angel shortly before the reception of his revelation that “As the Lord God lives, if you will show me, I will listen; I will not subtract nor will I add one word. If I do omit (anything), then may the Lord pass judgment upon me on the Day of Judgment.”

Mediterranean, and not simply a peculiarity of the *Sibylline Oracles*. What is peculiar about *Sib. Or.* 1-2 (as well as the *Sibylline Oracles* generally), however, is how *Sib. Or.* 1-2 articulates and configures these *topoi* in relation to one another. The result is a discourse that is truly unique among those of the ancient Mediterranean.

The interplay of these five rhetorical *topoi* to a large degree appears in capsule form in the very opening lines of the discourse:

Beginning from the first generation of articulate men
down to the last, I will prophesy in turn,
such things as were before, as are, and as will come upon
the world through the impiety of men (*Sib. Or.* 1.1-4).²⁵⁹

What follows in the remainder of *Sib. Or.* 1-2 is a form of rhetorical elaboration of this opening synopsis.

In these opening lines the Sibyl claims that she will “prophesy” (communication from deity) “such things as were before, as are, and as will come upon the world”—a period that essentially covers and includes the creation of the world and universe through to the great conflagration that will transpire at the end of the world, and beyond (history). The peculiar feature about this statement is that the Sibyl claims to prophesy not only the future (the period of history that is usually associated with prophecy), but also the past—a statement that seems to conflict with the conventional understanding of prophecy. Presumably, however, this prophesying of the past represents a divine retelling of the past, since it is God who inspires and speaks through the Sibyl (1.5) and not the Sibyl directly on her own initiative. Thus the Sibyl’s recollection of the past can be distinguished from other (i.e. human) retellings—which may be subject to various

²⁵⁹ Ἀρχομένη πρώτης γενεᾶς μερόπων ἀνθρώπων
ἄρχις ἐπ’ ἐσχατίῃς προφητεύσω τὰ ἕκαστα,
ὅπποσα πρὶν γέγονεν, πόσα δ’ ἐστίν, ὅποσα δὲ μέλλει
ἔσσεσθαι κόσμῳ διὰ δυσσεβίας ἀνθρώπων.

errors and inaccuracies, as well as manipulation—as a history that is trustworthy and reliable, and not subject to human error. Thus what we find in these opening lines is a blending of the *topos* of history with the *topos* of divine communication. The result can best be described as revealed history.

As we have already noted, this revealed history in *Sib. Or.* 1-2 is understood in terms of ten generations of humans. What is unique about these ten generations is that they are all, for the most part, understood solely in terms of their respective degrees of corruption. This is unlike some of the later *Sibylline Oracles* (11-14), as well as many examples of revealed histories in Babylonian discourse where the *topos* of history is understood largely in terms of authority, that is, in terms of successive series of dynasties or rulers. In fact, in *Sib. Or.* 1-2 we find two sets of five generations of humans that are each described in terms of increasing moral corruption, that is, in terms of decreasing moral calibre. Thus, it can be seen in the discourse of *Sib. Or.* 1-2 that as history advances, so does humanity regress in its moral fibre. In some sense then, it can be said that the *topos* of corruption in *Sib. Or.* 1-2 is a critical catalyst that moves history forward. From the divine perspective of the oracles this corruption necessitates an end—an end, however, that in turn gives way to a new beginning.

Of course, it is not simply corruption that moves history forward, but the authoritative response of God to that corruption. In particular, when the *topos* of authority intersects with the *topos* of corruption, they blend together to create a further *topos*—namely, judgment, since it is on God's authority that the notion of corruption in *Sib. Or.* 1-2 is both determined and judged. This judgment naturally entails some sort of sentencing. For those who are deemed to be evil or corrupt, this sentencing takes the form of punishment, which usually entails some sort of catastrophe (2.283-310).

Those who escape this judgment may in turn be spared catastrophe and in some cases receive a reward (2.313-338).

In this respect, it can be seen that the *topos* of catastrophe in *Sib. Or.* 1-2 stems in large part from God's authority to judge the world and/or to intervene in worldly affairs in the historical process. It is not simply catastrophe for the sake of catastrophe or destruction for the sake of destruction, but a way in which God by his authority (or his agents—whether knowingly or not) is able to take action in worldly matters, to address the problem of corruption, and to guide history towards its culmination.

When this notion of judgment eventually intersects with the *topos* of history, it inevitably gives way to the notion of a final judgment—that is, a definitive judgment that will transpire at the end of the world. In the *Sibylline Oracles*, this generally assumes the form of some sort of cataclysmic flood of fire that will destroy the earth along with all evil-doers who refuse God's offer of forgiveness (2.196-213; 4.171-178; 7.118-131). This final judgment in turn eventually gives way to a new beginning—namely, a recreated earth that will be inhabited by the righteous of the previous world (2.313-338; 3.767-795; 4.179-192; 7.144-149).

It can also be seen how the *topos* of catastrophe is intricately connected with history, and as such, also plays a critical role to end one particular age or epoch and give way to the beginning of a new one. This transitory function can perhaps best be seen in *Sib. Or.* 1, where the flood serves to end the fifth generation of humans, characterized by certain moral and ethical deficiencies such as insolence, crookedness, and slander (1.123-124), and inaugurate the beginning of a new "golden

age” characterized by justice and fair deeds.²⁶⁰ And, as we have just mentioned, the same type of transitory function can also be seen in *Sib. Or.* 2, where a flood of fire is predicted to end the current (i.e. tenth) generation (2.196-213) and inaugurate a new age where formerly unjust social and economic systems will be drastically reconfigured—a scenario which features itself in a number of other oracles (3.84-87; 4.171-178; 5.414-433; 7.118-149; 8.110-121).

The result of the interplay and configuration of these major rhetorical *topoi* in the *Sibylline Oracles* can be seen to create a number of unique and interesting results within the discourse of *Sib. Or.* 1-2. Foremost, the configuration combines to create a distinctively revolutionist response to the world, since the discourse envisions the world as completely corrupt and imagines change only through sovereign divine intervention that will transform and reconfigure the world’s conventional socio-economic and authoritative structures. As the Sibyl herself states:

The earth will belong equally to all, undivided by walls or fences...
Lives will be in common and wealth will have no division.
For there will be no poor man there, no rich, no tyrant,
no slave. Further, no one will be either great or small anymore.
No kings, no leaders. All will be on par together (2.319-324).²⁶¹

Second, we find a truly unique understanding of history that will itself be transformed in a drastic way. As we have seen, the course of history will eventually

²⁶⁰ The flood serves a similar purpose, as a critical reference point for a new period in history, in a number of other places in the *Sibylline Oracles*: in 3.108-109 it is used as a reference point for the ten generations of articulate men; in 4.49-53 the flood immediately precedes a scheme of four world kingdoms and ten generations; in 7.7-15 the flood serves to divide the first age from the second age; in 8.139 the “time of the phoenix” is referred to as the fifth period after the flood.

²⁶¹ γαῖα δ’ ἴση πάντων οὐ τείχεσιν οὐ περιφπαγμοῖς διαμεριζομένη...
κοινοί τε βίοι καὶ πλοῦτος ἄμοιρος.
οὐ γὰρ πτωχὸς ἐκεῖ, οὐ πλούσιος, οὐδέ τυράννος,
οὐ δούλος, οὐδ’ αὖ μέγας, οὐ μικρός τις ἔτ’ ἔσται,
οὐ βασιλεῖς, οὐχ ἡγεμόνες· κοινῇ δ’ ἅμα πάντες.

come to a climax in some sort of eschatological destruction, or a series of cataclysmic upheavals, which signal the end of the current period of world history (and perhaps for those deemed righteous, the inauguration of something better). In fact, at the end, what we find is a reconfiguration of, or shift away from, the conventional notion of time:

No longer will anyone say at all “night has come” or “tomorrow”
or “it happened yesterday,” or worry about many days.
No spring, no summer, no winter, no autumn,
no marriage, no death, no sales, no purchases,
no sunset, no sunrise. For he will make a long day (2.325-329).²⁶²

In this respect, it would therefore seem that time itself will come to an end, as will the progress (or change) that the concept of history itself implies. Since, in the Sibyl's understanding of history, the advance of history seems to be equated with the regression of human moral character, the implication of this elimination (or halting) of the advance of history would seem to suggest that human moral character will cease its regress. In this way, it would seem that unlike the first and sixth generations of humans who eventually succumbed to moral corruption and evil, the generation that emerges out of the final judgment of the tenth generation will remain free of moral corruption and deterioration, since they will remain at a static moment in time (or perhaps more properly, at a moment outside of history).

Accordingly, when we consider this favourable and ideal reconfiguration of socio-economic and political structures, and when we consider the static state that this new world will seemingly retain, it would seem that the *topos* of catastrophe in *Sib. Or.* 1-2 is in many ways (and somewhat ironically) something that is hoped for and

²⁶² κούκέτ' ἐπεὶ τις ὅλως “νύξ ἦλυθεν”, οὐδὲ μὲν “αὔριον”,
οὐκ “ἐκθὲς γέγονεν”, οὐκ ἡματα πολλὰ μεριμνᾷ,
οὐκ ἔαρ, οὐχὶ θέρος, οὐ χειμῶν', οὐ μετόπωρον'
οὐ γάμον, οὐ θάνατον, οὐ πράξεις, οὐδ' ἀγορασμούς,
οὐ δύσιν ἀντολίην· ποιήσει γὰρ μακρὸν ἡμαρ.

anticipated, since it comes to be expected that catastrophe, as an act of God's righteous judgment, will bring to an end the current world age characterized by corruption and evil and inaugurate a new world age that will be free of such corruption. In this sense, the rhetoric of *Sib. Or.* 1-2 can be seen as a direct countercultural challenge to the existing dominant culture, through the use of revolutionist rhetoric. In this way, the discourse of *Sib. Or.* 1-2 clearly distinguishes itself from the rhetoric of Greco-Roman Sibyllines, which not only sought to promote and maintain the existing dominant culture, but did so through the use of thaumaturgical rhetoric.

Reflections on the Analysis of *Topoi* in *Sib. Or.* 1-2

In summary, *Sib. Or.* 1-2 can be seen to employ certain general rhetorical *topoi* that can be found in other ancient Mediterranean discourse. As we have shown, the *topoi* of the periodization of history, corruption, authority, divine catastrophe, and divine communication are all found in Jewish, Christian, and Greco-Roman discourse (as well as in other related discourse from ancient Mesopotamia). More specifically, it was demonstrated that *Sib. Or.* 1-2 also employed the same major rhetorical *topoi* characteristic of Greco-Roman Sibylline oracles—at least as they are described by ancient writers. Significantly, however, the way these *topoi* are articulated in *Sib. Or.* 1-2 is in many cases different from the discourse characteristic of Greco-Roman Sibylline oracles. As we have noted, there is a significant difference in terms of how the *topoi* of history, catastrophe, corruption, and to some degree, authority are understood.

In many cases, the way these *topoi* are articulated in *Sib. Or.* 1-2 is consistent with their articulation in Judeo-Christian apocalyptic discourse. The *topos* of history,

for example, shifts away from an articulation in terms of one specific local event at one particular moment in time to an emphasis on an articulation of history that is universal in terms of space and that also spans the successive temporal periods of world history. The Sibyl's emphasis on corruption, and particularly of the corruption that characterizes the Roman dominant culture, differs from Greco-Roman Sibylline oracles which sought to endorse the dominant culture; rather, it comes to be articulated within counterculture rhetoric against Rome—an articulation again similar to what is frequently found in Judeo-Christian apocalyptic discourse. The Sibyl's emphasis on the description, purpose, and effects of catastrophe can be seen to be a dramatic shift away from the Greco-Roman Sibyllines, where catastrophe was most frequently understood as a threat to the dominant culture, and thus articulated in terms of self-preservation, rather than on how catastrophe can be seen to reconfigure or overthrow the dominant culture. Finally, the Sibyl's emphasis on God's authority over the cosmos and the historical process, and particularly, her emphasis on the divine judgment of the corruption inherent to worldly authoritative structures, is a clear shift away from the Greco-Roman Sibyllines which were known primarily for their benefits to and endorsement of the Roman state to a more apocalyptic articulation of the *topos* of authority.

Thus it can be seen that many of the rhetorical *topoi* associated with the Greco-Roman Sibylline oracles shifted away from their expected rhetorical usages in *Sib. Or.* 1-2 (and the *Sibylline Oracles* generally) and came to be articulated in a way that shows great affinity with the Judeo-Christian apocalyptic rhetoric with which it was contemporary. Having said that, however, there does seem to be a relative correspondence between *Sib. Or.* 1-2 and Greco-Roman Sibylline oracles in terms of the rhetorical function of the *topos* of divine communication and particularly in terms of

the emphasis on direct divine speech, which provides the critical mental space for the interplay of the other rhetorical *topoi*. This interplay provides the space that infuses the discourse with the appeal of its certainty and credibility, in other words, its *ethos*.

Accordingly, when we consider this articulation and configuration of major rhetorical *topoi* in *Sib. Or.* 1-2, it would seem that what we find in the *Sibylline Oracles* is a clear shift away from the dominant culture thaumaturgical rhetoric of the discourse of the Greco-Roman Sibyllines—with their emphasis on coping with specific local threats to the dominant culture (the foresight and avoidance of calamity, reassurance, restoration after loss, assuagement of grief, etc.)—to a clearly revolutionist response that declares that only the supernatural destruction of the world, and specifically its social order, will be sufficient to eliminate the evil and corruption that now characterize it. In short, these texts evidence a shift from a rhetoric that sanctions and endorses the dominant culture to a rhetoric that urges and argues for its overthrow.

CHAPTER 4: THE IMPLICATIONS OF *TOPOS* ANALYSIS FOR OUR UNDERSTANDING OF THE DISCOURSE OF *SIBYLLINE ORACLES* 1-2

In the preceding chapter, we used the socio-rhetorical approach described in chapter 2 in order to highlight the major rhetorical *topoi* of *Sib. Or.* 1-2 in relation to their use in the remainder of the Judeo-Christian *Sibylline Oracles*, their Greco-Roman counterparts, apocalyptic discourse, and other ancient Mediterranean discourse. The observations brought about by this analysis, I would suggest, bear significant implications for both the advancement of Sibylline studies and for the continued development of socio-rhetorical analysis. In chapter 4 we will highlight at least three of these implications. First, it would seem that there is a need to broaden the understanding of rhetorolects outlined by Robbins to better reflect the rhetorical discourse of the ancient Mediterranean generally and not simply that of early Christianity.²⁶³ The second implication concerns an assessment of the rhetorical discourse used in *Sib. Or.* 1-2. The third implication concerns the ideological reconfiguration of what we have earlier described as Sibyllism—particularly as it can be seen in the ideological shift that occurs in the rhetorical form and function of the *Sibylline Oracles* in relation to their Greco-Roman counterparts.

The Need to Broaden the Socio-Rhetorical Understanding of Rhetorolect

As already noted, Robbins has suggested that “six major modes of discourse in dialogue with one another throughout the first century of the common era produced the

²⁶³ Such a suggestion is certainly in continuity with the spirit of SRA when we consider that SRA as an interpretative analytics by its very nature invites continual development. In this respect, it is important to point out that what Robbins has outlined is not methodologically definitive but rather a critical reference or starting point.

phenomenon we now recognize as early Christian discourse.”²⁶⁴ These six discourse types, however, were not exclusive to early Christianity but were specific localizations of generic Mediterranean religious discourse already being used by other peoples around the Mediterranean. What makes these six specific localizations of ancient Mediterranean discourse types Christian is a christocentric focus—that is, they have been articulated and reconfigured in light of the rhetorical presentation of Christ (and for use among early Christians). Accordingly, since it can be seen that the biblical discourses participate in, but are not determinative for the identification of Mediterranean rhetorical discourses, Robbins’ taxonomy is too narrow to understand much of the ancient Mediterranean discourse that was contemporaneous with but not identical to early Christianity—and in the case of the *Sibylline Oracles*, the interaction between Jewish, Christian, and Greco-Roman (and possibly even Babylonian) rhetorical cultures.

Of particular interest for this project is the case of what Robbins has described as apocalyptic discourse, since, based on the observations of the previous section, it would be possible to suggest that the discourse of the *Sibylline Oracles* could primarily (although not entirely) be regarded as apocalyptic discourse. However, the difficulty with this assessment is that it fails to make provision for the ideological and rhetorical movement and development (a feature at the very heart of SRA) that has occurred within the medium of the Sibylline oracle—from their rhetorical form in the Greco-Roman world to their adaptation by Jews and Christians during the Second Temple Period.

²⁶⁴ Robbins, “The Dialectical Nature of Early Christian Discourse,” 353.

Earlier, we suggested that *Sib. Or.* 1-2 (in a manner consistent with the other Sibylline books in the extant collection) can be seen to exhibit a certain array of major rhetorical *topoi*: the periodization of history, corruption, catastrophe, authority, and divine communication. In this, *Sib. Or.* 1-2 is consistent with much of the Judeo-Christian apocalyptic discourse of the Second Temple period—in terms of the *topoi* employed, of how many of these *topoi* are articulated, and of the rhetorical response this articulation creates towards the world contemporary with the texts. However, it can also be seen from our survey that there are a variety of other discourses from the ancient Mediterranean that exhibit the same, or at least a very similar, array of major rhetorical *topoi*. Notable here is the type of discourse that came to be associated with the various oracles of the Greco-Roman world, as well as the various Greco-Roman oracle givers such as the Sibyl and the discourse of Greco-Roman Sibylline oracles.²⁶⁵

As we have shown, these too can be seen to exhibit a similar array of major rhetorical *topoi* that are common to apocalyptic discourse. However, as we have seen in the preceding chapter, where these discourse forms differ from the *Sibylline Oracles* and Judeo-Christian apocalyptic discourse is in how these *topoi* are articulated and the ideological response that they exhibit to the social world in which they were written.

In order to understand the relationship between these Mediterranean discourse modes that exhibit similar rhetorical *topoi* but differ in terms of their rhetorical texture, it would seem that there are at least two possibilities. First, it could be suggested that these similar discourse modes are simply a blend of apocalyptic rhetoric with one or more of the other discourse modes outlined by Robbins. The result would give the

²⁶⁵ We may also include here the discourse of the so-called Akkadian prophecies, as well as the discourse of some of the Gnostic apocalypses—although no doubt there are several other examples that could be seen in a more comprehensive analysis of ancient Mediterranean discourse.

oracles their own unique texture and shape that distinguishes them from apocalyptic discourse *per se*. The difficulty with such a view, however, is that it assumes the pre-eminence of the six discourse types outlined by Robbins in terms of Christian *topoi*, rather than considering the rhetorical discourses of early Christianity to be configurations of pre-existing ancient Mediterranean discourse.

Second, it could be suggested that Judeo-Christian apocalyptic rhetoric and the discourse of Greco-Roman oracles are in fact related subsets, or localizations, of a more general ancient Mediterranean discourse type. In favour of this second option, it would seem that the similarity of major *topoi* would certainly be consistent with their derivation from a single ancient Mediterranean discourse type, and that the differences between them in terms of the rhetorical texture of the *topoi* can be explained as a result of their use in different social and cultural contexts for different rhetorical and ideological purposes. If we take the examples of Judeo-Christian apocalyptic discourse and the discourse of Greco-Roman oracles, for example, these differences in social location are immediately apparent.

In terms of final cultural categories, it can be said that Judeo-Christian apocalyptic rhetoric emerges primarily out of a culture that runs counter to the dominant (Greco-Roman) culture in which it emerged. Throughout the Second Temple period, as well as for several of the preceding centuries, the Jewish world lived under the domination of various foreign nations and rulers—including those of Greece and Rome—an imposition that not only affected their geographical space, but also had tremendous impact in terms of government, practice of religion, economics, and the like. Lombard summarizes well the development of this social location:

Consecutively we find the domination of the Chaldeans, Persians, Greek-Macedonians, Seleucid and Roman empires. In spite of the policies of religious

tolerance (of the Persians, Alexander the Great and initially also the Romans), these foreign authorities brought about radical measures of far-reaching implications to the Jews. The most vital of these were the destruction of the temple-shrine together with Jerusalem in 587/6 B.C. and 70 A.D., the defilement of the temple by Antiochus IV Epiphanes on 6th December 168 B.C. and almost again by emperor Caligula (39/40 A.D.), the interference of the Seleucids, Romans and Herod I the Great in matters of appointing a high priest, the claim of emperor-worship and the imperial taxes, the mingling with alien cultures and the consequent syncretism of the Diaspora-Jews, etc. All these factors and circumstances created a sense of disillusionment and even despair within Jewish circles. Their national and political life together with the temple-cult were disrupted.²⁶⁶

Though not every sector of Second Temple Jewish society can be described in terms of counterculture,²⁶⁷ it is easy to see how the apocalyptic writers could speak out with a countercultural voice against the (perceived) corruption and evil inherent to the systems and structures of the dominant culture and demand a complete reordering (or even elimination) of them.

This is not to say that the rhetoric of apocalyptic is always countercultural. Christian apocalyptic, for example, frequently exhibits subculture rhetoric towards Judaism. Even so, in general, apocalyptic rhetoric usually embodies countercultural ideas and values—a stance that could easily be concealed in its ambiguous and symbol oriented discourse. In the case of apocalyptic, in order for a shift from dominant culture to counterculture to take place, there is a need for divine intervention. The earth is too corrupt as it is to bring about changes on its own, and any shifts must be brought about by divine action. Thus apocalyptic exhibits a strong revolutionist response to the world by transforming the corruption and evils of the present into the

²⁶⁶ H. A. Lombard, "The Character, Epoch (Period), Origins (Motives) and Methods of Jewish Apocalyptic," *Neotestamentica* 12 (1981), 33.

²⁶⁷ Some groups, such as the Sadducees, sought not necessarily to overthrow the existing Greco-Roman dominant culture, but to make alliances within it—thus gaining a voice to influence and ideally to reform the existing policies and practices of the dominant culture in a manner more sympathetic towards Judaism—and in this way could be understood more adequately in terms of subculture.

hope of a future golden age where human existence will finally be free from all that now encumbers it.

In terms of Wilson's taxonomy this countercultural response of the apocalyptic writers appears to be revolutionist.²⁶⁸ Given the long history of political domination and affliction, the apocalyptic writers came to the conclusion that this history of oppression could only be remedied by divine initiative and intervention. The worldly governments were too corrupt to be reformed by human effort. Rather, it could only be through a divine overthrow of worldly government that genuine and productive change could truly take place. In the case of apocalyptic discourse, this revolutionary shift emerges out of a complete destruction of the current world system, a destruction frequently envisioned as brought about by a flood of fire, and/or in terms of various cataclysmic shakeups (sun darkened; moon turns to blood; famine; plague; etc.). Out of this destruction a new world, free of all the characteristic corruption, would be forged. Thus the writer of the Apocalypse of John, for example, envisions and offers an elaborate description of the emergence of a new heaven, a new earth, and within these, a new Jerusalem that will finally be free from the sorrow, persecution, and corruption that characterized his contemporary situation (Rev 21:1-27).

In contrast to Judeo-Christian apocalyptic rhetoric which emerged out of a culture opposed to the dominant one, the rhetoric of Greco-Roman oracles (and in particular, Sibylline oracles) emerged as a response favourable to the dominant Greco-Roman culture seeking to endorse, maintain, and protect the dominant culture in which they were written and interpreted.

²⁶⁸ Though Wilson's taxonomy is actually a typology of religious sectarianism, it has been used in this dissertation in a more general sense that does not necessarily imply sectarianism. See, for example, Robbins, *Exploring*, 71-94.

In Bryan Wilson's terminology, the discourse and argumentative texture exhibited in Greco-Roman oracular discourse takes on an almost thaumaturgical feel, since the insights about certain situations and dilemmas that the gods offer allow the one who receives the oracle a potential course of action which, when understood correctly, will relieve the burdens of life, and enable self-preservation and success.

This is not, of course, to say that Greco-Roman oracular discourse always embodied a thaumaturgical understanding of the world. Nevertheless, by the time of the Roman Empire, the primary form of oracle that emerged was thaumaturgical. This was especially true of the Greco-Roman Sibylline oracles which were consulted by state officials during times of national crisis and disaster in order to determine what course of action should be taken in order to deal with the current catastrophe. They were also consulted during times of imminent war to determine what course of action would grant them victory and preserve the state. This thaumaturgical response stemmed in large part from the social location out of which it emerged. The preservation of the Roman dominant culture in the ancient Mediterranean needed to be maintained, and the discourse of oracles, and particularly the Greco-Roman Sibylline oracles, was the ideal medium to embody this. As De Villiers has pointed out, the discourse of

Prophecies and oracles can... serve to legitimise or authorise the status quo, rather than threaten it. They then serve to underpin power with ideology, strengthening the position of the rulers by placing the gods behind them. This authorisation is especially effective if the future is seen as revealing the eternal and divine power of those who are ruling. Prophecies and oracles then became an important part of the struggle for the soul of the nation.²⁶⁹

²⁶⁹ De Villiers, "Oracles and Prophecies in the Graeco-Roman World," 87.

When we consider the use of oracular discourse within the Roman Empire, and in particular, Rome's use of Sibylline oracles, it seems that their primary ideological function was for the maintenance and affirmation of dominant culture over and against all others. At the very least, this is suggested by at least two major factors: 1) Rome's assembling and keeping its own private collection of Sibylline oracles to be consulted and interpreted during times of national crisis and disaster; and 2) Rome's making personal collections of Sibylline oracles illegal—a monopoly which in theory would prohibit anyone from interpreting Sibylline oracles in a manner that would be to the detriment of the state. Thus Sibylline oracles came to be recognized and famed for their benefits to the Roman state (Flavius Vopiscus, *Div. Aurel.* 18.5).

For this reason, Greco-Roman Sibylline oracles came to articulate the *topos* of catastrophe in a way that differs significantly from the apocalyptic writers. Instead of understanding catastrophe as a means to bring about the necessary change to remedy the world situation, in the rhetoric of the Greco-Roman Sibylline oracles the *topos* of catastrophe is understood not as something to be hoped for, but as something to be avoided. The rhetoric of Greco-Roman Sibylline oracles is thaumaturgical in that its interest is in how the dominant culture can avoid, defend against, or best persevere through catastrophe. Thus Flavius Vopiscus states that they were consulted “whenever any serious commotion arose” (19.2). In some cases, victory in battle is said to hinge on consultation of and obedience to the Sibylline books (21.4). Likewise, Tacitus reports how a motion was made to consult the Sibylline books during a serious flood crisis (*Ann.* 1.76). On another occasion, he reports how the words of the Sibyl were consulted in order to determine an appropriate means to appease the wrath of the gods. (*Ann.* 15.44). It is thus easy to see how this difference in social location

naturally led to the articulation and configuration of these *topoi* in significantly different ways.

This difference in social location would naturally result in a different articulation or localization of these *topoi*, as well as a different rhetorical and ideological response to this social location. Presumably, then, what we find in the examples of apocalyptic discourse and the rhetoric of Greco-Roman Sibylline oracles (and oracular discourse generally) are two distinct subsets or localizations of a more general ancient Mediterranean discourse type, which we will here refer to as *mantic discourse*—a discourse type which was also localized by many other groups from around the ancient Mediterranean, and which we will here simply define as the divinely inspired, spoken revelation of divine mysteries—a definition that emerges from the general ancient Mediterranean belief that the gods (or God) know the answers to the mysteries that plague the human mind, and that, from time to time, they would (on their own initiative or at human request) make these mysteries known to humanity.

The term *mantic discourse* stems directly from the word most frequently used in the ancient Greco-Roman world for the practitioner of divination—*mantis*—a word most commonly translated as “diviner,” “soothsayer,” “seer,” or “prophet.”²⁷⁰ On a general level the *mantis* was usually understood to be the one who received divine revelation directly, or at the very least, was one who possessed an interpretative expertise that enabled him or her to perform the important task of decoding divine messages, which were often ambiguous and which frequently contained complex symbolism.²⁷¹ More specifically, Fishbane has articulated two basic types of “mantological genres” that

²⁷⁰ Aune, *Prophecy*, 23.

²⁷¹ *Ibid.*

came to be put into human speech and writing: visual phenomena (dreams, visions, and omens) and auditory phenomena (oracles).²⁷² Visual phenomena are an inherently “covert mantological type,” since the images presented to view, whether received internally or externally, are esoteric and require decoding by a divinely inspired interpreter or a divinely favoured individual who receives the interpretation from a divine mediator figure.²⁷³ Auditory phenomena, on the other hand, are an inherently “overt type,” since they are presented exoterically by a divinely inspired person to challenge, warn, or exhort an audience.²⁷⁴ In both cases the *mantis* was, in other words, a person who put divine communications into intelligible human writing or speech. On a most general level then, the speech or writing of the *mantis*, regardless of his or her social location, is most naturally described as *mantic discourse*. But as we have demonstrated above, this more generic ancient Mediterranean discourse type does come to be articulated in a number of specific ways according to the social location of the *mantis*.

Understood in this way, account can be made for both the similarities that exist between Judeo-Christian apocalyptic discourse and the discourse of Greco-Roman Sibylline oracles (and oracles generally), as well as the differences between the two in terms of the social, cultural, and ideological texture of the articulation of their common *topoi*. In this respect, then, the discourse of Greco-Roman Sibylline oracles (and oracular discourse generally) need not be understood to be simply a blend of apocalyptic and one or more of other discourse types outlined by Robbins. Rather, it is better to consider it as its own unique localization of mantic discourse, and that what is

²⁷² Michael A. Fishbane, *Biblical Interpretation in Ancient Israel* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1985), 443.

²⁷³ *Ibid.*

²⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 444.

often called “apocalyptic” is also, in some cases, a unique localization of mantic discourse.

What Rhetorical Discourse Is Being Used in *Sibylline Oracles* 1-2?

The second implication of this suggestion, which follows naturally from the previous one, concerns the relationship between *Sib. Or.* 1-2 (and the extant collection of Judeo-Christian *Sibylline Oracles*) and these two localizations of mantic discourse. Should *Sib. Or.* 1-2 be understood as apocalyptic discourse, with which it shows great affinity, or should it be understood to be an example of Greco-Roman oracular discourse—the localization out of which the original Greco-Roman Sibylline oracles emerged?

In response to these questions, it will be suggested that what we find in *Sib. Or.* 1-2 (and the *Sibylline Oracles* generally) is primarily a blend of these two mantic localizations. In particular, it would seem that what we have in *Sib. Or.* 1-2 (and in the *Sibylline Oracles* generally) is a blending of Judeo-Christian apocalyptic discourse into Greco-Roman oracular discourse. The result is an ideological shift that inevitably occurs from the Greco-Roman Sibylline oracles to the extant Judeo-Christian collection—from discourse that endorsed the dominant culture to discourse that spoke of the dominant culture’s overthrow, from a predominately thaumaturgical understanding of the world to one that is entirely revolutionist.

Now it could certainly just as easily be suggested that what we have is a blend of oracular discourse into apocalyptic discourse, since apocalyptic discourse may be regarded as the most dominant. However, since in the adaptation of *Sibylline Oracles* by Jews and Christians, the texture of the discourse is clearly moving in a trajectory

from oracular to apocalyptic, it is best to regard Greco-Roman oracular discourse as the primary discourse type, into which the apocalyptic articulation of several mantic *topoi* is blended.

As we have seen, the critical *topos* of divine communication—the mental space that serves as a matrix, giving the discourse its rhetorical power and credibility—is clearly articulated in a fashion characteristic of Greco-Roman Sibylline oracles and oracles generally. There is, of course, a major shift that does occur regarding the identity of the deity behind the inspiration of the Sibyl and her oracles. Apollo was the god said to have inspired the discourse that arose out of the Greco-Roman oracles; on the other hand, the writer of *Sib. Or.* 4 makes it clear that it is the “great God” who speaks through her, rather than the one whom the writer describes as “false Phoebus” (4.4). Such a statement is indeed interesting, since it calls into question the truth and reliability of the oracles delivered in Apollo’s name, while at the same time serving as a confirmation of her own *ethos*, and thus of the truth and credibility of her own oracles.²⁷⁵

However, even despite this shift that occurs in terms of the source behind the Sibyl’s inspiration, the means and effects of this inspiration remain relatively similar: God speaks directly through the Sibyl, making her words trustworthy and reliable; this normally occurs while the Sibyl is in a state of frenzy, and often against her will; the Sibyl speaks only what she is compelled by God to say, etc. (*Sib. Or.* 2.1-5). Most significantly, the emphasis on direct divine speech in *Sib. Or.* 1-2 keeps it clearly in line

²⁷⁵ This is an idea that, although explicit only in book 4, certainly implicitly undergirds the other Sibyllines of the standard collection.

with its Greco-Roman counterparts and differentiates it from apocalyptic discourse, with which *Sib. Or.* 1-2 bears other similarities.

Despite the continuity between *Sib. Or.* 1-2 and Greco-Roman Sibyllines in terms of the *topos* of divine communication, *Sib. Or.* 1-2 differs significantly in the articulation of the other mantic *topoi*. As noted above, in the extant collection of *Sibylline Oracles* we find a preoccupation with universal history—past, present, and future—which, although not foreign to Greco-Roman thinking,²⁷⁶ is generally foreign to Greco-Roman oracular discourse. The latter generally tends to emphasize a particular event or situation at one particular moment in time (namely, the future), rather than a sweeping and general report of events past, present, and future. As such it offers a perspective that comes across as much more personal and localized. The articulation of history in *Sib. Or.* 1-2, therefore, bears much resemblance to its articulation in Jewish and Christian apocalyptic, where surveys of history frequently serve an integral function.²⁷⁷

We may also note here how the *topos* of catastrophe has been reconfigured apocalyptically. We have already pointed out that the prediction of future catastrophe was not an intrinsic feature of Greco-Roman oracular discourse generally, nor was it intrinsic specifically to Greco-Roman Sibylline oracles. It is true that there was some understanding in the Greco-Roman world that the Sibyl's words were at least to some extent associated with various forecasts of destruction. In one of Plutarch's dialogues, for example, these forecasts are said to include "the bursting forth of fires from the mountain, boiling seas, blazing rocks tossed aloft by the wind, and the destruction of...

²⁷⁶ Momigliano, "The Origins of Universal History," 133-155.

²⁷⁷ See, for example, 1 *Enoch*, 2 *Baruch*, and the book of Daniel.

great and noble cities.”²⁷⁸ More frequently, however, the interest in Sibyllines seems to be more for the advice they could offer in how to deal with various catastrophes.²⁷⁹ They might, for instance, suggest how one might appease a deity, or prescribe a particular course of action in battle, etc.—that is, actions that ensure well-being and survival. As Collins has observed, Roman Sibyllines typically prescribe solutions rather than predict disasters.²⁸⁰ We may suggest that it is only with the advent of the Judeo-Christian Sibyllines that this discourse material came to have an intrinsic link with the prediction and forecasting of destruction, doom, and judgment.

Added to these major rhetorical *topoi*, we also find the inclusion of the *topos* of corruption. It, too, is articulated apocalyptically with particular emphasis on the dualistic tension between good and evil, as well as the moral and ethical implications and exhortations that accompany it. These elements of ethical *logos*, although prevalent throughout the Judeo-Christian *Sibylline Oracles*, are noticeably absent from ancient descriptions of Greco-Roman Sibyllines. Significantly, the presence of these elements allows for the extension of the *topos* of authority to include that of judgment, and in particular, a definitive final judgment—a notion also absent from extant testimony related to Greco-Roman Sibyllines. This final judgment is based on a certain absolute code of moral, ethical, and religious practices.

In sum, what we find in the *Sibylline Oracles* is a blend of these two strains or localizations of mantic discourse. More concretely, we find a blend of Judeo-Christian apocalyptic rhetoric into Greco-Roman oracular discourse. In this material the oracular

²⁷⁸ Plutarch, *Pyth. orac.* 398E, Babbitt.

²⁷⁹ Varro, *Rust.* 1.3, states, “for so many years later we are wont officially to consult her books when we desire to know what we should do after some portent.” See also Tacitus, *Ann.* 1.76.

²⁸⁰ Collins, *Seers, Sibyls and Sages*, 183.

topoi, while present in some form in the Greco-Roman Sibyllines, are reconfigured through the apocalyptic articulation of a number of these *topoi* by means of the introduction of certain Judeo-Christian conceptions and ideologies into this authoritative Greco-Roman medium. The conceptions and ideologies include the apocalyptic understanding of the divine order of universal history, the apocalyptic understanding of the presence of evil in the world, the extension of the *topos* of authority to include judgment, and in particular, a final judgment, and the decisive shift in the notion of catastrophe from remedy to prediction. One might argue that this shift is inevitable for a Jewish or Christian writer employing a Greco-Roman discourse, particularly when we consider the relative commonality of *topoi* between Greco-Roman oracular discourse and Judeo-Christian apocalyptic discourse. But, while the *Sibylline Oracles* can be described primarily as oracular, they are significantly reconfigured due to their use and blending of the *topoi* and other resources that have come to be associated with apocalyptic discourse.

Thus blended, these two localizations of mantic discourse respond to the dominant culture of the Greco-Roman world by creating and embodying a revolutionist response towards it. This shift is significant: no longer does the rhetoric of Sibylline oracles serve to legitimize and preserve the authority and social structures of the dominant culture of the Greco-Roman world; instead it can be seen to speak out against and judge its (perceived) corruption and urge its overthrow. Accordingly, it is here that the greatest affinity with Judeo-Christian apocalyptic discourse exists.²⁸¹

The result of this reconfiguration achieved through the blending of Judeo-Christian apocalyptic discourse with Greco-Roman oracular discourse, is a genuine

²⁸¹ E.g. the Apocalypse of John.

transformation of a Greco-Roman discourse medium and the *topoi* associated with it into a product that is intrinsically Judeo-Christian, and yet not without appeal to a Greco-Roman audience. In particular, it is this blending that accounts for the affinity that the *Sibylline Oracles* retain with apocalyptic, and yet distinguishes them from the contemporary Greco-Roman Sibyllines out of which they were forged.

More precisely, we may say that Greco-Roman oracular discourse was transformed by Jews, and that this Jewish adaptation was in turn transformed by Christians. In some cases, the *Sibylline Oracles* are either one or the other (Christian or Jewish adaptations of Greco-Roman oracular discourse); in other cases, they are an intertwining of the two. In some cases, the breakdown of the interweaving is obvious; in other cases it is almost impossible to distinguish between the two. This latter scenario is reflective of the remarkable similarity between the two, and yet the fundamental differences between the two make them essentially different from one another, and often a source of contention.

It is well accepted that Jews and Christians adapted the discourse of the Greco-Roman oracle for their purposes; however, it has not been as thoroughly discussed how Greco-Roman oracular discourse was transformed through the incorporation of various Jewish and Christian discourse types, and particularly apocalyptic, into this traditional and authoritative Greco-Roman medium. Yet such a phenomenon is highly significant, particularly considering that certain types of discourse are by nature more appropriate to certain settings and audiences than other discourse types. (Oracular discourse, for example, might be more acceptable to a Greco-Roman audience than, say, Christian apocalyptic discourse.) As such, the blending of Jewish and Christian apocalyptic with Greco-Roman oracular discourse is an important development, since it

includes an introduction of Jewish and Christian ideas, concepts, and ideologies into a medium of authoritative appeal in the Greco-Roman world.

The Reconfiguration of Sibyllism: The Rhetorical Perception of the Judeo-Christian Sibyl and the Function of Her Discourse in Relation to the Greco-Roman Sibylline Oracles

In chapter one, we spoke of a particular ideological phenomenon within the Greco-Roman world which we there referred to as Sibyllism—a particular (and quite popular) cultural and ideological understanding associated with both the words and message of the Sibyl, accompanied by a certain expectation as to the form, style, content, and “feel” of Sibylline verses, in addition to the *ethos* of the figure of the Sibyl herself. Additionally, there was a popular and widespread fascination with both the Sibyl and her oracular verse in the public mind and consciousness—a phenomenon which is suggested by the many well known stories and cultural understandings of the Sibyl, her prophecies, and her character. Finally, we note the extent of this phenomenon: her fame and prestige were known throughout the Greco-Roman world; the authority of her words to instruct on both personal and national matters; the tourist industry that came to be associated with her cave at Cumae; the imprinting of her image on various coins; the presence of a Sibylline canon at Rome; and the circulation of numerous private (and illegal) collections of Sibylline verses. In light of this initial understanding of the cultural phenomenon of Sibyllism within the Greco-Roman world, the ideological texture within *Sib. Or.* 1-2 (and the extant collection of *Sibylline Oracles*) can be seen on at least two different levels: in terms of both form and function of Sibyllism and in terms of Sibylline discourse as a whole.

In chapter 2, we defined ideological texture as the ideological movement within the text—that is, the dynamic shift (or proposed shift), propelled by a particular

implementation of a rhetorical discourse, from one culture (and its accompanying beliefs, systems, values, and practices) to another. Thus, when we speak of the rhetorical reconfiguration of Sibyllism, we are speaking of the ideological developments that have occurred in *Sib. Or.* 1-2 (as well as the rest of the extant collection) in relation to the Greco-Roman Sibylline oracles out of which they emerged—developments that can in large part be understood in terms of a dynamic subcultural shift within the phenomenon we have described as Sibyllism—in terms of the discourse. As we have seen, the voice to which the discourse is ascribed remains the same, and yet the attributes and features from which the Sibyl derives her authority differ (i.e. her association with Noah; her antiquity; the God who inspires her); she receives revelation in a similar manner (direct divine communication while in a state of ecstasy, etc.), although from a different deity (the great God instead of Apollo); she employs the same selection of well accepted mantic rhetorical *topoi* (divine communication, history, corruption, divine catastrophe, authority), and yet articulates them differently (in a manner consistent with revolutionist rhetoric, rather than thaumaturgically); she speaks during a similar time, but from a radically different social location (from a counterculture position instead of from within the dominant culture).

The Jewish *Sibylline Oracles* represent a remarkable sub-cultural shift in terms of the cultural understanding of the Sibyl, as well as the medium of the Sibylline oracle itself. It can be seen that the Sibyl came to be considered a credible prophetic voice and her oracles accepted as a legitimate rhetorical medium within the Jewish world—albeit presented, enacted, and developed in a manner more beneficial to the Jewish (and eventually Christian) contexts in which they were written. The result of this sub-

cultural reconfiguration of the rhetorical perception of the Sibyl and her oracles inevitably created an ideological shift in the rhetorical function of Sibylline discourse.

Functionally, as we have seen, what we find in terms of ideological texture in extant testimonies of Greco-Roman Sibylline discourse is a clear example of dominant culture rhetoric. It offered negligible challenge to the existing authoritative, religious, and social structures that characterized the social world in which they were written or spoken. Rather, the discourse of Sibylline oracles usually sought to endorse or legitimize the well-being of the Greco-Roman dominant culture over against competing ideologies. In this way they evidence a thaumaturgical response since, as the very words of Apollo himself (or one of the other deities), they were thought to contain the secrets of divine knowledge that would best enable the State to avert, deal with, or persevere through situations of national crisis, trauma, and calamity.

Beginning in the second century B.C.E., however, the pens of various Jewish writers and redactors would bring about a remarkable shift within the very nature of Sibylline discourse—a shift that would later be assumed and developed by certain Christian writers, and which would provide the prototype that would be emulated by those who would write their own Sibylline oracles in the centuries leading up to and through the Middle Ages. In particular, in terms of ideological texture, what we find is a remarkable shift within the discourse from dominant culture rhetoric to rhetoric that is primarily countercultural—that is, rhetoric that reacts negatively to the values and practices of the dominant culture by creating an alternative response that endorses a different system of values and practices.

Thus in *Sib. Or.* 1-2 we find a clear and extensive condemnation of the corruption inherent to the Sibyl's contemporary social world (2.252-282) and a longing

for its end. For this reason, we encounter the revolutionary rhetoric in which an end is envisioned to this irredeemable corruption by a divinely sanctioned flood of fire that will consume the entire earth (2.196-213). This catastrophe will inaugurate a clear countercultural alternative to the existing Greco-Roman dominant culture, and usher into being a world that is free from corruption within its authoritative structures and socio-economic systems—a world ruled instead by justice, unity, and equality (2.319-324).

Remarkably, this reconfigured world moves significantly beyond a simple remedying of human corruption; it reaches far deeper to the very notion of time (history) itself, whose reconfiguration (2.325-329)—we might even say “elimination”—seems intricately linked to human moral stability in the recreated world. If the progress of history is able to come to an end, then so is the regression within the human moral fibre. In many respects, then, since the solution to the problem of corruption can only occur on such a grand scale, the discourse of *Sib. Or.* 1-2 seems to forego any human attempt at reforming the system of practices, values, and beliefs of the dominant culture. The focus is on divine intervention and action to usher in and preserve the Sibyl’s envisioned ideal world. In this, it is truly emblematic of revolutionist rhetoric, as there is no human effort or initiative involved to bring about the anticipated changes to the world.

The dynamic shift within Sibyllism and Sibylline discourse, however, did not end with this Jewish reconfiguration. It continued in the hands of Christians who undertook to modify existing Jewish *Sibylline Oracles* (most obviously 1-2 and 8, but also to some extent 3 and 5) or to create their own original Christian Sibylline compositions (6 and 7). In some cases this reconfiguration took the form of a Christian sub-cultural

reconfiguration of the Jewish sub-cultural reconfiguration. Evidence of this subsequent reconfiguration is clear.

First, the Christian redactors of *Sib. Or.* 1-2 and 8 make the claim (either implicitly or explicitly) that the Jewish counterculture embodied in the text can better be propagated and understood in light of Christ; or perhaps more properly, that the Jewish writer's response toward the Greco-Roman world can best be articulated and grounded in light of Christ. In these cases, the basic foundational elements of the original Jewish texts are acceptable to the redactors (i.e. the Sibyl's association with Noah; how the Sibyl receives her communication from the deity; the articulation of the mantic *topoi*; the revolutionist understanding of the world; the counterculture rhetoric against the Roman dominant culture; the embodied understanding of God; etc.), but the redaction evidences that those responsible for the reconfigurations consider them to be better understood from the vantage point of Christ. Evidence of this is the addition of the section on the life of Christ in *Sib. Or.* 1.324-400, and the insertion of a section that condemns the "Hebrews" in *Sib. Or.* 2.238-251.

Second, in a rather strange development, we can also see a further shift in terms of the Sibyl's moral character—from the seemingly chaste and virtuous character she embodied in the Greco-Roman and Jewish minds, to her (ironically) questionable moral character described at the ends of *Sib. Or.* 1-2 and 7, where she describes herself as being wretched, ill-minded, lawless, shameless, promiscuous, and faithless.

Third and finally, in the Christian redaction of *Sib. Or.* 1-2 we find an intensification of the counterculture rhetoric begun by the original Jewish writer. This is most explicit in the addition of the extensive excerpt from Pseudo-Phocylides in *Sib. Or.* 2.56-148—an addition used by the Christian redactor to establish a model of

human behaviour and interaction grounded in the divinely sanctioned virtues of justice, mercy, moderation, and honesty. This ideal ethical model strengthens the countercultural rhetoric begun in the Jewish strata of *Sib. Or.* 1-2 by providing a tangible ethical directive that will undergird the socio-economic structures of the divinely reconfigured world envisioned by the Sibyl.

This ideological reconfiguration of Sibyllism in the form of a subcultural response towards Judaism was seemingly accepted and transmitted without much hesitation by the early church, since, for apologetic purposes, the Sibyl could usefully be said to have prophesied Christ to the world centuries before his actual coming—a claim with obvious rhetorical import.²⁸² This was also a shift that influenced certain segments of late Roman society as well. Servius (400 C.E.), in his commentary on Virgil's Fourth Eclogue, for example, states that the Cumaean Sibyl divided history into ten periods—an understanding that would seem to have derived from the Judeo-Christian Sibyllines, and in particular from *Sib. Or.* 1-2. Eventually, this shift was felt in the Middle Ages where we find the development of the cultural understanding of twelve highly Christianized Sibyls²⁸³ who came to speak almost exclusively of emphases foreign to the initial Greco-Roman Sibyl and her oracles.²⁸⁴

²⁸² Among the early Christians who cite and refer to the Sibyl are Clement of Rome, Athenagoras, Theophilus of Antioch, Justin Martyr, Tertullian, Lactantius, Clement of Alexandria, Eusebius, Jerome, and Augustine. For a useful collection of these citations, as well as some from the Middle Ages, see M. Monteiro, *As David and the Sibyls Say*, (London: Sands & Co., 1905), 36-55.

²⁸³ See, for example, those described by Monteiro, *As David and the Sibyls Say*, 1-27.

²⁸⁴ For a summary of the development of Sibyllism during the Middle Ages, see McGuinn, "*Teste David cum Sibylla*," 7-35.

Reflections on the Implications of *Topos* Analysis

In an earlier chapter we observed that although many scholars have seen a clear relationship between the extant collection of Judeo-Christian *Sibylline Oracles* and apocalyptic, none of them have gone so far as to label the *Sibylline Oracles* unrestrictedly as apocalyptic in the fullest sense of the term, but only as “related literature” or apocalyptic in a limited sense. In much the same way, though there may be a tendency simply to lump the extant collection into the same group as their Greco-Roman predecessors, Collins has noted that there is a fundamental difference between them. In many ways, therefore, they appear to defy any straightforward attempt at classification.

It can, however, be seen from the preceding that a socio-rhetorical approach is able to shed valuable light on this unique body of literature in a way that complements and builds on the results yielded by historical-critical methods used to study the *Sibylline Oracles* thus far. In particular, SRA enables us to see that this unique blending of two related subsets of mantic discourse (Greco-Roman oracular discourse with Judeo-Christian apocalyptic discourse) gives the Jewish and Christian Sibyllines their distinctive flavour and shape from other Sibylline and oracular literature in the Hellenistic age. It is also this blending that enables these texts to maintain their distinctiveness from apocalyptic literature, to which they are often compared. Because of this blending, the Jewish and Christian *Sibylline Oracles* generally move away from discourse that contributes to the well-being of the Roman state or other earthly authorities—that is, dominant culture rhetoric—to discourse that frequently contributes to its overthrow, or, at the very least, speaks of its drastic reconfiguration—that is,

counterculture rhetoric. Thus in this shift we witness an ideological movement away from a primarily thaumaturgical outlook to one that is almost exclusively revolutionist.

The insights of this and the previous chapter will provide much of the groundwork for our analysis of the development and function of the Noah-Flood narrative in *Sib. Or.* 1-2 in chapter 6. However, there is one final issue that must be addressed before the setting of the analytical context is complete, namely, a survey of the development of the flood narrative within the rhetorolects of the Second Temple period. This will accordingly be addressed in the following chapter.

CHAPTER 5: THE GENESIS FLOOD NARRATIVE AND ITS DEVELOPMENT WITHIN THE RHETOROLECTS OF SECOND TEMPLE JUDAISM AND EARLY CHRISTIANITY

In the previous chapter we articulated a number of major *topoi* generally characteristic of the discourse of the *Sibylline Oracles*. In addition to these *topoi* there is also a wide range of other *topoi*, as well as a number of stories, traditions, myths, norms, and values that underscore the presentation and contribute to the development of these major *topoi*. One of the most important of these—and the focus of the remainder of this study—is the narrative of Noah and the Flood, both as it stems from the originary story of Gen 6-9, and as it has been culturally and ideologically developed and nuanced in the intervening years (i.e. between the writing of Gen 6-9 and the writing of the various *Sibylline Oracles*).

References or allusions to the narrative appear in some form or another in seven of the extant twelve *Sibylline Oracles*, in addition to the Prologue. The narrative is absent from books 12-14, but since these form a continuity with book eleven (which makes reference to the Noah-Flood story), its absence is understandable. It is also absent from book 6, but book 6 is brief and generally not typical of the standard collection. Of the remaining oracles, it is only explicitly absent from book 5. Of the oracles where it does appear, it is most prominent in *Sib. Or. 1*, where it occupies approximately two hundred of a possible four hundred lines, and in *Sib. Or. 2*, where it functions overtly as a type of the end of the world. In the other oracles where it appears, it does not occupy such a dominant position (only occupying a few lines in each); however, the consistency with which it is employed certainly deserves consideration.

Use of the story of Noah and the flood by the writers of the *Sibylline Oracles*, however, was by no means an isolated phenomenon. In fact, the Hebrew Bible narrative of Noah and the Flood (Gen 6-9) has captivated audiences for well over 2500 years. But, in addition to the simple plot of a righteous man who builds a boat in order to save himself and his family (and by extension, the entire human race) from a cataclysmic flood, it can be seen that the narrative itself is one that is intrinsically pregnant with exploitable material and details.

First, the story is rich in religious *topoi* and imagery. Included among these are sin and righteousness, blessing and cursing, obedience, judgment, sacrifice, cataclysmic destruction, time (including an end and a beginning), salvation, and divine communication. A case can even be made for the presence of the Temple in the narrative.²⁸⁵

Second, the narrative contains an abundance of ambiguity and inconsistency, in large part due to its extensive redaction history. In short, it is an intertwining of at least two flood traditions—those of the so-called Yahwist and Priestly writers²⁸⁶—the result of which is a coexisting set of conflicting details (two pairs or seven pairs; 40 days or 150 days, etc.). Beyond this, ambiguity also exists in a number of the specific details of the narrative—such as the nature of the specific sins of the flood generation,

²⁸⁵ See, for example, S. W. Holloway, "What Ship Goes There: The Flood Narratives in the Gilgamesh Epic and Genesis Considered in Light of Ancient Near Eastern Temple Ideology," *ZAW* 103 (1991): 328-355.

²⁸⁶ For a general breakdown of these writers' contributions to the final form of the FN we find in Gen 6-9 see A. Richardson, *Genesis I-XI: Introduction and Commentary* (London: SCM, 1959), 93-115. For more on the redaction history of the FN, see N. P. Lemche, "The Chronology in the Story of the Flood," *JSOT* 18 (1980): 52-62; D. L. Petersen, "The Yahwist on the Flood," *VT* 26 (1976): 438-446. For an exception here, see G. J. Wenham, "The Coherence of the Flood Narrative," *VT* 28 (1978): 336-348.

the purpose of the 120 years, the identity of the “sons of God,” and the exact nature of Ham’s sin against his father.

Third, having been written in the language of myth, the narrative had great appeal to the imagination. Of special note here are the intermarrying of the sons of God with the daughters of men; God’s struggle with the waters of chaos and the hanging of his bow in the clouds; the verbal communication between God and Noah; and the incorporation of the narrative into an explicitly mytho-historical framework. Beyond this, the whole scenario of the salvation of a righteous man, his family, and a breeding pair of each of the world’s creatures in a non-seaworthy watercraft is itself a scenario that is explicitly mythical.²⁸⁷

Fourth and finally, the narrative is one that makes what might be considered “problematic” commentary on the nature of God and one of his patriarchs. In particular, God’s explicit act of repentance for making humanity (Gen 6:7), as well as his shortcoming in thinking that his judgment of the earth would put an end to human wickedness (8:21), would certainly create a sense of vulnerability in the character of the universal God. Moreover, the whole episode of Noah’s drunkenness, as well as his eventual cursing of his grandson Canaan, would seem to at the very least tarnish the relatively perfect character of one of the great patriarchs.

As a result of these and other similar features, this story has come to acquire (and perhaps, to suffer through) a long and varied history of use and interpretation—

²⁸⁷ For a discussion of the relationship between the Genesis FN and the Mesopotamian flood myths that predate it, see E. Noort, “The Stories of the Great Flood: Notes on Gen 6:5-9:17 in Its Context of the Ancient Near East,” in *Interpretations of the Flood* (ed. F. Garcia Martinez and G. P. Luttikhuisen; Leiden: Brill, 1998), 1-37; T. Frymer-Kensky, “The Atrahasis Epic and Its Significance for Our Understanding of Genesis 1-9,” *BA* 40 (1977): 147-154; A. Heidel, *The Gilgamesh Epic and Old Testament Parallels* (2d. ed.; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1973), 224-269; E. Fisher, “Gilgamesh and Genesis: The Flood Story in Context,” *CBQ* 32 (1970): 392-403.

from the use of Noah in the Hebrew Bible as an exemplary figure of righteousness (Ezekiel 14:14-20), to the use of the story in the justification of racism among some of the patristic writers,²⁸⁸ and even to modern day usage in Sunday school lessons or in creationist dialogue in their polemic against evolutionary theory.²⁸⁹ It is, of course, beyond the purpose of this project to summarize the full range of its uses throughout history.²⁹⁰ Rather, it will suffice for us to limit our discussion here to that material that might be the most relevant to our analysis of the function of the story of Noah and the Flood in the *Sibylline Oracles*—namely, a brief summary of its use in the writers of the Second Temple period.

Use of the Flood Narrative by the Writers of the Second Temple Period

The focus of this thesis is an analysis of the story of Noah and the Flood as we find it developed rhetorically in the twelve preserved books of the *Sibylline Oracles*, with special emphasis on *Sib. Or.* 1-2. The use of the Noah-Flood theme by the writers of the *Sibylline Oracles*, however, was by no means an isolated phenomenon, but was in fact quite widespread among a diversity of other writers of the Second Temple period.

²⁸⁸ See, for instance, H. F. Stander, "The Church Fathers on (the Cursing of) Ham," *Acta Patristica et Byzantina* 5 (1994): 113-125.

²⁸⁹ See, for example, J. C. Whitcomb and H. M. Morris, *The Genesis Flood: The Biblical Record and its Scientific Implications* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1969), 326-327, who, based on "full confidence in the accuracy, perspicuity and lucidity of the Scriptural records... as constituting a divine revelation from God Himself," have suggested that "Although there may be considerable latitude of opinion about details, the Biblical record *does* provide a basic outline of earth history, within which all the scientific data ought to be interpreted." In particular, they argue that "the Creation, the Fall, and the Flood constitute the truly basic facts, to which all the other details of early historical data must be referred." Accordingly, it is within this framework that they have "attempted to re-interpret the basic data of historical geology and other pertinent sciences, which at present are popularly interpreted in a context of uniformitarianism and evolutionism."

²⁹⁰ For a summary of the use of the flood narrative throughout history, see, for example, J. P. Lewis, "Noah and the Flood in Jewish, Christian, and Muslim Tradition," *BA* 47 (1984): 224-239; *idem*, *A Study of the Interpretation of Noah and the Flood*; and F. Garcia Martinez and G. P. Luttikhuisen, eds., *Interpretations of the Flood* (Leiden: Brill, 1998).

In particular, it can be found in a number of pseudepigraphical texts like 1 *Enoch*, where the tale of the watchers is greatly embellished, and where the flood features prominently in a number of apocalyptic surveys of history; 2 *Enoch*, where Noah is described as a progenitor of a new race, and where the destruction of the flood serves to typify a second global destruction and judgment; *Jubilees*, where the FN is used to endorse a 364 day calendar and other priestly items;²⁹¹ *L.A.E.* 49.3, where the flood is one of two global judgments prophesied by Eve;²⁹² 2 *Baruch*, where the destruction brought about by the flood is emphasized; 3 *Baruch*, where a strong typological correlation is set up between Adam and Noah; the *Apocalypse of Abraham*, where Noah appears in a list of ancestors; the *Treatise of Shem*, where Shem's association with Noah seems to legitimize Shem's competency as a revelatory figure; 3

²⁹¹ From the way the Genesis FN is used in the book of *Jubilees*, Lewis was able to conclude that "The significance of this material from *Jubilees* is that it demonstrates the manner in which the writer has embellished the flood narrative for the purpose of tracing certain of the Jewish festivals and practices to the patriarchs. Festivals, according to him, begin with Noah. Exact dates have been supplied for each event of the flood in the effort to validate a religious calendar for which the writer is doing propaganda. An effort is made to demonstrate that Noah acts in keeping with the ritual prescriptions of the Law and that he is the transmitter of esoteric knowledge (*Jub.* 10.14; 12.27; 21.10). Elements of the story that do not fit his purpose, such as the sending out of the dove, have been omitted. Theological interpretations have been added: angels assemble the animals for the ark; Noah's post-flood sacrifice is an atonement; his drunkenness is in connection with a sacrifice; and God is to dwell in the tents of Shem" (*A Study of the Interpretation of Noah and the Flood*, 32). Similarly, J. T. A. G. M. van Ruiten has surveyed the omissions, additions, variances in sequence, and other differences used by the author of *Jubilees* in his rewriting of Gen 6-8, and in this way was able to draw a picture of some of his hermeneutical presuppositions showing that some of these differences result from: the author's attempt to reconcile certain exegetical difficulties inherent to the text of Genesis (chronology, doublets, etc.); the influence of contemporary interpretations of the text (the combination of the judgment of the angels and giants with the flood); and the introduction of dogmatically sensitive issues, such as the three hundred and sixty-four day calendar ("The Interpretation of the Flood Story in the Book of *Jubilees*," in F. Garcia Martinez and G. P. Luttikhuisen, eds., *Interpretations of the Flood* [Leiden: Brill, 1998], 66-85).

²⁹² From his survey of the material from the *Life of Adam and Eve*, Lewis was able to conclude that "this writer treats the flood out of a background where the Christological interpretation of the O.T. has thoroughly penetrated. At the same time, his writing reflects considerable influence of haggadic materials. The typological exegesis, so characteristic of other Christian treatment of the O.T., only reveals itself in the interpretation of the dove" (*A Study of the Interpretation of Noah and the Flood*, 41).

Macc. 2.4, where the flood is described as a punishment for wicked deeds; *Apoc. Paul* 50, where Noah appears as a preacher of repentance; *T. Isaac* 4.37, where Noah is described as one who found favour with God; and *T. Adam*, where Adam foretells that the End will come 6000 years after the flood.²⁹³

Among the Qumran texts where the FN or elements of it appear are the Genesis Apocryphon, which documents Noah's miraculous birth; the Damascus Document 2.17-21, where the story of the watchers and the generation of the flood is used as the first example of apostasy that brought punishment upon the people;²⁹⁴ 4Q508 (Festival Prayers), which seems to suggest a liturgical usage of Noah and the narrative associated with him;²⁹⁵ 4Q370 (Admonition Based on the Flood), in which the FN is reconfigured for parenetic or didactic purposes;²⁹⁶ and 4Q252 (Commentary on Genesis A), where the author sought not only to solve the numerous problems inherent to the biblical text, but to harmonize the biblical text with the calendar of 364 days used by the Qumran community.²⁹⁷

Likewise, the FN appears in the NT in texts like Matt 24:37-39 and Luke 17:26-30, where it is used to illustrate the imminence of the coming of the Son of Man; 1 Pet 3:20, whose writer is able to see a link between the flood and baptism; 2 Pet 2:5-6,

²⁹³ From his analysis, Lewis was able to determine certain elements of the social and historical contexts surrounding the writing of many Jewish and Christian texts on the basis of how they interpreted and reworked the Genesis FN. That is to say, some elements of the *Sitz im Leben* of these writers and their audiences can be seen when it is considered what elements of the Flood narrative have been retained, added, or omitted; what details have been emphasized and embellished; what versions of the Flood story were used; and the like. Specifically, Lewis has noted about the Second Temple writer that, "Men of the past are his heroes and examples; embellishments are freely used; biblical materials are reworked to furnish descriptions of different situations from that to which they originally applied; and current day theological beliefs are read back into biblical narratives" (*A Study of the Interpretation of Noah and the Flood*, 10).

²⁹⁴ Garcia Martinez, "Interpretations of the Flood in the Dead Sea Scrolls," 87-88.

²⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 93-94.

²⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 95-99.

²⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 101.

where the flood serves as a type of the end of the world; Jude 6, where the author alludes to the judgment of the watchers; and Hebrews 11:7, where the figure of Noah is used to illustrate faith.²⁹⁸

It also occurs in Hellenistic writers like Philo of Alexandria, who was interested primarily in the moral and allegorical applications of the FN;²⁹⁹ Pseudo-Philo, who presents a fairly literal and straightforward presentation of the flood narrative with little comment;³⁰⁰ and Josephus, who primarily paraphrases Greek scripture—presenting it as a statement of fact without drawing moral implications—although embellishing it with details drawn from pseudepigrapha and folklore.³⁰¹

Further, it appears in a radically reconfigured form in the *Apocalypse of Adam*, the *Apocryphon of John*, the *Paraphrase of Shem*, and the *True Nature of the Archons* from Nag Hammadi;³⁰² and eventually in the writings of several of the early church fathers, such as *1 Clem.* 7.6 and 9.4, where Noah is described as a preacher of repentance; Irenaeus, *Adv. Haer.* 5.29.2, where the flood is understood to be typical of the flood of fire that will transpire during the last days; and Justin Martyr, *Apol.* 2.7.2, where it appears to be used for the purpose of anti-Jewish polemic.

²⁹⁸ R. Zuurmond has surveyed the intertextual relationship of the Enochic version of the flood story (and in particular the Enochic interpretation of Gen 6:1-4) on several of these early Christian texts, such as Matt 24:37-39, Luke 17:26-30, and the epistles of 1 and 2 Peter and Jude ("The Flood According to Enoch in Early Christian Literature," in *Society of Biblical Literature: 1991 Seminar Papers* [Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1991], 766-772).

²⁹⁹ Lewis, *A Study of the Interpretation of Noah and the Flood*, 42-74.

³⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 74-77.

³⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 77-80.

³⁰² G. P. Luttikhuisen has surveyed the radically reinterpreted biblical tradition of the flood in these three Gnostic texts and has hypothesized that the Gnostic revision of the biblical narrative about Noah and the Flood is a result of the adaptation of biblical traditions to the thought structure of an early (non-Jewish) Gnostic mythological story ("Biblical Narrative in Gnostic Revision: The Story of Noah and the Flood in Classic Gnostic Mythology," in F. Garcia Martinez and G. P. Luttikhuisen, eds., *Interpretations of the Flood* [Leiden: Brill, 1998], 109-123). See also, A. F. J. Klijn, "An Analysis of the Use of the Story of the Flood in the *Apocalypse of Adam*," in *Studies in Gnosticism and Hellenistic Religions Presented to Gilles Quispel*, edited by R. van den Brock and M. J. Vermaseren (Leiden: Brill, 1981), 144-153.

Certainly, more could be said here about the use of the FN in these Second Temple texts and the various studies that have been performed on them; however, it is not our purpose here to simply repeat what has been said before; rather, our purpose is to approach the Flood narrative's usage by the Second Temple writers socio-rhetorically, and particularly from the vantage point of rhetorical *topoi*. In order to show how the various trajectories of the Flood narrative's usage came to develop, and eventually, where its usage in the *Sibylline Oracles* contributes to this development.

Use of the Flood Narrative in the Discourse of the Second Temple Period

Although the FN has been used in a number of different ways for a variety of different purposes, it can be argued that its use within the discourse of the Second Temple period was shaped primarily within two specific sets of rhetorolects, priestly and apocalyptic. This is not to say that it cannot be found in other rhetorical discourses,³⁰³ only that its greatest appeal was to those authors who employed priestly and apocalyptic discourse.

Use of the Flood Narrative in (Second Temple) Priestly Rhetorolect

We will begin with the use of the FN within the priestly rhetorolect of the Second Temple period, since it was most likely in the context of priestly discourse that the FN originally appeared in Jewish tradition. To this end, we will first discuss the Genesis version of the FN, following with discussion of the development of the Noah-Flood narrative in the book of *Jubilees* and the Qumran fragment 4Q252, and then concluding this section with a brief discussion of a number of Second Temple writers

³⁰³ It is, for example, alluded to in the wisdom discourse of Sir 44:17-18.

who seem to maintain certain priestly details of the FN but without evidence of further blending.

The Genesis Flood Narrative

In its originary form in Gen 6-9, the FN would appear to embody rhetoric that occurs within the interests of priestly rhetorlect, particularly if we view it socio-rhetorically in terms of its final form. To this end, although couched in story form, the implicit argumentation contained within the discourse can be seen to be ripe with priestly *topoi* and configurations of those *topoi*. Among the priestly *topoi* that are at the forefront are: covenant, purity, sacrifice, time (calendar), law (legal prescriptions), and temple.

The priestly articulation of the *topos* of time is most apparent when we consider the writer's emphasis on the internal chronological details of the flood event, and in particular, the specific dates assigned to these details. Thus he concerns himself with such precise details as: Noah's age when the flood came (600; Gen 7:6, 11), the date the flood began (27th day of the 2nd month; 7:11), the duration of the flooding (40 days; 7:17; 150 days; 7:24), the day the ark rested on Ararat (27th day of the 7th month; 8:3); the water continuing to decrease until the tenth month (8:4), the mountains emerging from the water on the first day of the tenth month (8:5), the raven being sent after another forty days (8:6-7), the waiting of seven days between the sending of each dove (8:10-12); the age of Noah (601) and the date (1st day of the 1st month) when the water completely subsided (8:13), and the date (27th day of the second month) when the earth had become completely dry (8:14)—presumably the date when Noah also exited the ark. In short, it appears that what we have in Gen 6-9 is a chronology of the flood event whose total duration is one year, although, as it appears in the Genesis text, it is a somewhat confused chronology—particularly if we were to use the chronology of the

MT.³⁰⁴ Considering this emphasis, it seems reasonable to conclude that the timing of events was of calendrical, and thus priestly, significance.

The *topos* of covenant appears explicitly at least twice in the Gen FN. It appears first in 6:19, where, even before the flood, God makes a covenant with Noah to preserve him and his family from the flood. The second occasion occurs after the flood, in 9:8-17, when God makes a covenant with Noah, his sons and their descendants, and all living creatures never again to destroy the earth and its inhabitants by flood. It is a unilateral covenant marked by the placing of God's bow in the clouds—a covenant that will last for the duration of time (cf. Josephus, *Ant.* 1.3.8). Less explicitly, this can also be seen in Gen 8:21-22, where, after smelling the sweet aroma of Noah's burnt offering, God declares that he will never again curse the earth on account of human wickedness.

The *topos* of purity/impurity is not dominant in the Genesis FN, but it was employed explicitly on at least two different occasions. First, the "clean" and "unclean" animals are distinguished from one another during the boarding of the animals onto the ark. In 7:2-3, for example, Noah is instructed to take seven pairs of all clean (καθαρῶν) creatures onto the ark, while only permitting a single pair of each type of unclean (μὴ καθαρῶν) creature onto the ark. It is a distinction that is also underscored by the writer of *L.A.B.* 3.4. Josephus (*Ant.* 1.3.2) mentions the boarding of the animals by pairs and

³⁰⁴ For the chronology above, as well as for all references to the Genesis flood narrative, we have used the LXX version of the biblical text since it appears to be the one used by the Sibyl of books 1-2. In the LXX, the flood lasts a full solar year—from the twenty-seventh day of the second month to the same date the following year. In this it differs from the MT which has the flood beginning ten days earlier but ending on the same date—yielding a total duration of one year and ten days. It may be argued, however, that this was a 354 day lunar year, and that the extra days were added by a Priestly redactor in order to make up the difference with the solar calendar that he may have been using (E. Kutsch, "Der Kalendar des Jubiläenbuches und das Alte und das Neue Testament," *VT* 11 [1961], 43).

by sevens but seems to remove the distinction between clean and unclean. Second, the *topos* also appears in 8:20, where Noah offers a burnt offering of all clean beasts and all clean birds. The implication here is that Noah (knowingly or unknowingly) abided by the rules of ritual purity long before the giving of the Mosaic Law.

The *topos* of sacrifice occurs primarily in Gen 8:20-22, where, shortly following the flood, Noah is seen to build an altar to the Lord and to offer upon it a sweet smelling burnt offering of all clean animals and birds. Although the details of Noah's sacrifice are by no means extensive, the details of the building of the altar, the type of sacrifice (burnt offering), the use of only clean animals and birds, and the sensory-aesthetic description of the offering as sweet smelling in the divine nostrils, are certainly in continuity with the formal sacrificial codes and other examples of sacrifice in later sections of the Pentateuch. Again, Noah acts in accordance with the Mosaic Law long before its conferral. It is also important to note here the emphasis on sensory-aesthetic texture (which seems to be so central to much of the subsequent priestly rhetoric)—most obviously the emphasis on God's apparent sense of smell.

Explicit examples of legal prescriptions occur at least twice in the Genesis flood narrative. First, in 9:3-4, where at least two dietary prescriptions are introduced: a) God sanctions the use of animals for human consumption (previously forbidden), but, in doing so b) forbids the eating of the animal's blood. Second, in 9:5-6 God institutes the legal prescription of capital punishment as a consequence for anyone who takes another person's life. Again, the description of these laws is not extensive but is certainly enough to equate them with elements of the future Mosaic Law, which becomes a paradigmatic body of priestly discourse in Jewish tradition.

Finally, the *topos* of temple, although not explicitly articulated by the writers of the Genesis FN itself, can certainly be suggested when we consider the shape and dimensional proportions of the (less-than-seaworthy) ark in relation to those of the Jerusalem Temple. In this respect, the writer of Genesis informs us that the dimensions of the ark Noah was instructed to build were 300 cubits for the length of the ark, 50 cubits the width, and 30 cubits the height (6:15-17). By comparison, the dimensions of the temple seem to have been approximately 100 cubits by 50 cubits by 30 cubits. The dimensions of the ark, then, meant that it was three times as long as the temple, although proportionately there certainly is some congruity—not to mention a significant degree of congruity in terms of salvific function as well. As Holloway has usefully pointed out, the ark of the Genesis FN was patterned on an idealized Solomonic Temple, and as such, like the ark in the Gilgamesh Epic, is best seen as a product of ancient Near Eastern temple ideology—expressing both general and acculturated ideals of design, function, and mythology.³⁰⁵

The Book of Jubilees

The most extensive usage of the flood narrative within the priestly rhetorolect of the Second Temple Period appears within the discourse of the book of *Jubilees*, whose writer makes some effort to clear up a number of the chronological difficulties inherent to the Genesis version (MT) of the flood narrative in order to establish the origins of the 364 day calendar.³⁰⁶ In order to establish this, the writer of *Jub.* 6.23-31 indicates that feasts of remembrance were established on the first day of the first, fourth, seventh, and tenth months. In between each of these feasts is a period of thirteen weeks, for a

³⁰⁵ Holloway, "What Ship Goes There," 329.

³⁰⁶ For a useful discussion on the interpretation of the flood narrative in *Jubilees*, see van Ruiten, "The Interpretation of the Flood Story in the Book of Jubilees," 66-85.

total of 364 days between the yearly celebration of each of these feasts—an untransgressible calendar that cannot be violated since it is ordained and engraved on the heavenly tablets. The importance of guarding this 364 day year over and against the competing 354 day lunar calendar is described in 6.32-38. In short, to follow the 364 day calendar is to ensure that the new moons, festivals, and Sabbaths are celebrated at their appointed times. To follow the lunar calendar, on the other hand, is to advance every year by ten days, and thus “corrupt and make a day of testimony a reproach and a profane day a festival... because they will set awry the months and sabbaths and feasts and jubilees” (6.37)—an error that will eventually lead one to “forget the feasts of the covenant and walk in the feasts of the gentiles, after their errors and after their ignorance” (6.35).

In addition to the *topos* of calendar, the *topos* of covenant is expanded by the writer of *Jubilees*, from God’s covenant not to destroy the earth by flood to include a covenant by Noah and his sons to abide by certain dietary prescriptions (and particularly the ban on the eating of blood, 6.4-16). These dietary prescriptions are found in Genesis (9:4), but are greatly embellished in *Jubilees*. Of significance, are the additions of details relating to the duration of the covenant (forever), the consequences of violating the covenant (they will be uprooted, and their seed removed from the earth), and its intended recipients (the children of Israel). Because of this covenant, it is ordained that the feast of Shebuot (the feast of “Weeks” or “Oaths”) should be celebrated each year to renew this covenant in all its aspects (*Jub.* 6.17-22).

The writer of *Jubilees* also makes mention of Noah’s debarkation sacrifice (6.1-3), although he greatly embellishes the details far beyond what is found in the Genesis text. Like the writer of Genesis, *Jubilees* mentions the burnt offering and the resultant

sweet aroma, although reducing the size of the offering from one of each type of clean animal and bird, to a smaller, but more descriptive, offering that includes a calf, a goat, a lamb, salt, a turtledove, and a young dove. These Noah offers with oil, a sprinkling of wine, and incense. In addition to this burnt offering, this scene also includes a sacrifice of atonement for the land. For this purpose, Noah is said to have taken the kid of a goat, and to have “made atonement with its blood for all the sins of the land because everything which was on it had been blotted out except those who were in the ark with Noah.”

A sacrifice also occurs in *Jub.* 7.1-6, where the incident of Noah’s drunkenness occurs in connection with a sacrifice in the fifth year on the first day of the first month (in accordance with the divinely ordained feasts, *Jub.* 6.23-31). Here Noah offers a burnt offering of a calf, a ram, seven lambs each a year old, and a kid of a goat to make atonement for himself and his sons. Like the other instance, Noah offers their fat and their flesh upon the altar, kneads it with oil, sprinkled wine in the fire, and offers frankincense on the altar—all creating a sweet aroma before the Lord. In both cases, these descriptions of sacrifices and their effects are not unlike many of those found in (other) parts of the Pentateuch. As such, Noah can be seen to perform these sacrifices in a manner consistent with the “future” priests of Israel and Judah. The ideological implications of the writer of *Jubilees* are clear: Noah clearly functions as a pre-Aaronic priest.

In *Jub.* 6.4-14, the legal prescriptions of Gen 9 are duplicated, although presented in greater detail, with particular emphasis on the prohibition of eating blood and the consequences of doing so (mentioned in the covenant section). In *Jub.* 7.20-39, however, there is a further section of legal prescriptions, although this time relayed

by Noah to his grandchildren. Much of the emphasis here is again on the prohibition against eating blood, the consequences for which are clearly stated in 7.29:

And no man who eats blood or sheds the blood of a man will remain upon the earth; and neither seed nor posterity will remain alive for him under heaven. For they will go down into Sheol, and into the place of judgment they will descend. And into the darkness of the depths they will all be removed with a cruel death.

Beyond this, we also find the law of the reserving of first fruits given by Noah to his grandchildren. Further still, the writer of *Jub.* 21.10 indicates that Abraham's commands and the legal prescriptions given to Isaac are based on the authority of the books of Enoch and Noah. In short, for the writer of *Jubilees*, Noah is clearly a highly regarded "legal" figure before the giving of the Mosaic Law—the words of Moses are only a continuation of those of Noah.

Interestingly, in one significant point of departure from the Genesis narrative, there is no mention of the dimensions of the ark in *Jubilees*, which seems to suggest that either such a correlation did not occur to the writer, or, despite his interest in developing other priestly aspects of the FN, such a correlation was (perhaps somewhat ironically) of no interest to him.

Qumran Text 4Q252

Very similar to *Jubilees* and its emphasis on the solar calendar and the precise dating of the internal details of the Flood event is the Qumran text 4Q252.³⁰⁷ In fact, 4Q252 seems to move beyond *Jubilees* and (the LXX version of) Genesis in this respect by supplying an even more precise chronology of dates—providing the dates for a number of events not enumerated in these other two texts, and in most cases, going so far as

³⁰⁷ For a useful discussion see, T. H. Lim, "The Chronology of the Flood Story in a Qumran Text (4Q252)," *JJS* 43 (1992), 288-298.

to include a specific day of the week for each event of the flood chronology. In fact, it would seem that the emphasis in 4Q252 on the dating of the flood particulars is paramount. In this respect, it is noteworthy that a number of other priestly *topoi* remain undeveloped and seem barely to warrant a mention. As Lim has noted, “even God’s promise of not destroying the earth again by the waters of the flood is passed over in silence!”³⁰⁸ Likewise, in addition to the omission of the *topos* of covenant, we find, for example, the omission of Noah’s post-flood sacrifice, as well as various legal prescriptions, such as the prohibition against eating blood.

Lim suggests that these omissions cast some doubt on the priestly origins of the solar calendar,³⁰⁹ and this is certainly a possibility, but the text is brief (only about 26 lines related to Noah and the Flood), and everything in it is subordinated to the *topos* of calendar. And so while 4Q252 does not specifically endorse other priestly issues, it certainly does not entirely preclude them either—it is simply a case of emphasizing one particular priestly *topos* at the expense of all others.

Maintenance of Priestly Details in Other Second Temple Discourse

Some writers of the Second Temple period—particularly Pseudo-Philo and Josephus, but also 2 *Enoch*—echo a number of the priestly details found in Genesis and *Jubilees*, but for reasons known only to them, choose not to develop these details any further. Most notable in this respect is Josephus, who follows Genesis and *Jubilees* in his articulation of: a) the *topos* of time, where he offers a similar chronology of flood details (*Ant.* 1.3); b) the *topos* of sacrifice, where he mentions Noah’s sacrifice in conjunction with God’s decision never again to judge the earth by flood (*Ant.* 1.3.7), but does not

³⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 296.

³⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 298.

offer any details of the sacrifice *per se*. Likewise, he seems to follow the writer of *Jubilees* in his mention of the detail of Noah's drunkenness occurring in conjunction with a sacrifice (*Ant.* 1.6.3); c) he mentions the various legal prescriptions (*Ant.* 1.6.8), but offers nothing further than their mention; and d) he also follows the writer of Genesis in terms of the dimensions of the ark (*Ant.* 1.3.2), although it is difficult to ascertain whether or not he saw a correlation with the Jerusalem temple, or whether he was simply preserving the literal details of Genesis.

Pseudo-Philo also maintains much of the same, following Genesis and *Jubilees* in his articulation of: a) the *topos* of covenant and the place of the pre-flood covenant made by God with Noah (3.4); b) Noah's debarkation sacrifice (3.8), but offering little more than the writer of Genesis; c) the legal prescriptions (3.11), but like Josephus, offering nothing further than their mention; d) a similar interest in the dating and chronology of the flood, but without progressing beyond the Genesis FN to the extent that the writer of *Jubilees* does; e) regarding the *topos* of temple, Pseudo-Philo also follows the writer of Genesis in terms of the dimensions of the ark, although it is difficult to ascertain whether or not he also saw a correlation with the Jerusalem temple, or was simply preserving the literal details of Genesis.

In the case of both Josephus and Pseudo-Philo, since neither writer ever really offers any development of these *topoi*, it is difficult to tell whether they repeated these details with any priestly interests in mind, or were simply repeating the status quo.

In summary, then, it could be argued that the Genesis FN was originally written with a certain priestly agenda in mind and that a number of Second Temple writers recognized the priestly resources and *topoi* inherent to the flood narrative and developed them accordingly. Foremost among the Second Temple texts that

developed this priestly trajectory was the book of *Jubilees*. Its writer, who is described by Wintermute as being part of a “zealous, conservative, pious segment of Judaism which was bound together by its own set of traditions, expectations, and practices,”³¹⁰ thus interwove the FN into the ideological texture of the entire text. Likewise, the writer of 4Q252 also interwove aspects of the priestly topology, specifically to lend credence to his endorsement of the 364 day calendar. In addition, a number of other Second Temple writers (notably, Josephus and Pseudo-Philo) highlighted these same priestly details, although it is difficult to ascertain whether they shared these same priestly interests, or whether they were simply repeating the details of the established tradition.

Use of the Flood Narrative within Apocalyptic Rhetorolect

Even though it can be argued that the FN first appeared in the context of priestly rhetorolect, it can be easily seen how the narrative contained resources especially conducive to the argumentative fabric of apocalyptic rhetorolect. In fact, of all the Second Temple writers, it appears to have been of greatest interest for the writers of Judeo-Christian apocalyptic discourse, presumably because of the tremendous similarities between the two in terms of dominant rhetorical *topoi* and texture. In fact, these similarities are so strong that it led Milton S. Terry at the end of the nineteenth century to describe the FN of Gen 6-9 as the “Apocalypse of Noah and the Flood.”³¹¹ Of course such an assessment would generally not hold in light of the conventional understanding of apocalyptic.³¹² Even so, it can be said that, though the FN of Genesis

³¹⁰ O. S. Wintermute, “Jubilees,” in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha* (ed. J. H. Charlesworth; Garden City: Doubleday, 1983), 2:45.

³¹¹ M. S. Terry, *Biblical Apocalypics: A Study of the Most Notable Revelations of God and of Christ* (repr., Grand Rapids: Baker, 1988), 64-67.

³¹² See, for example, the definition articulated by J. J. Collins, “Introduction: Towards the Morphology of a Genre,” *Semeia* 14 (1979), 1-20.

is not an apocalypse *per se*, it does provide the unrefined resources (and, in some ways, an exemplary model) for apocalyptic discourse. In particular, it exhibits the key *topoi* on which apocalyptic rhetoric is built, and it can be seen to embody a revolutionist response to the world—a feature also characteristic of apocalyptic rhetoric. This is particularly evident when we consider the story in light of mantic rhetoric and its characteristic *topoi* discussed in chapters 3-4.

The Flood Narrative in Light of Apocalyptic Topoi

In chapters 3-4 we suggested that there were at least five major *topoi* that can be said to characterize Judeo-Christian apocalyptic rhetoric, Greco-Roman Sibylline and other oracular discourse, and other specific localizations of mantic discourse from around the ancient Mediterranean—namely, history, corruption, authority, catastrophe, and divine communication. When we consider the Genesis FN in light of these major *topoi*, it is quite apparent that a number of these mantic *topoi* come to the forefront in varying degrees.

History

We have already noted the priestly emphasis on the *topos* of time, and particularly the calendrical issues related to this emphasis. However, to view the flood narrative through apocalyptic eyes, we can see how the event of the flood can also be seen to function rhetorically as a critical dividing point (junction) within the flow of world history—an end to one world age and the inauguration of a second world age. This is particularly evident by the writer's inclusion of God's instruction to "be fruitful and

multiply on the earth” (8:17)³¹³—a command that clearly brings to mind God’s initial instruction to creation in Gen 1:28 to do the same.

This cataclysmic destruction of the world by flood would bring to an end the current world age, characterized by corruption and evil, and in turn inaugurate the beginning of a new world age, which presumably would be free of such corruption and evil. Moreover, this also seems to be the whole point of God’s decision to destroy the world—to put an end to a world of corruption and to inaugurate a world that is free of this corruption. In this, the *topos* of history naturally intersects with the apocalyptic *topoi* of corruption (since it is as a result of human wickedness that the current world age must come to an end), catastrophe (since this is the means through which the current world age comes to an end), and authority (because it is on the basis of God’s authority to judge human corruption that these events transpire).

Corruption

The *topos* of corruption is immediately apparent in a simple reading of the narrative, and plays a dominant role within the argumentative fabric of the FN. It begins, for example, with the classic episode of the intermarrying of the sons of God with the daughters of men (6:2-5)—an episode which at the very least seems to suggest a corruption of the divinely ordered boundaries within creation.

Following this episode, we find what essentially amounts to a summary of the then current state of the world, which was generally characterized by evil, iniquity, and corruption in its entirety.³¹⁴ Gen 6:6, for example, suggests that “the wicked actions of

³¹³ αὐξάνεσθε καὶ πληθύνεσθε ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς.

³¹⁴ The word “corrupted” (ἐφθάρη, 6:12; κατεφθαρμένη, 6:13; κατέφθειρε, 6:13) appears at least three times within Genesis 6-9; words for “evil” (κακίαι, 6:6; πονηρὰ, 6:6, 8:21) occur three times, and the word for “iniquity” (ἀδικίας, 6:12, 14) occurs twice.

men were multiplied upon the earth, and that everyone in his heart was intently brooding over evil continually.”³¹⁵ This description is continued further in 6:12-14, where the deficiencies and corruption of the human condition are repetitively emphasized:

But the earth was corrupted before God, and the earth was filled with iniquity. And the Lord God saw the earth, and it was corrupted; because all flesh had corrupted its way upon the earth. And the Lord God said to Noah, “A period of all men is come before me; because the earth has been filled with iniquity by them, and, behold, I destroy them and the earth.”³¹⁶

Clines has suggested that the author of this text views the sin of this generation as a corruption of the original creation and the natural order of things³¹⁷—an assertion that is certainly consistent with Cassuto’s observation that the wording of Gen 6:12 (MT), “And God saw the earth, and behold it was corrupt,” seems intentionally designed to contrastingly remind the reader of Gen 1:31 (MT), “And God saw all that he had made, and behold it was very good.”³¹⁸

The only exception to this evil and corruption exists in the form of the person of Noah, whose righteousness forms a sharp contrast with the rest of the world’s population. In fact, Noah is described in 6:10 as a righteous man (ἄνθρωπος δίκαιος), blameless in his generation (τέλειος ὡς ἐν τῇ γενεᾷ αὐτοῦ), and as one who was well-pleasing to God (τῷ θεῷ εὐηρέστησε). By contrast, the corruption within the world is so

³¹⁵ ὅτι ἐπληθύνθησαν αἱ κακίαι τῶν ἀνθρώπων ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς, καὶ πᾶς τῆς διανοεῖται ἐν τῇ καρδίᾳ αὐτοῦ ἐπιμελῶς ἐπὶ τὰ πονηρὰ πάσας τὰς ἡμέρας.

³¹⁶ Ἐφθάρη δὲ ἡ γῆ ἐναντίον τοῦ Θεοῦ, καὶ ἐπλήσθη ἡ γῆ ἀδικίας. Καὶ εἶδε Κύριος ὁ Θεὸς τὴν γῆν, καὶ ἦν κατεφθαρμένη· ὅτι κατέφθειρε πᾶσα σὰρξ τὴν ὁδὸν αὐτοῦ ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς. Καὶ εἶπε Κύριος ὁ Θεὸς τῷ Νῶε, καιρὸς παντὸς ἀνθρώπου ἦκει ἐναντίον μου, ὅτι ἐπλήσθη ἡ γῆ ἀδικίας ἀπ’ αὐτῶν· καὶ ἰδοὺ ἐγὼ καταφθείρω αὐτοὺς καὶ τὴν γῆν.

³¹⁷ D. J. A. Clines, “The Theology of the Flood Narrative,” *On the Way to the Postmodern: Old Testament Essays, 1967-1998* (vol. 2; JSOTSup 293; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), 513-516.

³¹⁸ U. Cassuto, *Commentary on Genesis* (vol. 2; trans. I. Abrahams; Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1961), 53.

intense that God: a) limits the days of humanity to 120 years; b) is grieved that he has made humanity; and c) decides that the only way to rid the world of this corruption is to completely destroy it.³¹⁹

Catastrophe

Compared to the catastrophes that have preceded the flood, as well as those that have followed it, the magnitude of the catastrophe of the flood, at least as it is presented rhetorically in Gen 6-9, is unparalleled.³²⁰ In fact, the magnitude of the flood is so great that it is said to have: a) covered the entire world—rising above the tallest mountains by fifteen cubits (Gen 7:17-20); b) lasted approximately one year; c) destroyed every living land and air creature, except for those who took refuge in the ark (7:21-23). In fact, the writer, by using the imagery of the waters descending from the floodgates of heaven above and arising from the great abyss below (7:11) seems to suggest that what occurred during the flood was a complete undoing of creation. In this respect, Blenkinsopp has described the significance of the flood as “uncreation”: “The world in

³¹⁹ Unfortunately, however, the judgment of the world by flood did not accomplish the desired results of ridding the world of evil and corruption. In 8:21, for example, God himself is said to concede this, and therefore determines never again to smite all living flesh in a similar manner. Likewise, in only a few short verses (9:20-27) do we find the righteous Noah starring in the perhaps not so righteous drunken sailor episode, and in the subsequent cursing of Ham, which more than bluntly seems to suggest that the state of the world was quickly returning to a state of corruption similar to that before the flood.

³²⁰ Words related to the *topos* of catastrophe can be seen to dominate the repetitive texture of Genesis 6-9. The word “destroy,” for example, occurs at least three times (καταφθείρω, 6:14; καταφθεῖραι, 6:18; 9:11); “die” four times (τελευτήσει, 6:18; ἀπέθανε, 7:21, 22; ἀποθανεῖται, 9:11); “blot out” five times (ἀπαλείψω, 6:8; ἐξαλείψω, 7:4; ἐξήλειψε, 7:23, ἐξηλείφθησαν, 7:23; ἐξαλείψαι, 9:15); and, of course, “flood” at least eight times (κατακλυσμός, 6:18; 7:6, 7, 10, 17; 9:11 [x2], 15).

which order first arose out of a primeval watery chaos is now reduced to the watery chaos out of which it arose—chaos-come-again.”³²¹

Authority

Alongside these other three *topoi*, we also find a significant development of the *topos* of authority, and specifically God’s authority. Significantly, the magnitude of God’s authority over and within the cosmos can be seen when we consider that God: a) possesses the authority to pass judgment on corruption of the world;³²² b) possesses the authority over nature to bring about the catastrophe of the flood in order to punish and eliminate this corruption; c) possesses the authority over the historical process to bring about the end of one world age and inaugurate the beginning of a new one; and d) has the authority to reveal the full scope of events to Noah, with the certainty that they will come to pass.

Divine Communication

Significant to the progression of the Flood narrative is the unilateral communication that takes place from God to Noah—much of which was knowledge that was privy only to God himself (that is, outside of the realm of human knowledge). Significantly, we find: a) God’s revelation to Noah of his decision to destroy the earth on account of human iniquity (Gen 6:14-18); b) God’s prescription for salvation which included the imperative to build an ark and instructions on how to build it (6:15-17), along with directions on

³²¹ J. Blenkinsopp, *The Pentateuch: An Introduction to the First Five Books of the Bible* (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 46-47.

³²² A similar rationale for a divine sending of a great flood appears in Ovid, *Metam.* 1.128-131. This contrasts sharply with the much older *Atrahasis Epic*, where the flood occurs in order to curb the rampant noise pollution caused by the rapidly expanding human population that is disturbing the sleep of the gods (1.352-359).

whom and what to bring onto the ark (family, animals, food, etc.: 6:19-22, 7:1-3, 7:7-8); c) God's instruction to be fruitful and multiply and to have dominion over the earth, along with the various legal prescriptions that would allow for this to be best carried out (9:1-7); and d) the everlasting covenant made by God with Noah never again to destroy the earth by flood—a covenant that was signalled by God placing his bow in the clouds (9:8-17).

The Flood Narrative in Apocalyptic Rhetorolect

The writers of apocalyptic rhetorolect soon picked up on these rhetorical resources inherent to the flood narrative and began to include them in various ways in their own rhetorical arguments and typologies of the soon coming judgment at the end of the world.

Corruption

The dualistic contrast between the righteousness of Noah and the corruption of the flood generation was understood and embellished in many ways by the ancient writers. *4 Ezra* 3.8 describes the latter as ones who walked after their own will, and who scorned God and did ungodly things before him. *1 En.* 65.6 is more specific and describes the evil and corruption of Noah's generation as the acquisition and use of forbidden types of knowledge: angelic secrets, occultic powers, sorcery, the mixing of colours, and the making of molten images. Likewise, in *1 En.* 1-36, and particularly *1 En.* 6-11, we find an extensive embellishment of the story of the Watchers, which seems to be a reflection of the corruption of the natural order of things: the intermarrying of humans and angels (6-7), the eating of living creatures (which was not permitted until after the flood) and the drinking of blood (7.3-6), the spreading of magic

arts (7-8), and, among other things, a general increase in violence and bloodshed upon the earth. 2 Pet 2:5 is briefer and describes the earth during the time of Noah as “a world of the ungodly.” Presumably, however, these embellished descriptions of Noah’s generation were to some degree a reflection of the apocalyptic writer’s own generation. As Lewis has noted regarding apocryphal embellishments of the evils of the flood generation, “Since the Scripture uses only general terms to describe the degradation of the flood generation, the bill of particulars furnished by any writer is an area in which he will reflect the religious mores of his time.”³²³

On the other extreme, Noah’s righteousness and his favour before God is further emphasized in *1 En.* 67.1, where he is said (by God) to have “a lot without blame, a lot of true love,” and by stories of his miraculous birth, where Noah is said to have spoken to the Lord in righteousness while exiting the womb (e.g. *1 Enoch* 106-107; *1QapGen2*), suggesting some kind of unique relationship with God.³²⁴

This dualistic contrast, however, was not enhanced simply by an embellishment of Noah’s righteousness, but also through an elimination of any questionable conduct on his part—such as his drunken exploits and the cursing of his grandson Canaan. These details tend to be omitted from all presentations of Noah in apocalyptic discourse. It is, rather, only priestly writers such as the author of *Jubilees* (and maybe Josephus) who deal with these issues by connecting Noah’s drunkenness to a sacrifice. In apocalyptic rhetorolect, these details of Noah’s indiscretions are simply

³²³ Lewis, *A Study of the Interpretation of Noah and the Flood*, 20.

³²⁴ For more on Noah’s righteousness, see J. C. VanderKam, “The Righteousness of Noah,” in *Ideal Figures in Ancient Judaism: Profiles and Paradigms* (ed. J. J. Collins and G. W. E. Nickelsburg; Chico: Scholars Press, 1980), 27, who argues that for the Second Temple writer, “Noah has become, not simply a moral paradigm, but an eschatological model.” See also Deborah Dimant, “Noah in Early Jewish Literature,” in *Biblical Figures Outside the Bible* (ed. M. E. Stone and T. A. Bergren; Harrisburg: Trinity, 1998), 123-150.

ignored, presumably in order to boost his rhetorical *ethos* and his status as an exemplary model of righteousness.

History

In general, the writers of apocalyptic rhetorlect, unlike the writers of priestly rhetorlect, seem to have had little interest in the detailed chronology of the flood, but take a greater interest in the flood as a natural dividing point within the scheme of world history—as in *2 Baruch*, the *Animal Apocalypse*, and the *Apocalypse of Weeks*. In particular, the Flood was understood to have brought to an end one world age and to be the catalyst that inaugurated the beginning of a subsequent world age. However, the apocalyptic writers moved beyond Genesis by assigning to the flood a prominent place within the periodization of world history, giving it a more central role than many of the other formative events in Israelite history and religion. For this reason, the Flood eventually came to be understood as a type of the end of the world. As Eve says to her children shortly before her death in the *Life of Adam and Eve*, “Because of your collusion, our Lord will bring over your race the wrath of his judgment, first by water and then by fire; by these two the Lord will judge the whole human race” (49.3). 2 Pet 3:5-7 likewise notes that the end brought about by this second destruction will in turn give way to a new beginning, and specifically, promises “new heavens and new earth, where righteousness is at home” (2 Pet 3:13).³²⁵

³²⁵ That the flood served in this respect as a critical point in time to divide these two epoch periods is further articulated in subsequent writers. In Samaritan theology, for example, Noah was frequently identified as a second Adam, and as the progenitor of a new race. See J. MacDonald, *The Theology of the Samaritans* (London: SCM Press, 1964), 221, 351, 362, and 438.

Authority

The authority of God expressed and demonstrated in the Genesis flood narrative is maintained in Second Temple materials, but comes to function as a critical precedent and example for how God may choose to deal with corruption in the future. In this way, how God judged Noah's generation becomes an example of how God will deal with the corruption of the writer's own day and age. Thus the apocalyptic writer can argue: if the judgment of the flood of Noah was great, how much more severe will be the judgment of the last days. As such, the story of Noah and the flood became more than simply a critical dividing point in history; it also came to provide a critical precedent and appropriate topological resources that could serve to frame and describe the impending final judgment that they longed for—namely, the end of the current corrupt world age and the inauguration of a new world age that would be free of such corruption and evil. As the writer of 2 Peter proclaims: "By these waters also the world of that time was deluged and destroyed. By the same word the present heavens and earth are being reserved for fire, being kept for the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men" (3:6-7).

Catastrophe

Unlike the priestly and other non-apocalyptic writers who tend to minimize and de-emphasize the destruction and effects of the flood, apocalyptic writers place emphasis on it by using it as an example of the cataclysmic destruction of the last days—the fearsome benchmark that will be eclipsed only by the burning of the earth at the end of history (*L.A.E.* 49.3). The argument here is that if the flood of Noah was dreadful, how much more severe the (soon-coming) flood of fire. Thus, 2 Peter states: "by the word of God... the world of that time was deluged with water and perished. But by the same

word the present heavens and earth have been reserved for fire, being kept until the day of judgment and destruction of the godless" (3:5-7). This is a flood that will not simply cover the earth with water, but which will set it ablaze with fire in order to melt and dissolve all of its elements (2 Pet 3:8-13).

Divine Communication

The writers who draw on apocalyptic rhetorolect generally tend to maintain and embellish the details of the communication that occurred between God and Noah. *1 En. 67*, for example, includes a number of divinely revealed details relating to the flood that are foreign to the Genesis narrative: the participation of the angels in the construction of the ark (67.2); that God's protective hand will be upon the ark to preserve it (67.2); the strengthening of Noah's seed (67.3); and the imprisonment and punishment of the angels who perverted humanity (67.4-7). Where the apocalyptic writers tend to move beyond Genesis is in terms of their inclusion of the idea of Noah as a divinely inspired preacher of repentance—a tradition which, as we shall see, is highly developed in *Sib. Or.* 1-2, but which is also alluded to in 2 Pet 2:5, *Apoc. Paul* 50, and eventually in a number of places in the Qur'an. In this respect, Noah is said to have been inspired to share the contents of this revelation with his fellow humans of the impending catastrophe and a way to escape this destruction through the ark—a message that was ultimately rejected, and as such, only served to legitimate God's judgment.

The Revolutionist Function of the Flood Narrative in Apocalyptic Rhetorolect

In addition to exhibiting the key *topoi* on which apocalyptic rhetoric is built, it can be seen from this discussion that the Genesis flood narrative also embodies, like the

majority of apocalyptic, a revolutionist response to the world, and in fact embodies the exact scenario envisioned by the writers who use apocalyptic rhetoric. As we have seen from the discussion of the apocalyptic *topoi* of the FN, the world is understood to be too evil and corrupt to continue as it is, and so it is destroyed. This destruction in turn gives way to the beginning of a new age which it is hoped will be free of such evil and corruption.

Of course, there is an obvious difference between the Genesis flood narrative and apocalyptic discourse. Genesis 6-9 is presented as a revolutionist event that occurred in the past, whereas apocalyptic discourse sets forth a revolutionist rhetoric that looks forward to a future reconfiguration of the world and its social structures; but this is exactly the appeal of the Flood narrative for the apocalyptic writers. Thus, it is easy to see the affinity that exists between the two, and why it would be of such great appeal to Second Temple Jewish and Early Christian apocalyptic writers as they sought for creative ways to articulate and express their own concerns about the irredeemable corruption of their contemporary world and envision a way by which this corruption would be dealt with, and the world restored to what it was intended to be. In this, the apocalyptic writers found in the flood narrative an ideal topographical and topological precursor.

Use of the FN in the Development of the Discourse of *Sibylline Oracles*

It can be seen from this brief survey that the story of Noah and the Flood came to be used and modified by quite a number of different sources, in quite a number of different ways, and for a number of different purposes. Most prominent among these were the writers of priestly rhetoric—who saw within the Flood narrative various resources that could be developed in order to legitimize the 364 day calendar, certain religious

feasts and festivals, and various legal practices, and who saw in Noah a forerunner to the Aaronic priesthood; and the writers of apocalyptic rhetorolect, who saw within the FN a number of parallels to their own day and situation, as well as an example of a cataclysmic reconfiguration of the world's socio-economic structures similar to the one they themselves were anticipating.

Significant for our study on the development and function of the Noah-Flood narrative in *Sib. Or.* 1-2 is the positioning of the writer of *Sib. Or.* 1-2 in relation to these two rhetorical trajectories of interpretation of the Flood narrative. First of all, it would seem that various extracts from apocalyptic rhetorolect or similar traditions made their way into the mantic rhetoric of the *Sibylline Oracles*. To this end, it can be said that the Sibyl no doubt modified and added to these traditions her own material which would best serve her purpose (and in fact can be seen clearly to subordinate the priestly elements of the Flood narrative in favour of the potential apocalyptic resources tapped and untapped by the writers of apocalyptic rhetorolect). Like its use in many of these other texts, use of the Noah-Flood story here was not peripheral, but was employed and modified in order to play a critical role in the development of the Sibyl and in the oracular texts associated with her.

While this can generally be said of the corpus as a whole, it is most evident in *Sib. Or.* 1-2 where the Noah-Flood narrative plays a central role in the articulation of the major rhetorical *topoi* of the Sibyl's argument. In the process, through use of the *topoi* present in the FN, the Sibyl is able to rearticulate and supplement many of the mantic *topoi* characteristic of the Greco-Roman Sibylline oracles and to do so in a way that is apocalyptic. This reconfiguration maintains a degree of continuity with Greco-

Roman Sibyllines, but also allows for the expansion of their appeal into the Judeo-Christian world.

Likewise, use of the Noah-Flood story in this re-articulation contributed to the shift from what could be described primarily as a thaumaturgical response to the world in Greco-Roman oracles, to a response that is strongly revolutionist in Judeo-Christian oracles. The rhetoric of Sibylline oracles thus ceased to legitimize and affirm the existing Greco-Roman dominant culture, and instead came to urge a countercultural perspective against the dominant culture. Accordingly, the remainder of this thesis will concentrate on the development and function of the story of Noah and the Flood in the *Sibylline Oracles*, with special emphasis on *Sib. Or.* 1-2, since it makes the most extensive use of the Flood story in the extant collection, and is in many ways the oracle where this transformation is most clearly established.

CHAPTER 6: AN ANALYSIS OF THE DEVELOPMENT AND FUNCTION OF THE NOAH-FLOOD NARRATIVE IN *SIBYLLINE ORACLES* 1-2

In the opening lines of *Sib. Or.* 1, the Sibyl pronounces that she will sequentially prophesy past, present, and future, beginning with the first generation of humanity down to the last (1-4)—a period that essentially includes the creation of the world and universe through to the great conflagration that will transpire at the end of the world and beyond.

As we have stated in an earlier chapter, the notion of the Sibyl prophesying the past is interesting since prophecy is usually in some way associated with the future. Presumably, however, this prophesying of the past represents a divine retelling of the past, since it is God who inspires and speaks through the Sibyl (1.5), and not the Sibyl directly on her own initiative. Thus the Sibyl's recollection of the past can be distinguished from all other (i.e. human) retellings—which may be subject to various errors and inaccuracies, as well as manipulation. As such, it is a history that is trustworthy and reliable and not subject to human error.

This divine retelling of the past, when coupled with the Sibyl's prophecies of the days and events that are yet to be, represents a divine overview of the critical figures, events, and moments in the history of the world from its beginning to its end. To this end, one of the most critical events in this telling of history is the event of the Flood, which serves to divide this history into two distinct but cyclical parts,³²⁶ and which provides the chronological vantage point from which the Sibyl, as the daughter-in-law of Noah (*Sib. Or.* 1.288-289), utters her inspired words.

³²⁶ Thus marking time's mid-point (1.292).

More specifically, the Sibyl of books 1-2 divides the course of history into ten distinct periods (or, “generations of men”), or more precisely, two parallel sets of five periods characterized by deteriorating religious, moral, and ethical quality. At the end of each five-generation cycle, the world undergoes judgment and is destroyed.³²⁷ The first of these judgments is that of the Flood; the second is also a flood—although a flood of fire (2.196-213) and not of water.

In fact, so important is the story of Noah and the Flood in *Sib. Or.* 1 that it occupies approximately two hundred of four hundred lines, and provides a model for much of what transpires in book 2. Accordingly, in what follows we will examine the use of the Noah-Flood story in *Sib. Or.* 1-2 in order to determine how it functions in the mantic discourse of this oracle, and, where applicable, how its use here contributes to the development of both the figure of the Sibyl and the discourse characteristic of the oracles ascribed to her name.

The Development of the Noah-Flood Narrative in *Sib. Or.* 1-2

The basic plot structure of the Flood story in *Sib. Or.* 1-2 is remarkably familiar to anyone well acquainted with the standard version in the Hebrew or Christian Bibles: A time came several generations after the creation of the world when humanity had become so corrupt (1.123-124), that God determined it necessary to judge and destroy humanity and the earth they inhabited (1.131). The only exception to this judgment was found in the form of Noah who, because of his exemplary righteousness, found favour with God (1.125-126), who warned him in advance of this coming destruction

³²⁷ The idea of a five-generation cycle of humans of declining moral quality first appears in Hesiod, *Op.* 105-203.

(1.131), and instructed him to build a wooden vessel to save himself and his family from the soon-coming flood (1.132-136).

The flood did indeed come soon and it destroyed the earth and all humanity in it (1.217-241). Noah and his family, however, were saved because they had followed God's instruction and had taken refuge in the ark (1.210-216). After the waters of the flood had subsided, Noah and his family (along with the animals) emerged from the ark (1.275-282), and, again in response to God's instruction, began the process of repopulating the earth (1.270-272, 283). This initial period that succeeded the flood was described as a golden age (1.284), and was characterized by justice and fair deeds (1.295-296).

As is apparent, the plot of the story of Noah and the Flood in *Sib. Or.* 1-2 follows the basic plot structure of the originary story found in Gen 6-9.³²⁸ Yet despite this similarity in basic plot structure, careful examination of the discourse reveals that the version of the story in the *Sibylline Oracles* is not simply a one-to-one repetition of its counterpart in Genesis, but is rather, a complex interweaving of a number of different traditions, themes, stories, social, cultural, and religious norms and values, as well as ideological underpinnings, preferences, and movement—features that inevitably reveal themselves in terms of the additions, omissions, changes, expansions, and embellishments to the flood story by the writer(s) of *Sib. Or.* 1-2.

Most significant among these are: the divine instructions relating to how Noah should prepare for the flood; the chronicling of Noah's activity as a preacher of repentance; the calling of the animals and Noah's family into the ark; the coming of the

³²⁸ This is most likely the LXX version of Gen 6-9, since this would have been the version used by the Jews of the Diaspora, and eventually by the early Church as well.

water and its effects; the number and order of the sending of the birds; the landing of the ark; the prophecy of a final judgment; and details relating to the post-flood world and events. Presumably, however, these modifications were not simply unwitting changes, but were done in order to contribute to and enhance the rhetorical appeal of the Sibyl's prophecy. Accordingly, we will discuss these modifications briefly (in the order that they occur in the text) before moving on to a discussion of how they contribute to a number of major ideological shifts within the Sibyl's reworked flood narrative.

Divine Instruction on Flood Preparation

In *Sib. Or.* 1.127-136, there seems to be a development in terms of how God instructs Noah to prepare for the flood, and this occurs on at least two different fronts. First, Noah is instructed to preach repentance so that all may be saved (1.128-129). This instruction is absent from Gen 6-9, where there does not seem to be the option of repentance for the flood generation since the earth is too corrupt and must be destroyed (Gen 6:14). *Sibylline Oracles* 1.130-131, on the other hand, seems to indicate that the flood will occur only if people do not repent. The flood is, then, not inevitable, but conditional, which is unlike the Genesis account, where destruction by flood seems to be inevitable (6:14).

Second, Noah is instructed by God to build a "wooden house" in order to save himself and his family from the impending destruction by flood. In order for this instruction to be carried out, God gives Noah the necessary knowledge, insight, and skill in order to build it. Genesis 6:15-17 gives a brief but detailed instruction on the size, design, and materials to be used in the building of the ark. Further details of this

building are provided in some Second Temple texts, such as *1 En.* 67:2; but the Genesis instruction and any further details are noticeably absent from *Sib. Or.* 1. Perhaps this is because the Genesis version is interested in establishing a relationship between the ark and the Jerusalem Temple,³²⁹ whereas in *Sib. Or.* 1, no such interest exists.

Noah's Activity as a Preacher of Repentance

Sibylline Oracles 1.147-198 chronicles Noah's activity as a preacher of repentance in direct response to the divine mandate given in 1.128-129. As we have already mentioned, this is a detail that does not appear in Gen 6-9. In fact, Noah does not even speak in Genesis, but only God and the narrator. While it is true that the tradition of Noah as a preacher appears also in several Second Temple period texts,³³⁰ in comparison to the tradition found here in *Sib. Or.* 1-2, Noah's preaching in these texts is relatively insignificant. In fact, Noah's preaching in *Sib. Or.* 1-2 is the single, most prominent example of this tradition in the Second Temple period.

³²⁹ See, for example, Holloway, "What Ship Goes There," who argues that the arks of both the Gilgamesh Epic and the Genesis FN are both reflective of their respective temple ideologies: "the ark in *Gilgamesh* was conceptualized along the lines of a ziggurat, while that in Genesis was patterned on an idealized Solomonic temple. Both ark narratives are best seen as products of ancient Near Eastern temple ideology, expressing both general and acculturated ideals of design, function and mythology" (329).

³³⁰ In Josephus' *Ant.* 1.3.1, for example, Noah preaches to his countrymen on his own initiative. He was uneasy with what they did, and displeased with their conduct, and so he undertook to persuade them to change "their dispositions and their acts for the better." However, since they did not assent to his argument, he became fearful for his life, and moved with his family out of the land. Similarly, in 2 Peter 2:5, Noah is described as a "preacher of righteousness." And in *Apoc. Paul* 50, Noah explains to the apostle that he implored his generation saying, "Repent, for a flood of water will come upon you"—a message that ultimately met with ridicule. Other traditions in which Noah speaks include *1 En.* 106.1-3, where, in a description of his miraculous birth, Noah is said, while still in the hands of the midwife, to have spoken to the Lord with righteousness; and in the Qur'an, where he is said to have carried on dialogues with both the flood generation who mocked him (11.26-44) and with Allah himself (11.46-49).

Such a large section within *Sib. Or.* 1-2 devoted to Noah preaching repentance is also significant since his preaching emphasizes God's mercy and grace, while at the same time emphasizing the hardness, corruption, and hopelessness of humanity. This juxtaposition serves to soften the harshness of God's wanting to judge the earth and thus to legitimize his decision to flood it.

Beyond this, and perhaps more significantly, it can be said that the representative sermon that Noah preaches in 1.147-198³³¹ is in fact an embodiment of revolutionist rhetoric. In particular, Noah addresses the corruption of his audience and the rest of the world (of which his audience is typical) and pleads for them to repent. However, since they refuse to repent (1.171-172), and thus place their generation beyond the hope of divine forgiveness, it will be necessary for God to destroy the earth and humanity in order to eliminate this corruption.

Following this destruction, Noah preaches that there will be a second age that will emerge, which presumably (that is, implicitly) would be free of the corruption characteristic of Noah's generation (i.e. that Noah had described earlier in his preaching). In this, the revolutionist rhetoric of Noah is typical of the revolutionist rhetoric of the Sibyl in *Sib. Or.* 2. Just as Noah was divinely inspired to proclaim the impending judgment and destruction of the world by flood (i.e. of the first world age), so too is his daughter-in-law, the Sibyl, divinely inspired to proclaim the final (future) judgment and destruction of the world (i.e. of the second world age), and the new age that will emerge from the ashes of the preceding one.

³³¹ As the Sibyl indicates in 1.149, these words were not the actual words of one of his sermons, but are representative of the style and content of his preaching generally.

The Boarding of the Ark

The Genesis FN devotes much effort to the details relating to the boarding of the animals onto the ark. In 7:2-3, Noah is instructed to take into the ark seven pairs of each type of clean animal, but only one pair of each type of unclean animal, in addition to seven pairs of each type of bird. In 7:8-9, Noah takes only one pair of each type of animal and bird onto the ark, regardless of whether they were clean or unclean. And in 7:14-16, two of each type of animal is said to have entered the ark, although in this case, no distinction is made as to whether they were clean or unclean.³³²

The Sibyl, on the other hand, does not worry about the numbering and pairing up of the animals—how many there are of each, the priestly interest in whether or not they are clean or unclean—nor is she worried about reconciling the related discrepancies of Gen 7:1-16. Rather, she is simply interested in the saving event itself, and Noah's obedience to God's instruction (*Sib. Or.* 1:200-216).

The Coming of the Water and Its Effects

Sibylline Oracles 1.217-241 describes the event of the flood itself. In the Genesis flood narrative, the majority of the description of the coming of the floodwaters and their far-reaching effects occurs in 7:11 and between 7:17-23. Within this description, the fountains of the abyss (ἄβύσσος) and the cataracts (κατάρακτοι) of heaven are said to have opened (Gen 7:11). As a direct result, water greatly abounds and bears up the ark and covers the mountains (7:17-20). Consequently, every living thing that moved upon the earth dies (7:21-23). Though these elements are repeated several times

³³² As it stands, these details are convoluted and confused, and so naturally a number of ancient writers sought to reconcile or to minimize these discrepancies (e.g. Josephus, *Ant.* 1.3.2).

during the Genesis story, beyond the repetition of these general details there is little in the way of a descriptive expansion of them. Rather, the specific details of the flood event are left to the reader's imagination.

In contrast, the writer of the Jewish strata of *Sib. Or.* 1 (like so many other Second Temple writers) took full advantage of the text's silence and added her own descriptive details to the Genesis account.³³³ Certainly the Sibyl does maintain the basic framework of Genesis and includes the details of the opening of the cataracts (κατάρακτοι) of heaven (1.222) and the abyss (ἄβύσσος) (1.223) (although in reverse order),³³⁴ as well as the bearing up of the ark (1.225); in this way she shows her dependence on the LXX version of Genesis; however, she clearly moves beyond these general details and includes some of her own material that helps to add shape and texture and mood and feeling to this cataclysmic event. In particular we see: a) an intensification of the description of the rains that accompanied the flood to include a complete covering of all solar luminaries (that hid the sun, moon, and stars), as well as terribly loud thunder, the gathering of storm winds, and the sending out of hurricanes (1.217-220); b) a description of the actual voyage of the ark, which, unlike the Genesis account, gives the impression of a vessel which could hardly be controlled and which only barely survived the great tempest:

The wondrous house itself swam on the flood.
Battered by many raging waves and swimming
under the impact of the winds, it surged terribly.
The keel cut immense foam
As the rushing waters were moved (1.225-229),³³⁵

³³³ *1 En.* 66, for example, says that God put the "angels of punishment" in charge of the flood waters, but this idea is beyond the liberties taken by the Sibyl.

³³⁴ This idea of the flood originating from above and below is also maintained in several Second Temple apocalyptic texts—most notably *1 En.* 54.7-10 and *2 En.* 70.8.

³³⁵ Αὐτὸς δ' ἐπενήχετο ὄμβρω
οἶκος θεσπέσιος· πολλοῖσι δὲ κύμασι λάβροισ

and c) a description of the after-effects of the flood (that is, the death and destruction) that Noah saw when he opened the window of the ark, in addition to the intense emotional effects the whole experience had on the patriarch:

Beholding the great mass of limitless waters,
 Noah was struck with terror to see with his eyes
 only death on all sides, and he quivered greatly at heart.
 And then the air drew back a little, since it had labored many days
 Drenching the whole world, and showed then the great vault
 of heaven at evening, as it were bloodied, greenish-yellow,
 and the brightly gleaming disk hard-pressed. Noah barely maintained his
 courage (1.235-241).³³⁶

Somewhat ironically, many of the details that were intensified by the Sibyl were minimized by a number of other Second Temple period writers in their renditions of the flood story. *Jubilees* 5.24-26, for example, mentions little more than the duration of the flood and the depth of the flood waters; *L.A.B.* 3 mentions only the duration of the flood. Similarly, Josephus *Ant.* 1.3.5 mentions only the duration of the flood and the depth of the flood waters, but he does not go beyond Genesis in detailing any of the specifics relating to the intensity, mood, effects, or emotions surrounding the event of the flood itself.

On its own, the event of the flood itself (as it is recounted in Genesis) could be regarded as an event of apocalyptic proportions, but the Sibyl goes beyond this and adds several details that further develop this (the darkening of luminaries, the

ῥηγνύμενος καὶ νηχόμενος ἀνέμων ὑπὸ ῥίπῃς
 ὄρνυτο δειμαλέως· ἔτεμνεν μυρίον ἀφρόν
 στείρη κινυμένων ὑδάτων κελαρυζομενάων.
³³⁶ καὶ λεύσας ὑδάτων ἀπειρεσίων πολὺ πλῆθος
 πάντοσε Νῶε ἔμορ ἐν ὀφθαλμοῖσιν ὁρᾶσθαι,
 δεῖμ' ἔχε καὶ κραδίην πάλLEN μέγα. Καὶ τότε δ' ἀήρ
 βαῖον στειλόμενος, ἔτει κάμεν ἡμασι πολλοῖς
 κόσμον ὅλον δεύων, τότε δείελον οἶά τε χλωρόν
 αἵματόεντα πόλον μέγαν τε πυραυγέα δίσκον
 δείξεν κεκμηκότα· μόλις δ' ἔσκεν Νῶε θάρσος.

emotions, terror and fear of the human participants, rampant death and destruction, and the bloodied sky are elements which can all be found in other contemporary apocalyptic texts)—thus intensifying the typology between the flood and the events of the last days described in book 2.

This development of the sensory-aesthetic texture of the flood event by the Sibyl, in contrast to the minimum of details presented in Genesis and other Second Temple texts, not only contributes to and intensifies the pathetic appeal of the story—bringing the reader a little closer to the horror of the ordeal, and the resulting devastation and trauma—but also adds apocalyptic flavour to the story. This apocalyptic intensification no doubt serves to strengthen the comparison with the flood of fire in the tenth generation.

The Sending of the Birds

In Gen 8, Noah is said to have initially sent a raven, followed by the sending out of a dove three times. *Sib. Or.* 1.242-260, on the other hand, reverses the order, and has the sending of a dove twice, followed by the sending of the raven. In this, the Sibyl is closer to the Babylonian flood narratives of Berossus and Gilgamesh, and as such is unique among the Jewish and Christian texts of the Second Temple period, many of which do not even mention the incident of the sending out of the birds. Those who do seem to follow the Judeo-Christian tradition associated with the Genesis text. None, however, incorporate elements from the Babylonian traditions (to which Genesis was largely a reaction). The significance of the inclusion of this Babylonian element is difficult to determine, but presumably it was one of the details included to help broaden

the appeal of the Sibyl's words beyond Judeo-Christian parameters by infusing it with details not unfamiliar to those of the Greco-Roman world and beyond.

The Landing of the Ark

In 1.261-267, the ark is said, consistent with general Judeo-Christian tradition, to land on Mount Ararat. Though the location of Mount Ararat is not mentioned in the Genesis flood story, the usual placing of Ararat is in Armenia (cf. Josephus *Ant.* 1.3.5). The writer of 2 *En.* 73.1 locates Ararat "between Assyria and Armenia, in the land of Arabia, beside the ocean." Somewhat uniquely, however, the Sibyl locates the landing of the ark on the mainland of Phrygia, a detail that is also mentioned by the Christian writer of *Sib. Or.* 7.

The Prophecy of a Final Judgment

In 1.272-273, the instruction to have dominion over creation (Gen 9:1-7) is replaced with the command to deal "justly with one another," and with the prophecy of a "final judgment for all." This suggestion of a final judgment does not appear in Genesis, but is included in the *Sibylline Oracles* since the Sibyl is prophesying past, present, and future (1.1-4). This revelation of a future judgment at this point would seem to indicate that the flood is typical of the judgment to come (i.e. the flood of fire).

Several Second Temple apocalyptic texts also include a similar prediction following the flood: in *L.A.E.* 49.3, the archangel Michael says to Adam and Eve after the fall, "Because of your collusion, our Lord will bring over your race the wrath of his judgment, first by water and then by fire; by these two the Lord will judge the whole human race"; in 2 *En.* 70.10, Methusalam is told by God that "from [Noah's] seed I will

raise up another world, and his seed will exist forever, until the second destruction when once again mankind will have committed sin in front of my face.” Similarly, the Sibyl moves beyond the original Genesis FN by infusing it with the apocalyptic expectation prevalent among the Second Temple writers.

The Post-Flood World

In 1.283-286, a new generation of life dawns after the flood that is referred to as “golden.” The allusion here is to Hesiod,³³⁷ who describes a “golden” race of mortal humans that “lived with happy hearts, untouched by work or sorrow...” Now the Sibyl does not rigidly follow Hesiod in her understanding of what this golden age embodied (since the Sibyl’s golden age does involve labour); however, her use of the phrase is certainly adequate to distinguish the character of the post-flood generation in her story from the post-flood generation of the Genesis account, where humanity can be seen to quickly return to its old corrupt and evil ways—as typified by Noah’s drunkenness, the dishonouring of Noah by his son Ham, and the subsequent cursing of Canaan (Gen 9:18-27).

Instead the Sibyl in 1.293-296 introduces “three great-spirited kings” who will rule righteously and justly for many years during the golden age. Though they are not mentioned by name, presumably these are Shem, Ham, and Japheth.³³⁸ If this identification is correct, then the Sibyl has completely put aside Gen 9:18-27, since it obviously does not serve her rhetorical purpose. In this she is not unlike many other

³³⁷ Hesiod, *Op.* 105-119.

³³⁸ Collins, “The Sibylline Oracles,” 1:341 n. x.

Second Temple writers (the most notable exceptions here being *Jubilees* and Josephus).

The Post-Flood Covenant

One final detail that differs significantly from Gen 6-9 concerns God's post-flood covenant to never again destroy the earth by flood and the symbolic hanging of God's bow in the clouds. Despite their use by many other contemporary writers,³³⁹ these priestly details of the sweet smelling offering and the covenant of the hanging of the bow in the clouds are absent from the Sibyl's flood story proper. Their existence does, however, seem to be presumed, as they eventually come into play during the seventh generation (1.307-323). This seventh generation is comparable to the second generation in the first cycle of five generations, as the character and moral quality of humans here also begins to deteriorate, and in fact, they even begin to plot to fight against heaven. They too are said to be in danger of being destroyed by raging waters, but God is said to have prevented it on account of a promise not to move (again) by flood against evil-spirited men. Though the covenant is not mentioned in the Sibyl's version of the flood story, it is mentioned here. Perhaps it is this covenant against another flood of water that necessitates a flood of fire in the last days to deal with human corruption.

³³⁹ These details are maintained by other Second Temple writers: in *1 En.* 55.1-2, God not only puts a sign in the heavens (i.e. his bow), but swears on his great name that he will never again destroy the world by flood. In *Jub.* 6.4, the Lord smelled the "sweet aroma" of Noah's post-flood sacrifice, and "made a covenant with him so that there might not be floodwaters which would destroy the earth." Pseudo-Philo 3.9-12 follows Genesis closely in including God's covenant to never again destroy the world by flood, and the memorial of God's hanging of his bow in the clouds, but adds that they will instead be judged "by famine or by the sword or by fire or by death."

Major Shifts within the Sibyl's Reworked Flood Narrative

The cumulative effect of this reconfiguration through addition, omission, expansion and embellishment of details within the Sibyl's reworked flood narrative plays itself out in terms of a number of significant developments with respect to the text's narrational and sensory-aesthetic textures, the ethos of the characters within the text (including the Sibyl), and an important shift in the function of temporal references within the narrative.

The Development of Speech and Narration (Narrational Texture)

A significant development that occurs between the FN of Gen 6-9 and that of *Sib. Or.* 1-2 lies in the voices that speak within the text. In the Genesis FN, the only character given a speaking role is God. Neither Noah, his sons, nor the flood generation is given any sort of speaking part during the flood story proper, and it is not until the episode of Noah's drunkenness that we finally find a human voice in the text.

In Genesis 6-9, God speaks a total of seven times, addressing three different beings or groups. On two occasions God speaks to himself: in 6:8, where God speaks of his decision to "blot out" humanity; and in 8:21-22, where God speaks of his decision never to smite the earth by flood again because of humankind. On three occasions God speaks only to Noah: in 6:14-22, where God reveals to Noah his plan to destroy the earth on account of human iniquity, and gives him instruction on how to build the ark, and how to load it with family and animals; in 7:14, God affirms Noah's righteousness, instructs him on clean and unclean animals, and provides some details on the flood chronology; and in 8:15-17, where God instructs Noah to exit the ark with his family, and tells them to increase and multiply. And on two occasions, God addresses Noah and his sons: in 9:1-7, where God blesses them, instils them with the

prerogative to increase and multiply and to have dominion over the earth, and institutes capital punishment; and in 9:8-17, where God establishes his covenant with them and promises never again to destroy the earth by flood.

In the flood story of *Sib. Or. 1*, on the other hand, there are at least four voices that speak within the text: God, Noah, Noah's generation, and the Sibyl. Unlike Gen 6-9 where God speaks a total of seven times, God speaks only three times in this text. On the first occasion (1.127-145), God informs Noah of his plan to destroy the human race through a great flood of water (1.131). Accordingly, God instructs Noah to build "an imperishable wooden house" (1.132-136) and to preach repentance to all people (1.128-129)—instruction which Noah faithfully carries out. On the second occasion (1.200-209), God announces to Noah that the time of the flood is now at hand (1.201-204), and accordingly instructs Noah to call his family and the animals onto the ark—which Noah again is faithful in carrying out. On the third occasion (1.267-274), God affirms Noah for his righteousness and trustworthiness that have allowed him to be preserved (1.269). Now that the waters have subsided, God instructs Noah to exit the ark with his family, and from there to increase and multiply and fill the earth, and to deal justly with one another (a command which, if we can identify the three great-spirited kings of 1.293 with Noah's three sons,³⁴⁰ was also carried out).

A further detail relating to the development of speech within *Sib. Or. 1* concerns the location from which God speaks. In Genesis, when God speaks to Noah, there is no indication as to this location. In *Sib. Or. 1*, however, the location is always indicated. In 1.127, God speaks to Noah from heaven; in 1.200, God appears on earth, cries out, and speaks to Noah; and, in 1.267-268, God cries out from heaven to

³⁴⁰ Collins, "The Sibylline Oracles," 1:341, n. x.

Noah. Moreover, it is noteworthy that on these three occasions, God speaks only to Noah. There are other characters in the text (Noah's family, Noah's contemporaries), but God does not address them directly, only addressing and instructing them through Noah. Perhaps this is because of Noah's unparalleled righteousness, or because he is deemed by God to be a most trustworthy man (1.126, 269)—that is, he is trustworthy to deliver the message that God gives him to relay to his generation. In this he parallels the Sibyl, who does not speak on her own initiative, but only says what God bids her to say.

Unlike the Genesis FN, however, where he does not speak at all, Noah is given two speaking parts in *Sib. Or.* 1. On the first occasion, he responds to God's instruction and preaches repentance to his generation (1.150-170, 173-198). He begins by summarizing the corrupt state of humanity (1.150-156), then appeals to them to seek God's grace (1.157-161), since the wrath of God will come upon them if they do not repent (1.162-170). Noah does not, however, enter into conversation with God. He does not respond to God verbally, but only by carrying out God's instruction. In this, *Sib. Or.* 1 is consistent with Genesis, where Noah also never responds verbally to God, but only by non-verbal obedience to God's instruction.

At this point Noah's preaching is interrupted by the short response of Noah's generation (the third voice) to his preaching, who sneer at him and call him "demented, a man gone mad" (1.171-172). In *Apoc. Paul* 50, Noah is also mocked and ridiculed by his generation, who say to him, "This time is rather for those who can play and would sin as they please, for him to whom it is possible to commit fornication not a little; for God does not see and does not know what is done by us all, and a flood of water will certainly not come on this world."

Following this interruption, Noah returns to his chronicling of the human condition with another extensive listing of moral failures (1.173-198). At this point, however, instead of trying to woo them to repentance, he reveals to them the signs that will precede the earth's destruction by flood, his own grief about their impending doom, and the inauguration of a new age that will follow the flood. On the second occasion on which Noah speaks, albeit in an example of implied, not cited speech, we are told by the Sibyl that Noah responds to God's instruction and calls his family onto the ark (1.210-212).

In addition to the voices of God, Noah, and Noah's generation, there is a fourth voice in the text—the voice of the Sibyl, who, in this case, functions as both narrative voice and narrator. This voice of the Sibyl fills in the context and details that surround the voices of the other three. The Sibyl appears to narrate omnisciently, knowing the thoughts and emotions of the story's participants (particularly Noah). Of course, this omniscience should not be surprising when we consider the Sibyl's opening lines that she is prophesying past, present, and future (1.1-4).

The inclusion of these additional voices in *Sib. Or.* 1 is significant. God does not simply destroy the earth and its inhabitants without warning but, through the preaching of Noah, gives them both ample warning of the impending judgment and gives them opportunity to repent. Further, by including their response to the preaching of Noah, the Sibyl places the weight of the destruction of Noah's generation on their own shoulders—they were given opportunity to change, but did not, and so are accountable for the judgment they received.

Thus the Sibyl is able to establish the following paradigm between speakers and listeners within the text: God speaks to Noah; Noah listens to and is obedient to

the words of God and is saved; Noah's family listens to and is obedient to Noah's words, and is saved; Noah's generation does not listen to and is not obedient to Noah's words and is not saved. This in turn sets up the parallel to the Sibyl and the Sibyl's listeners: God speaks to the Sibyl; those who listen to and are obedient to the divinely inspired words of the Sibyl will be saved; those who are not obedient to, or who ignore, the words of the Sibyl will be destroyed. The implicit argument established by the interaction between speakers and listeners in the Sibyl's flood story is clear: only obedience to the divinely inspired words of God's authorized spokesperson will assure one of (future) salvation.

The Development of Characters' Emotions (Sensory-Aesthetic Texture)

One of the most notable developments in character can be seen in terms of the emotions expressed by the characters in the story, and in particular, those demonstrated by both God and Noah. In Gen 6-9, the primary expressions of emotion are attributed to God. In Gen 6:8, for example, God expresses grief that he made humanity. In 6:10, God is described as being well-pleased with Noah. In 8:21, the reader gets the impression that God was also pleased with the smell of Noah's burnt offering. Significantly, these are all emotion-fused actions as well.

On the other hand, Noah appears to be relatively unmoved by the whole flood ordeal and shows nothing in the way of fear or grief. The only exception here might be his cursing of his grandson Canaan (9:26) after the exposure of his nakedness, which certainly gives the impression of anger, but is still limited to self-expressive action. There are, however, repetitive narrative assertions concerning Noah's purposeful

obedience. One is thus left with the impression of a primarily purposeful Noah, whose inner actions remain unknown to the reader.

When we consider the emotional displays of these two characters in *Sib. Or. 1*, however, we find that a remarkable shift takes place. In 1.147, for example, an “immeasurable fear” is said to seize Noah after God speaks to him. In 1.190-191, Noah says that he will lament and weep for the flood generation. At the sight of the destruction caused by the flood, Noah is struck with terror (1.236), quivered greatly at heart (1.237), and barely maintained his courage (1.241). In 1.250-253, courage and joy seize Noah and his family at the return of the dove. And in 1.275, Noah takes courage to exit the ark.³⁴¹

In other words, a major shift occurs between Genesis and *Sib. Or. 1* in terms of the sensory-aesthetic texture of the FN: in Genesis it is God who demonstrates emotion; in *Sib. Or. 1*, it is Noah. God demonstrates no emotion here, with the exception of perhaps an implied disappointment with humanity, but even this might be difficult to argue, since 1.120-124 seem to suggest that God made Noah’s generation morally inferior to the previous four. Interestingly, God is said to demonstrate emotion immediately before our narrative (1.118, wrath/anger) and shortly after (1.316, anger), but remarkably, there is nothing explicit in the Sibyl’s rhetorical reconfiguration of the flood story.

Thus in *Sib. Or. 1* we find a reversal of *ethos*, since it is Noah who grieves for the flood generation, and not God. The lack of grief on God’s part in *Sib. Or. 1* derives from the fact that the destruction caused by the flood is all part of God’s predetermined

³⁴¹ 1 *En.* 65.5 gives another example of an emotional Noah. Here Noah is said to have cried out sorrowfully and with bitter tears at the corrupt state of the world.

plan—a reflection of God’s authoritative *ethos*. In Genesis, on the other hand, the flood seems to be more of an unfortunate after-thought—an attempt to remedy an unexpected, and from divine perspective, tragic, development in the human condition. This lack of control on God’s part fits the pattern of the need for priestly intervention found throughout the Pentateuch; in *Sib. Or.* 1-2 God’s authoritative stance is apocalyptic: he is in control.

The Development of the Characters within the Text (Ethos)

A third aspect where significant character development occurs is in the area of ethos. In particular, significant developments in the area of ethos can be seen within each of the characters referred to in the discourse—namely, God, Noah’s generation, Noah, Noah’s sons, and the Sibyl.

Divine Ethos

The development of divine ethos occurs in a number of ways throughout the Sibyl’s flood story. Significant here is the omission of certain Genesis details such as God’s repentance for making humankind (6:7) and his related emotional grief (6:8)—details which are already softened somewhat in the LXX version of Genesis. The elimination of these details seems to have at its heart the removal of any hint of divine vulnerability in terms of emotions, foreknowledge, power, or control. The God portrayed in *Sib. Or.* 1 is instead one not surprised by the unfortunate decay of human morality and religiosity, but in some sense can actually be seen to have created it so (cf. 1.120-124). The elimination of these aspects of divine vulnerability would certainly be important in

the writer's attempt to establish the supremacy of the Judeo-Christian God among the host of Greco-Roman deities prevalent within the Sibyl's environment.

A second way is the emphasis given to divine location in the text, and in particular, the location of God in relation to humanity. Unlike Genesis, where the narrator is silent as to the location of God in relation to Noah, Noah's generation, and even the earth, the writer of *Sib. Or.* 1 takes great pains to emphasize God's heavenly location. In 1.127 and 1.267-268, for example, God is said to have spoken from heaven; in 1.158, God is said to inhabit the vault of heaven; in 1:165, Noah proclaims to his generation that "the wrath of the great God will come upon you from heaven"; in 1.179 and 1.200, God is described by the Sibyl as the Most High; in 1.216, he is described as "the heavenly God"; and in 1.275, God's voice is described as the heavenly voice. The divine location underscores the authority *topos* in apocalyptic rhetoric: God is not simply a local or tribal deity, but is a God who positions himself above all gods, worldly governments, and human activities.

Furthermore, God is static and immobile. In contrast, the movement of the earthly figures and characters in the text, however, is fairly similar to the Genesis story: the earth, or more particularly, the land, is fixed; the water rises from below the land to above the land, and then returns to below the land again; the ark moves up and down with the water, and allows for protection from the waters above and below; Noah and his family enter the ark, and thus also move up and down with the rising and receding waters, and receive protection from the torrential rains. The result of this movement up and down with the waters is salvation; humanity chooses to remain on the land and thus remain stationary as the waters rise above the land. The result of remaining stationary, is of course, death; the waters recede, and the ark, as well as Noah and his

family, move accordingly, and are returned to the earth to inaugurate a new beginning. In short, the result of the rising waters is judgment and destruction of human corruption, whereas the result of the receding waters is the beginning of a new golden age. In contrast, there is no change or movement in God.

A third way is the divine instruction to Noah to preach repentance to his generation (1.128-129). In Genesis, it is ambiguous whether Noah's generation had a clear opportunity to repent of their corrupt and evil ways before they were destroyed by the catastrophic flood, thus leaving open the suggestion that God may have acted unjustly, since, if he had given them fair warning, some or all of them might have changed their ungodly ways. By adding this overt detail of God's instruction to Noah to preach repentance, the Sibyl clears up any ambiguity and in so doing enhances God's *ethos* by giving legitimacy to God's decision to judge humanity through the destruction of the flood: Noah's generation had knowledge of the impending flood and had been given the opportunity to change; however, since they rejected this opportunity, they bear the responsibility for their own fate.

Fourth, there is the favourable sanctioning of the divine character by Noah. In Noah's preaching to his generation God is continually described as all-seeing, all-knowing, immortal, awesome, exceedingly great, fearless, heavenly, creator, imperishable, good, gracious, saviour, most high, and the like (1.150-198). This enhancement of the divine *ethos* can also be seen in the Sibyl's inclusion of the riddle on the name of God—where God is described as being robed with heaven, draped around with the sea, and as having the entire chorus of stars revolve around him (1.137-146).

In summary, the portrayal of God in the flood story of the Sibyl establishes him as much more than a localized or tribal deity swayed by the priestly action of the Jews (and eventually, Christians), but as an apocalyptic universal deity who reigns above all others. He is not a God who is subject to surprise and emotional grief, but one who is in control of and has foreknowledge of the events transpiring in his created world. Moreover, he is not a God who punishes unjustly, but one who gives opportunity for repentance and change (that is, he is one who is merciful), even if he knows it will not happen.

The Ethos of Noah's Generation

In the Sibyl's ten-fold scheme of history, Noah's generation is equated with the fifth generation of humans. They are introduced in 1.120-124, where they are described as having deteriorated in character and moral quality far more than the generation of the giants, the second generation, with whom the writer appears to equate the watchers (even though in Gen 6 and *1 Enoch*, the giants are the sons of the watchers).³⁴²

In the original story in Genesis, the ethos of the flood generation is understood to be unfavourably low, although for a somewhat vague and ambiguous reason. In

³⁴² *Sib. Or.* 1.87-103, refers to the second generation of humans as the "Watchers," which would seem to draw an implicit comparison to the fallen sons of God in Gen 6:2-5. The link to Gen 6 here is not explicit in the text itself, but comparison can be seen here between the Sibyl's description of the watchers and the interpretation of the "sons of God" (of Gen 6) in *1 En.* 6-16 (cf. 69, 86-88, etc.). Both, for instance, are described in terms of a listing of skills mastered, and as being bound hand and foot in Tartarus, or the underworld. There are, however, points of difference between the two. In *Sib. Or.* 1, they appear to be a race of humans, whereas in *Enoch*, they are clearly a race of celestial beings (cf. Collins, "The Sibylline Oracles," 1:337 n. f). Also, in the Enochic interpretation of Genesis, the watchers are said to immediately precede the Flood, whereas in *Sib. Or.* 1 there are three intervening generations between the watchers and the Flood. Since there is this three-generation interval, one must wonder whether or not the writer of this section is seeking to magnify the corrupt state of the world immediately preceding the flood.

Gen 6:6, the generation preceding the flood is described generally in terms of wicked actions and evil intent, and 6:12-14 repetitively describes a corrupt earth that is filled with iniquity. In *Sib. Or. 1*, this irreparable ethos is reduced further by the testimony of a number of different voices in the text, which further articulate the extent of their corruption. In 1.123-124, the sins of the flood generation are described by the Sibyl more precisely as insolence, crookedness, and an abominable pouring forth of slander. These are in turn expounded further in Noah's preaching where they are described unreservedly as: faithless, smitten with madness, evil, violent, blood thirsty, ill-tempered, lawless, wretched, evil-hearted, fickle, shameless, untruthful, adulterous, slanderous, irreverent, and cruel (cf. 1.150-156; 174-181). The ethos of Noah's generation is further discredited by divine speech, where they are similarly described as having a "shameless spirit" (1.130), as well as being evil and faithless (1.204). Likewise, the Sibyl, in addition to her initial description of them in 1.120-124, seems to believe that they have no potential for good (1.199). Remarkably, in addition to the testimony of the other voices in the text, the flood generation actually indirectly confirms the assessment of their wickedness by their own speech. Most obvious here is of course their explicit rejection of the divine invitation to repentance (and salvation), and in their explicit naming of Noah's righteousness as madness (1.171-172).

While other Second Temple texts also offer details of the flood generation's corruption,³⁴³ there appears to be no intertextual dependence between these texts and *Sib. Or. 1*. Rather it seems that this type of embellishment was a well accepted

³⁴³ In *4 Ezra* 3.8, for example, every nation is described as having "walked after its own will," as having done "ungodly things," and as having scorned God. In *2 En.* 34 the people of the flood generation are described more graphically as being "idol worshippers and sodomite fornicators," and as being characterized by "every other kind of uncleanness which it is disgusting to report."

strategy among Second Temple period writers who incorporated the flood story into their own rhetorical agendas. As already noted by Lewis, writers of Second Temple Literature embellished the flood story in a manner that was reflective of their own *Sitz im Leben*.³⁴⁴ Accordingly, it can be suggested that the offenses chronicled by Noah (and sanctioned by the Sibyl and by God) are directly reflective of the perceived moral deterioration of the Sibyl's own audience.

The Ethos of Noah

Among the details of Noah's character we have already highlighted are a number that most obviously contribute to the ethos of Noah among the Sibyl's audience. Foremost among these are the testimonies of the different voices in the text about Noah's impeccable character. In *Sib. Or.* 1.125-126 for example, the Sibyl describes Noah's righteousness as exceptional in comparison to the rest of his generation: "Noah alone among all was most upright and true, a most trustworthy man, concerned for noble deeds."³⁴⁵ Although in contrast to the human perception of Noah as demented and mad (1.171-172; cf. *Apoc. Paul* 50), Noah's righteousness is later reiterated by the Sibyl (1.280) and sanctioned by divine speech in 1.269. This description is similar to what we find in Gen 6:10, which describes Noah as just, perfect in his generation, and well-pleasing to God. Beyond this, it can also be said that Noah's ethos is further strengthened by the testimony of his own corrupt generation that was eventually destroyed—even though they mocked Noah and his message and called him mad,

³⁴⁴ Lewis, *A Study of the Interpretation of Noah and the Flood*, 20: "Since the Scripture uses only general terms to describe the degradation of the flood generation, the bill of particulars furnished by any writer is an area in which he will reflect the religious mores of his time."

³⁴⁵ μούνος δ' ἐν πάντεσσι δικαιοτάτος καὶ ἀληθής
ἦν Νῶε, πιστότατος καλοῖς τ' ἔργοις μεμνηώς.

when we consider that they held little credibility themselves (in 1.199 the Sibyl describes them lawless; in 1.130 God describes them shameless), their negative critique of Noah only serves indirectly and implicitly to affirm his credibility. It is through self-expressive speech that Noah's ethos is both challenged and affirmed: the Sibyl suggests Noah's righteousness; shortly thereafter, Noah's generation challenges his credibility; finally, in a later passage, any question or challenge of Noah's credibility is put to rest with divine speech affirming his unique character.³⁴⁶

Two other details related to speech also prove to be important. First, among all of the people on earth during the period immediately preceding the flood, God is said to speak only to Noah. Of all people on earth, Noah is considered by God to be trustworthy enough to be his reliable spokesperson. In this he is paralleled by the Sibyl, who also functions as God's reliable spokesperson to her generation. Second, the inclusion of the detail of Noah's career as a preacher of repentance also serves to strengthen his ethos, since in that capacity (and in light of the fact that God speaks to Noah's generation only through Noah), he becomes God's official spokesperson to the pre-flood world and is the vehicle through which God offers repentance.

Beyond the development of Noah's ethos that occurs via self-expressive action within the text, we also discern rhetorical *ethos* in Noah through depiction of emotion-fused action. As we have already pointed out, the Sibyl's Noah is not simply a parallel

³⁴⁶ Other Second Temple Period texts that offer similar understandings of Noah's righteous character include: 4 *Ezra* 3.11, where there is a direct equation between Noah and "righteousness;" *Jub.* 5.19 which states that Noah was saved from the waters of the flood "because his heart was righteous in all of his ways," and because "he did not transgress anything which was ordained for him;" and 1 *En.* 65.11, where he is recognized as being "pure and kindhearted," and as having a distaste for "the secret things." Along with these, we might also include the story of Noah's miraculous birth, where Noah is depicted as speaking righteousness to the Lord while still in the arms of the midwife (1 *En.* 106.1-3), an event which no doubt suggests a unique and special character.

of the emotionless Noah of Gen 6-9, but is rather one that evidences human emotions in response to the circumstances and experience of the world around him. He experiences immeasurable fear when spoken to by God (1.147); he tells his contemporaries that he will lament and weep when the flood comes upon them (1.190-191); and, when he sees the results of the flood, is struck with terror and quivers greatly at heart (1.236-237).

Finally, it is important to consider the omission of the episode of Noah's drunkenness, his dishonouring by his son Ham, and the resultant cursing of Noah's grandson Canaan (cf. Gen 9:18-27). For the Sibyl, the story of Noah does not end on such a sour note, but instead preserves the impeccable character of Noah and, particularly in this case, details relating to his self-control (particularly apt here is 2.95 which states "Do not damage your mind with wine or drink to excess"—an extension of the more general maxim, "moderation is best, but excess is grievous" (2.142)), and his honour—details of great importance to the Sibyl's audience. By doing so, not only does the Sibyl strengthen the ethos of Noah, but the ethos of Noah's sons as well.

The Ethos of Noah's sons

In the flood story of Genesis, Noah's three sons are identified by name as Shem, Ham, and Japheth (6:9). In the version of the flood story recounted by the Sibyl, however, their names are strangely omitted. The three sons are still present in the text of the story, and function in the same non-descript way during the flood event proper; however, this lack of naming may give one the impression that they are of less importance to the overall development of the flood story. Such an impression is strengthened when we consider that the Sibyl has eliminated in its entirety the episode

of Noah's drunkenness (along with Ham's dishonouring of his father), the only episode in the Genesis story where Shem, Ham, and Japheth serve any major function in terms of plot or character development.

Before we dismiss Noah's sons as being of little importance to the Sibyl's development of the flood story, however, it will be important to consider some details contained in the verses describing the post-flood generation and the type of rule characteristic of it. After the great flood, the Sibyl says that "a new generation of life dawned" (1.283). It is described as "the first golden, excellent one... since the time of the first formed man" (1.284-286). From here, the Sibyl goes on to indicate that during this golden age, "There will be a royal scepter-bearing rule. For three great-spirited kings, most righteous men, will destroy the fates and will rule for a period of many years, administering justice to men. They will be concerned with labor and fair deeds" (1.292-296). Though the identity of these three kings is not made explicit in the text, presumably these kings are Noah's three sons—Shem, Ham, and Japheth,³⁴⁷ since their just rule and their nourishment and repopulation of the earth (1.295-299) would appear to be a direct fulfillment of the charge given to Noah and his sons by God before exiting the ark: "go forth boldly... and fill the whole earth, increasing and multiplying, dealing justly with each other..." (1.270-273).

Accordingly, by identifying the sons of Noah with the three righteous kings, and by removing the episode of Ham dishonouring his father, the Sibyl has restored and strengthened the credibility of Noah's sons—a feature which, as we will see, will be very important for the larger purpose of the Sibyl and the development of her extensive typology between the flood story and her prophecy of the end of the world.

³⁴⁷ Collins, "The Sibylline Oracles," 1:341.

The Ethos of the Sibyl

In 1.287-291, the Sibyl introduces herself into the FN by identifying herself as the wife of one of Noah's three sons.³⁴⁸ In so doing, she establishes the *ethos* for her prophecy. In this, she follows the precedent of the writer of *Sib. Or.* 3.823-827—a feature which is also suggested (although more implicitly) in a number of other Sibylline texts. In *Sib. Or.* 11, for example, the Sibyl begins her forecast of future history shortly after the events of the flood and the tower of Babel. Likewise, in *Sib. Or.* 7, the Sibyl appears to prophesy from a point shortly before the flood.

There appear to be a number of ways in which the use of the Noah-Flood story functions in a significant way toward the development of the figure and character of the Sibyl. In particular, certain elements of the story are used to establish her antiquity. In Greco-Roman tradition, the Sibyl is said to have lived for at least one thousand years—a remarkable lifespan that was granted to her as a result of a deal she made with Apollo.³⁴⁹ In the Jewish-Christian tradition her antiquity is similarly maintained, although without specifically explaining how she received her old age. Presumably it would not have come from Apollo, since the Sibyl claims to be inspired by the Great God. However, since according to biblical tradition, people were said to have originally lived just shy of a thousand years (Noah, for instance, is said to have lived until the age of nine hundred and fifty), her association with Noah could maintain her antiquity, but at

³⁴⁸ The Sibyl does not mention to which of Noah's sons she was married. One might speculate that it could be Shem, since it seems that there was at least some sort of revelatory tradition associated with him (i.e. such as the revelations he allegedly received in the *Treatise of Shem*, and in *Jub.* 10.10-14, where the medicinal secrets that the angels taught Noah were passed down to Shem). However, for the Sibyl's purposes, the identification of her husband seems to be of little importance.

³⁴⁹ Ovid, *Metam.* 14.135-153; Virgil, *Aen.* 6.

the same time, dissociate her from Apollo, which may have been a somewhat repulsive thought for any Jewish or Christian monotheistic writer (*Sib. Or.* 4.4-5).

Similarly, other elements of the story appear to have been used to establish her lineage. In the Jewish oracles, as noted, the Sibyl came to be associated with Noah—and in particular, as a daughter-in-law of Noah (*Sib. Or.* 1-2, 3). Presumably, this was done in order to establish her *ethos* and solidify her righteousness and credibility to the Jewish world, since her ties to Noah would suggest that she came from good “stock,” and was therefore a competent revelatory figure for the Jewish world. In the Christian sections this link to Noah is maintained (i.e. in the Christian redaction of books 1-2 this part of the Jewish strata is retained), although her righteousness is certainly thrown into question at the end of books 2 and 7 by associating her with the sins of greed, promiscuity, and faithlessness—a feature which most likely would have also come to serve in a different time and situation an apologetic purpose (i.e. if the greatly revered Sibyl had need of repentance, how much more so the people who hear or read her words).

Taken together, these features no doubt serve to strengthen her credibility with her audience(s) and, by extension, her *ethos* as a revelatory figure for not only the Greco-Roman world, but the Judeo-Christian world as well. In particular, the incorporation of the Sibyl into the lineage of Noah also serves to anchor her firmly into the Jewish revelatory tradition already associated with Noah and his descendants. As we have already seen, Noah himself was the recipient of a monumental revelation that affected the course of world history—an incident of revelation that was certainly embellished by later writers. Also, if we consider seriously the *Treatise of Shem*, we find revelatory experiences associated with Noah’s son Shem as well. Thus, this

incorporation of a revelatory figure like the Sibyl into the lineage of Noah is in some ways a natural fit when we consider the revelatory tradition associated with Noah and his descendants. Moreover, this incorporation of the Sibyl into the revelatory tradition associated with Noah by its very nature contributes strongly to the shift in the identified source of inspiration behind the production of Sibylline oracles—from Apollo in the Greco-Roman Sibyllines to “the great God” in the Judeo-Christian *Sibylline Oracles*.

In any event, it is interesting to note how the ethos of Noah and the Sibyl are intricately related. On the one hand, the authority of the Sibyl’s testimony about Noah is important for the establishment of Noah’s credibility, and particularly so among a Greco-Roman (non-Judeo-Christian) audience. At the same time, however, it is interesting to point out that it is this same credibility (of Noah) in conjunction with the Sibyl’s incorporation into Noah’s kin that gives the Sibyl credibility among a Judeo-Christian audience. In the context of *Sib. Or.* 1-2, the ethos of the figures of Noah and the Sibyl are inseparably linked. The ethos of each in some way depends on the other.

The Shift in the Function of Temporal References

The flood stories of both Gen 6-9 and *Sib. Or.* 1-2 claim an intense interest in the temporal details of the Flood event, although rather remarkably they go about it in two very different ways. In Gen 6-9, the writer concerns himself primarily with the internal chronological details inherent to the event of the flood itself. Thus he focuses on such precise details as Noah’s age when the flood came (600; Gen 7:6, 11), the date the flood began (27th day of the 2nd month; 7:11), the duration of the flooding (40 days; 7:17; 150 days; 7:24), the day the ark rested on the mountain (27th day of the 7th month; 8:3), the water continuing to decrease until the tenth month (8:4), the mountains

emerging from the water on the first day of the tenth month (8:5), the raven being sent after another forty days (8:6-7), the waiting of seven days between the sending of each dove (8:10-12), the age of Noah (601), the date (1st day of the 1st month) when the water completely subsided (8:13), and the date (27th day of the second month) when the earth had become completely dry (8:14)—presumably the date when Noah also exited the ark.³⁵⁰

The writer of this section of *Sib. Or.* 1, however, makes no attempt to reconcile the complex chronology of Gen 6-8, and, with the exception of 1.281, where the duration of the flood experience is said to be forty-one dawns, does not even hint at establishing any sort of formal timeline or dating of events. In this she differs significantly from certain other Second Temple writers, such as the writer of *Jubilees* and 4Q252, who make extensive efforts to reconcile the chronology of Genesis, since for them the details of the flood are important for establishing the proper calendar, and so are of utmost importance for dates of feasts, festivals, and other priestly issues.

In *Sib. Or.* 1-2, no such priestly issues exist, and as such, they do not factor into the writer's version of the flood. Instead, the writer of *Sib. Or.* 1-2 seems more interested to establish the central place of the flood in the divine scheme of world history, rather than the timing of the details of the flood itself. In particular, with the end of the flood and the beginning of the golden age, time is said to be at its midpoint (1.292). In many respects, this would seem to be a premature midpoint when one considers the biblical tradition and the "histories" of certain Second Temple writers like Josephus; however, in this respect the text is consistent with other apocalyptic writings

³⁵⁰ In this, the writer of Genesis is followed by a number of other Second Temple writers who share a similar interest in the dating and chronology of the flood. Among these are the writers of *Jub.* 5.20-32, 4Q252, 2 *En.* 73.1-9, *L.A.B.* 3, and Josephus *Ant.* 1.3.

which sought to centralize the flood in order to use it as a type of the end of the world. In 1 *En.* 89, for example, the flood is inserted into a similar scheme of world history.

This connection between the flood event and the *topos* of history is not as overtly dominant in the other *Sibylline Oracles*; however, its presence as a critical reference point for a new period in time can certainly be seen with little difficulty: in 3.108-109 it is used as a reference point for the ten generations of articulate men; in 4.49-53 the flood immediately precedes a scheme of four world kingdoms and ten generations; in 7.7-15 the flood serves to divide the first age from the second age; and in 8.139 the “time of the phoenix” is referred to as the fifth period after the flood.

The reason for this shift in emphasis seems to stem largely from the Sibyl's interest in the approaching end of the world and the judgment that will accompany it. She is interested primarily in the imminent end of the world and the impending final judgment, and so she emphasizes the features of the Genesis FN that speak typologically of these soon to come events. Again, it is here that the Sibyl's interests determine how the flood story is rewritten (and in fact how history itself is rewritten and projected).

The Subordination of Priestly Rhetorolect to Apocalyptic Rhetorolect

The net result of the Sibyl's innovations in her reworked Flood narrative would seem to function to create a significant shift away from a priestly to an apocalyptic rhetorolect. For the writer of *Sib. Or.* 1-2, the view of the world that is possible through the priestly rhetorolect is clearly inadequate to address the problem of evil in the contemporary situation. As an alternative understanding of the cosmos and God's involvement within it, an apocalyptic rhetorolect allows for a true dealing with the problem of evil. As such,

the subordination of the priestly details and emphases of the flood narrative to the potential apocalyptic details contribute more usefully to the Sibyl's mantic agenda.³⁵¹

Within a number of so-called apocalyptic texts, there appears to be a blending of both priestly and apocalyptic rhetorolects—notably the Astronomical book and the early chapters of the Book of Watchers from *1 Enoch*—a phenomenon that might lead one to suggest that, to at least some degree, the origins of apocalyptic might lie within priestly circles.³⁵² In terms of ideological texture, it might be said here that an ideological shift can be seen to be taking place within these texts—for these writers, the dominant priestly culture became inadequate to understand and deal with their situation, thus necessitating a move towards an apocalyptic understanding of the world.

In the two Enoch texts mentioned, we find a partial shift from priestly to apocalyptic rhetorolect, and thus a blending of priestly and apocalyptic rhetorolects—the result of which appears to be a subcultural reconfiguration of the dominant priestly culture. What we find in *Sib. Or.* 1-2, on the other hand, is a complete subordination of the priestly rhetorolect within the flood narrative to an overtly mantic articulation of the narrative. Thus, from this brief survey of the reworking of the Genesis FN by the Sibyl, it can be seen that the Sibyl is clearly following the apocalyptic trajectory of the FN's development by both eliminating, where possible, what we have described as the

³⁵¹ Of course, there is a significant degree of progression from the dealing with of corruption in the FN to the mantic rhetoric of *Sib. Or.* 2. In the first case the flood dealt (inadequately) with corruption simply by destroying the earth; apocalyptic rhetorolect, by contrast, proposes a complete reconfiguration (i.e. elimination) of the *topos* of history, which finally allows for the cycle of corruption in the previous generations to come to an end.

³⁵² See, for example, R. G. Hamerton-Kelly, "The Temple and the Origins of Jewish Apocalyptic," *VT* 20 (1970): 1-15, and M. Barker, "Beyond the Veil of the Temple: The High Priestly Origins of the Apocalypses," *SJT* 51 (1998): 1-21.

priestly details of the Genesis FN, and by emphasizing, adding to, and embellishing the potential apocalyptic resources of the FN discussed in chapter five.

One example of this shift is the minimization (or even elimination) of the distinctive priestly emphasis of the Genesis account (and other Second Temple writers—*Jubilees*, etc.) in order to give way to an overtly apocalyptic agenda. More specifically, it can be seen how the majority of the details which would (or, at least could) have been of priestly interest, or could have been exploited for priestly purposes, have been systematically removed: the building of the altar by Noah and the accompanying sacrifice following the flood, dietary prescriptions, the section on capital punishment, the numbering of the animals according to whether or not they were clean or unclean, and the dimensions and specifications of the ark. The post-flood covenant between God and Noah is also removed, although alluded to in the seventh generation (although seemingly it is preserved for some other reason). In the case of the concept of time, there is not so much a removal as a re-articulation. In addition, one also wonders whether or not there is some significance in the reversing of the order of the birds Noah sent from the ark: in Genesis the unclean bird (raven) is followed by the clean bird (dove); in *Sib. Or.* 1-2, the clean bird is followed by the unclean bird.³⁵³

Foremost among the reconfigurations is the use of time which we have just mentioned. This shift in the use of time brings *Sib. Or.* 1-2 in line with other apocalyptic rhetoric, and in particular, with the type of usage it receives in the discourse of those texts commonly referred to as historical apocalypses. That this development in *Sib. Or.* 1-2 may be a result of its usage for apocalyptic purposes seems clear, since the

³⁵³ Many of these priestly elements came to have great importance to the writer of the book of *Jubilees* in his attempt to legitimize and establish certain priestly ideals and practices to his audience, such as the establishment of the origins of the feast of Shebuot (6.17) and the 364 day calendar (6.32-38).

divine guidance of the course of history is imperative to the apocalyptic hope. Since God has determined the course of history (and has periodically judged its corruption), the Sibyl's audience can be reassured that he will continue to guide it and work out a favourable end for those who are obedient to him.

A second example of this shift is the addition of Noah's activity as a preacher of repentance, and in particular the countercultural, revolutionist stance that his rhetoric takes toward his contemporary world, a feature that brings the Sibyl's FN in line with a number of other examples of apocalyptic discourse during the Second Temple period that exhibit similar responses to their respective social worlds. To this end, we also find an intensification of the description of the evil and corruption to which this rhetoric responds, from the generic description of wicked actions and evil intent (Gen 6:6) to the comprehensive listing of moral and spiritual crimes found within Noah's sermon, where his generation is described unreservedly as faithless, smitten with madness, evil, violent, blood thirsty, ill-tempered, lawless, wretched, evil-hearted, fickle, shameless, untruthful, adulterous, slanderous, irreverent, and cruel (cf. 1.150-156; 174-181).

Third, as part of the Sibyl's apocalyptic agenda we also find a development of the story's sensory-aesthetic texture, and particularly as it pertains to the description of the event of the flood itself: the intensification of the description of the destruction with the details of the intensity of the storm, the battering of the ark, the image of the "measureless waters," and the "death" that Noah could see on all sides of the ark; the addition of details that enhance the mood, such as the darkening of the heavenly luminaries and the bloodied sky; and the addition of the emotional reaction of Noah to

the whole ordeal—his quivering at heart, the terror with which he was struck, and the detail of him barely maintaining his courage.

Fourth, we find the inclusion of a prophecy of final judgment (1.274). Thus the flood story suggests a definitive end, of which the flood of Noah is typical—a feature which, as we have seen, is found in a number of examples of apocalyptic discourse from the Second Temple period (*L.A.E.* 49.3; *2 En.* 70.10).

Fifth, the description of the post-flood world as a “golden age” characterized by justice and fair deeds parallels much of the apocalyptic discourse of the Second Temple period. Towards the creation of this golden age we also find the elimination of the details of corruption that immediately followed the Genesis flood—Noah’s drunkenness (Gen 9:21), Ham’s dishonouring of his father (Gen 9:22), the cursing of Canaan (Gen 9:25), and God’s admission that the human heart is still intrinsically wicked (Gen 8:21).

The sixth elaboration is the development of the understanding of God as a universal deity over and above all other deities, one who oversees and guides the historical process. To this end, we find the removal of the personal name of God (YHWH) in favour of more general divine titles which suggest a universal, rather than a national deity (immortal God [1.121], heavenly creator [1.158], imperishable God [1.158], the great God [1.165], the heavenly God [1.216], and other similar titles and descriptions); the emphasis on God’s location above all earthly figures and activity (and in particular his description as the most high God [1.179] who oversees everything [1.152]); and the removal of the various aspects of God’s vulnerability (such as his apparent surprise and emotional grief over the deterioration of human moral character, as well as God’s own admission that the divine plan to destroy human wickedness was

unsuccessful). In this way, in the FN of *Sib. Or.* 1 God is depicted as one who does not make mistakes, but has everything well planned out. Beyond this, we also find the development of God's just character—he does not send the judgment of the flood unannounced (as in Genesis), but through Noah gives ample warning, as well as an opportunity for repentance so that the flood might be averted were humanity to respond.

The Place of the Noah-Flood Narrative in the Argument of *Sib. Or.* 1-2

So far, we have sought to explore some of the Sibyl's more significant modifications of the Genesis FN—namely, the omissions, additions, embellishments, and other changes that can be seen in terms of the development of the details of the flood story *per se*, as well as the development of the characters within the flood story and the internal emphases of the different writers in their rendition of the flood narrative. Nevertheless, the Sibyl's modified flood narrative does not exist independently or for its own sake, but was created to be incorporated into a larger body of material (i.e. *Sib. Or.* 1-2). In order to contribute to the rhetorical end of the book as a whole, we might therefore reasonably suggest that the modifications of the Genesis FN were incorporated for this same rhetorical purpose.

That larger rhetorical purpose of the Sibyl's oracle appears to be the setting forth of a prophecy outlining the catastrophic events of the end, and the accompanying exhortation for people to adjust their beliefs and lifestyles accordingly, so as to be judged favourably during this impending final judgment. More specifically, these events will be the most horrible that the world has ever seen—including natural disasters, such as raging earthquakes (2.6), famines, pestilence, and thunderbolts

(2.23), permutations of nature, such as blood precipitation from heaven (2.20), wars and bloodshed, times of lamentations and tears, and even the confusion of holy, chosen, and faithful people (2.168-169)—all culminating with the destruction of the earth by fire (2.196-213). Following these events, there will be a final judgment where the righteous³⁵⁴ will be separated from the wicked.³⁵⁵ Those deemed “wicked” will be subject to eternal punishment (2.254-255), while those judged to be righteous will be lifted “through the blazing river” (2.315), and will be brought “to light and to life without care” (2.316). They will no longer worry about or have to endure the earth’s corrupt and unjust social structures and systems, but will instead live in a world that is envisioned to “belong equally to all, undivided by walls or fences... Lives will be in common and wealth will have no division. For there will be no poor man there, no rich, no tyrant, no slave. Further, no one will be great or small anymore. No kings, no leaders. All will be on par together” (2.319-324).³⁵⁶

In the original Jewish strata of the text, the description of certain wicked actions and their punishment, in addition to certain righteous acts and their rewards, forms an implicit argument for the Sibyl’s audience to adopt a certain form of behaviour and belief. In the Christian redaction, this appeal is even further explicated in the Sibyl’s presentation of the great contest for entry into heaven (2.39-153), as well as the

³⁵⁴ Namely, those who are concerned with justice and noble deeds, piety and most righteous thoughts (2.313-314).

³⁵⁵ *Sib. Or.* 2.254-283 gives a comprehensive listing of the types of people who might be considered wicked: the impious, murderers, thieves, vandals, adulterers, lawless and violent ones, idol worshippers, the faithless, blasphemers, the shameless, the unjust, the deceitful, the arrogant, those who mistreat orphans and widows, those who ill-treat their parents, the promiscuous, those who have had abortions, and those involved with sorcery.

³⁵⁶ γαῖα δ’ ἴση πάντων οὐ τείχεσιν οὐ περιφραγμοῖς διαμεριζομένη...
κοινοί τε βίοι καὶ πλοῦτος ἄμοιρος.
οὐ γὰρ πτωχὸς ἐκεῖ, οὐ πλούσιος, οὐδὲ τύραννος,
οὐ δούλος, οὐδ’ αὖ μέγας, οὐ μικρός τις ἔτ’ ἔσται,
οὐ βασιλεῖς, οὐχ ἡγεμόνες· κοινῇ δ’ ἅμα πάντες.

contest's moral guidelines set out primarily by the Sibyl's inclusion of a large excerpt from Pseudo-Phocylides (2.56-148).

Considering this rhetorical argument, the Sibyl's modified flood story can thus be seen to contribute to this prophecy of the events of the end and the accompanying persuasive appeal with which it is infused. In fact, the Sibyl gives the flood story a central role within the matrix of this oracle, and there are a number of reasons that make this selection understandable. In particular, this can be seen when we compare the similarities between the topological fabric of the Sibyl's oracle and the Gen flood story. Thus the Sibyl incorporates (by and large) the major rhetorical *topoi* inherent to mantic discourse described in chapters 3 and 4.

In an earlier chapter, we suggested that there were a number of major rhetorical *topoi* which can generally be said to characterize *Sib. Or.* 1-2, and by extension the entire Judeo-Christian Sibylline corpus as a whole (or, at the very least, the majority of the oracles within it). Specifically, we listed these as the *topoi* of divine communication, authority, history, corruption, and catastrophe. And these can certainly be seen to be characteristic of *Sib. Or.* 1-2.³⁵⁷

Likewise, in chapter five, we suggested that these same major rhetorical *topoi* can also be seen to be at work in the Genesis flood story: since the world was entirely corrupt and evil, God, in his authority, determines that it is necessary to judge the world and destroy it through a great catastrophe (flood). This plan was revealed to Noah, who heeded divine advice to take the proper course of action to save himself and his family from the great flood, which, in its various stages, covered the earth for an entire year.

³⁵⁷ See, for example, the discussion of these *topoi* in chapter 3.

Thus there is a relative correspondence between major *topoi* in the argument of the Sibyl's oracle and the potential apocalyptic *topoi* inherent to the Genesis FN. However, since the details of the flood story do not always offer a one-to-one correspondence of emphases of the Sibyl, and given its priestly origins, the Sibyl modifies and tweaks these details in her own rendition of the flood story (either by incorporating her own material, or by incorporating elements developed by others) in order to have them better correspond with the articulation of major *topoi* in the other sections of *Sib. Or.* 1-2, and by so doing, to enhance the effectiveness of the argument.

First is the Sibyl's addition of the *topos* of divine communication. In particular, this *topos* comes about with the incorporation of the detail of Noah's activity as a preacher of repentance and his motivation to do so. Here Noah, like the Sibyl, does not preach on his own initiative but speaks only when prompted (or inspired) by God to do so. In addition, we see that the infusion of fear, frequently characteristic of Sibylline and oracular inspiration, also accompanies Noah's inspiration (*Sib. Or.* 1.147). In this way the text presents a picture of the Sibyl's prophecy that is grounded in the experience of her father-in-law Noah who preceded her. The identity of the God who inspires her, the compulsion by which this God compels her to speak, and the countercultural, revolutionist rhetoric that characterizes her speech can all be seen to stem from the experience of Noah.

Second, the Sibyl, who seeks to position the event of the flood within the larger scheme of universal history (and specifically, at its center) and to understand its relationship to some sort of definitive end, differs significantly in her articulation of the *topos* of history from the writer of Genesis, who emphasized only the chronological

details relating to the event of the flood itself, with little interest in its positioning within the course of world (theological) history. Here one can also discern a distinctive shift in the Sibylline and oracular usage of time—a shift that was already begun in earlier Sibylline books, such as 3 and 4, but which is firmly established in *Sib. Or.* 1-2: the Sibyl does not simply address individual and isolated situations in the indefinite future (like oracular discourse), but envisions the whole of history and the way in which its events are working together toward a definitive end. Thus the events of the tenth generation prophesied by the Sibyl are grounded and understood only in relation to the event of the flood prophesied by Noah—the events of the tenth generation are understood to be a similar, but heightened reflection of the events of the fifth.

Third, regarding the *topos* of corruption, the ambiguity of what was described only as violence and corruption in the Genesis FN has certainly been cleared up by multiple narrative voices. The most extensive expansion comes from the mouth of Noah, who describes the corruption of his generation in terms of being faithless, smitten with madness, evil, violent, blood thirsty, ill-tempered, lawless, wretched, evil-hearted, fickle, shameless, untruthful, adulterous, slanderous, irreverent, and cruel (cf. 1.150-156; 174-181)—an assessment which is confirmed by both God (1.130) and the Sibyl (1.123-124, 199) and which is not unlike the Sibyl's description of the tenth generation: just as the pinnacle of evil and corruption of the first world age climaxes immediately preceding the flood, so too does it reach an even higher point immediately preceding the flood of fire during the second world age.

Fourth, regarding the *topos* of catastrophe, the Sibyl, in contrast to many of the other Second Temple writers, goes to great lengths to heighten the sensory-aesthetic texture of her description of the flood event. The text intensifies the description of the

destruction with the details of the intensity of the storm, the battering around of the ark, the image of the “measureless waters,” and the “death” that Noah could see on all sides of the ark. The text adds details that enhance the mood, such as the darkening of the heavenly luminaries and the bloodied sky. Finally, the text highlights the emotion fused response of Noah to the whole ordeal—his quivering at heart, the terror with which he was struck, and the detail of him barely maintaining his courage—details that are not unlike those used by the Sibyl to describe the flood of fire during the tenth generation. Accordingly, just as the flood of water can be considered to be an undoing of creation, so the flood of fire is an even greater act of uncreation (2.196-213).

Fifth, regarding the *topos* of authority, we find the significant addition of the Sibyl's vision of a future final judgment (1.274)—a feature totally foreign to the original Genesis FN, but which clearly indicates the Sibyl's grounding of God's judgment of the tenth generation in the previous judgment of the world by flood. In the same way that God possessed the authority to judge the corruption and evil in the world during the days of Noah, and to inaugurate a new world free of such corruption, so God possesses this same authority to perform a similar, but ultimately more effective act at the end of the tenth generation.

In short, due to the nature of the oracle itself, the major emphasis of the Sibyl is on the judgment and destruction that will transpire during the tenth generation, that is, at the end of the world. In order to assist the reader, she sets up a typology with a similar event from a common body of tradition that includes a pool of similar *topoi* familiar to both the Sibyl and her audience. In this case, it is the flood, since it embodies all of the *topoi* the Sibyl wishes to emphasize (including the greatest example of the judgment/destruction imaginable). However, in order to emphasize the

severity and dreadfulness of the final event, she heightens the sensory-aesthetic texture. Thus, as we have seen, the dreadfulness of the flood is intensified in order to emphasize the severity of the events of the last day. In achieving this purpose, the Sibyl establishes a number of typological innovations rooted in the FN.

Typological Innovations of the Sibyl Rooted in Her Flood Narrative

It has long been recognized that the event of the flood served as a type of the end of the world among many Second Temple writers (e.g. *1 and 2 Enoch*, *Life of Adam and Eve*, etc.). In the case of *Sib. Or.* 1-2, however, the flood material is neither recited nor recontextualized, but profoundly reconfigured to be much more comprehensive and intricately complex. For the typology reconfigures more than just the event of the flood, but the very rhetoric of the text itself. Among the most significant of these rhetorical reconfigurations are the typological relationship between Noah and the Sibyl, the relationship between Noah's rhetoric and the Sibyl's rhetoric, and the typology between the post-flood worlds.

The Typological Relationship Between Noah and the Sibyl

The relationship between Noah and the Sibyl is certainly explicit in the text of *Sib. Or.* 1-2: the Sibyl is Noah's daughter-in-law—the wife of one of Noah's sons (1.289-290).³⁵⁸ In this, the text makes explicit what is only implicit in other portions of the *Sibylline Oracles* (e.g. 7 and 11) where her prophecies of the future begin at a point roughly contemporaneous with the flood.³⁵⁹

³⁵⁸ In this *Sib. Or.* 1-2 clearly follows the precedent of the older *Sib. Or.* 3.

³⁵⁹ In *Sib. Or.* 7, for example, the Sibyl seems to offer her prophecy just slightly prior to the flood. Likewise, in *Sib. Or.* 11, the Sibyl offers her prophecy just shortly after the flood.

Presumably this recurrent identification of this authoritative Greco-Roman oracle-giver with the posterity of the great antediluvian patriarch Noah must have held a good deal of importance to the writers and readers of the extant collection of oracles. Bartlett, for example, has suggested that this identification allowed for the Sibyl's incorporation into the biblical tradition.³⁶⁰ Likewise, it is an understanding that also appears to have been carried over to, and accepted by, members of the early Christian community.

The association of the Sibyl with Noah allows for the establishment of the Sibyl's *ethos* in the Jewish strata of the *Sibylline Oracles*. As we have already seen, this association with Noah would displace any doubt (at least in the Jewish mind) about the legitimacy of her character and prophecies. In the Christian sections, this credibility is certainly thrown into question by associating her with the sins of lawlessness, shamelessness, and shutting out those in need (2.339-347); however, in the Jewish sections, there is no indication that her character was anything other than the chaste and pure image that was the norm in the Greco-Roman mind.

Beyond these somewhat obvious elements, the importance of the relationship between these two figures can be seen in a much clearer light when we consider the extensive typological relationship between the two of them—that is to say, that the biblical figure of Noah can be seen to be typical of the Greco-Roman Sibyl. There are, of course, obvious superficial differences between these two in terms of gender, religious origins, and scope of influence; however, when we consider seriously the details and rhetoric of the text of *Sib. Or.* 1-2, there are a number of elements that contribute to and allow for this suggestion.

³⁶⁰ Bartlett, *Jews in the Hellenistic World*, 36.

First, both Noah and the Sibyl can be considered universal figures—that is, they are figures that are not exclusive to one particular region, culture, or religion. For the Sibyl, this is most obviously suggested by the ancient traditions that identify ten Sibyls of differing geographical regions (such as those identified by Varro and the writer of the Prologue to the *Sibylline Oracles*),³⁶¹ but also in other factors, such as the inscription of her image on various coins from differing geographical regions as well. It is also suggested in the extant corpus by the global scope of the audience that the Sibyl claims to address—perhaps most obviously the Sibyl's introduction to book 11:

World of widespread men, long walls,
great cities, and innumerable nations
of east, west, south, and north,
divided in many diverse languages and kingdoms,
to you I am about to speak the most disastrous tidings (11.1-5).³⁶²

The universal appeal of Noah can be seen when we consider that he predates the critical defining moments in Israelite (and by extension Christian and Samaritan) religion, such as the giving of the law, and predates several important Israelite figures like Abraham (who is identified as the first Hebrew), and as such, does not find himself integrally tied to the creation and development of Israelite religion. In this sense, then, he might be considered more broadly to be one of the great ancestors of monotheistic religion. Moreover, not only was he claimed by Judaism, Christianity, and Samaritan religion, but was apparently also claimed by some sectors of Greco-Roman society

³⁶¹ By the Middle Ages, this number had reached twelve, as typified by the twelve Sibyls incorporated into Michelangelo's painting of the Sistine Chapel. For a description of these twelve Sibyls see Monteiro, *As David and the Sibyls Say*, 1-27.

³⁶² Κόσμε πολυσπερέων ἀνδρῶν καὶ τείχεα μακρά
καὶ πόλεις ἄπληστοι ἰδ' ἔθνεα μυριόεντα
ἀντολῆς δύσεως τε μεσημβρίας τε καὶ ἄρκτου
παντοδαπαῖς φωναῖς μεμεισμένα καὶ βασιλείαις·
ἀλλ' ὑπὲρ ὑμῶν νῦν μέλλω τὰ κάκιστ' ἀγορεύειν.

(such as the people of Apamea who struck coins depicting Noah and the flood), and eventually by Islamic religion as well (surah 11.26-49).

In addition to their universal nature, they are both ancient and long-lived. In Greco-Roman tradition, the Sibyl is said to have lived to about one thousand years of age. And while the first mention of her dates back to Heraclitus around 500 B.C.E.,³⁶³ she is said to date back much further to about seven hundred years before the voyage of Aeneas (the Cumaean Sibyl, that is).³⁶⁴ In similar fashion, the biblical Noah is said to have lived nine hundred and fifty years, and likewise originated in mytho-historical times.

Both are also considered revelatory figures who receive their revelations in a similar manner. As one of the premiere revelatory figures in the Greco-Roman world, the Sibyl's credentials need little justification. Noah, on the other hand, is not normally thought of as a revelatory figure, but, as we have already suggested, there are a number of factors that give this suggestion credence: Noah received a revelation that was privy only to God himself; he was taught the medicinal secrets of the angels (*Jub.* 10); and his son Shem is also said to have received divine revelation (*Treatise of Shem*). As well, the manner in which Noah receives his revelation in *Sib. Or.* 1 closely resembles that of the Sibyl. Specifically, in reacting to this revelation, Noah is seized by an immeasurable fear—a description that, although brief, is not unlike the characteristic reaction of the Sibyl when divine inspiration comes upon her. Moreover, the reader of *Sib. Or.* 1-2 is given the impression that, as divine messengers, God speaks to their respective generations only through them. As such, both Noah and the

³⁶³ Plutarch, *Pyth. orac.* 397A.

³⁶⁴ Virgil, *Aen.* 6.

Sibyl are considered to be credible conveyers of divine revelation to their society. More importantly, they are both considered by God to be the trustworthy means through which God speaks to their respective societies and reveals the divine plan for the future and gives instruction regarding salvation.

Finally, Noah's preaching is typical of the Sibyl's prophecy. On a surface level, this aspect of the typology is obvious: just as Noah prophesies the impending preliminary judgment after the fifth generation to his own generation, so the Sibyl prophesies the final judgment that will transpire after the tenth generation. As Nikiprowetsky has stated: "Comme Noé avait exhorté au repentir les antédiluviens, à la veille de la première catastrophe cosmique, de même la Sibylle annonce aux hommes l'imminence du déluge de feu, le second Déluge, et les presse de prévenir la colère par la conversion."³⁶⁵ Beyond this suggestion, and on a much deeper level, however, the actual rhetoric of Noah's preaching is typical of the rhetoric of the Sibyl's prophecy.

The Typological Relationship Between Noah's Rhetoric and the Sibyl's Rhetoric

In an earlier section, we described the preaching of Noah as revolutionist rhetoric. Noah's preaching declares that only the destruction of the world, and specifically, its social order, will be sufficient to save people.³⁶⁶ Although it can be said that at the outset Noah technically begins his preaching from what might be described as a conversionist perspective (that is, he attempts to persuade his generation to give up their corrupt and evil ways in favour of the godly ways to which Noah subscribes [1.150-170]), half way through his sermon, when he is mocked and ridiculed by his

³⁶⁵ Nikiprowetsky, *La troisième Sibylle*, 50.

³⁶⁶ Wilson, *Magic and the Millennium*, 22-26.

generation (1.171-172), Noah's rhetoric takes a drastic turn to what can only be described as revolutionist rhetoric. Since Noah's generation, in rejecting Noah's message, have confirmed that they are beyond hope, Noah ceases his attempt to persuade them to change, but instead simply begins to chronicle the devastation and destruction that will soon befall them, and the new generation of humans that God will raise out of this destruction (1.173-198). Since humans are unable to change their evil and corrupt ways, renewal of the world cannot be brought about by their own initiative. Rather, the world must be completely destroyed if this corruption and evil are to be eliminated. Only by destroying the earth can the earth ever truly be renewed.

Moreover, the revolutionist response to the world in Noah's preaching can more specifically be described as counterculture rhetoric—that is, it is rhetoric that rejects explicit and mutable characteristics of the dominant culture by providing a relatively self-sufficient system of action that is grounded in a well-developed supporting ideology.³⁶⁷ In particular, Noah's rhetoric not only takes a stand against the current social system to which Noah belongs (characterized by faithlessness, evil, violence, ill-temperedness, and lawlessness), but also endorses a system which can be described as the exact opposite—namely, one that takes into consideration and stands “in awe of the exceedingly great, fearless heavenly creator, imperishable God, who inhabits the vault of heaven” (1.157-158)—and which is basically embodied in the divinely sanctioned virtue of Noah himself, a person who “was most upright and true, a most trustworthy man, concerned for noble deeds” (1.125-126)—virtue similar to those embodied by the three great-spirited kings who will initially rule during the generation immediately following the flood (1.293-296). In short, Noah's preaching can be

³⁶⁷ Roberts, “Toward a Generic Concept of Counter-Culture,” 121.

described as counter-cultural rhetoric that presupposes a revolutionary event in order to bring about this shift from dominant culture to counterculture.

The original Jewish strata of the Sibyl's prophecy of the tenth generation also takes the form of countercultural rhetoric—in this case, against the Greco-Roman world (a stance found in many, but not all, of the *Sibylline Oracles*). Accordingly, it too offers a revolutionary response to the world.

The society in which the Sibyl lives is characterized by corruption within the existing social structures and practices (e.g., 2.213, the selling of free men into slavery) and by individual sins such as murder, lying, thievery, vandalism, adultery, slander, idolatry, blasphemy, faithlessness, lawlessness, and the like (2.252-282). Even though there are those who are striving in the contest for entry into heaven by exemplifying the virtues of justice, honesty, moderation, and mercy, the state of the world is still too corrupt to allow for redemption by human means, but instead necessitates intervention by someone (God) outside of the historical process to initiate and bring this about—that is, to end the current age and inaugurate the beginning of a new age free of this corruption, an age that will not recognize a distinction between rich and poor, slave or free, great or small, but one when all will live in harmony as equals, and without the distinctions that now artificially divide humanity (2.319-324).

The Christian final form of the text assumes this countercultural stance against the Greco-Roman world (and the soon-coming revolutionary event that will put an end to the contemporary dominant culture), but incorporates with it what we might describe as sub-cultural rhetoric against the Jewish world, since it presupposes that Jewish belief and practice, though not wrong in its entirety, can better be embodied in light of the life and teachings of Jesus (thus the extended section on Jesus in *Sib. Or.* 1.324-

400, and the Christian additions to the eschatology of book 2, and in particular 2.238-251, which envisions a judgment of all Hebrews after Jeremiah).

In the Christian struggle to gain legitimacy over Judaism, the latter would here be considered the dominant culture, and Christianity the subculture that agrees fundamentally with the Jewish dominant culture, but maintains that it is best enacted in light of Jesus. This is in many respects implied by the redaction itself: the Christian redactor does not create her own oracle from scratch, but simply modifies the original Jewish oracle in order to bring it into line with her own Christian understanding.

Other Typological Connections Rooted in the Flood Narrative

In addition to the typology established between the character and rhetoric of Noah and those of the Sibyl herself, the Sibyl of books 1-2 also seems to extract several other typologies derived from the resources of the flood story. Among these we find that 1) the salvation of Noah is typical of those who will be saved during the last days (i.e. the tenth generation); and 2) a typology exists between the post-destruction worlds and is rooted in the righteousness of Noah's three sons.

First, it can be seen that the salvation of Noah is typical of those who will be saved in the last days. Though Noah's righteousness is only briefly described in *Sib. Or.* 1.125-126 as being derived from truthfulness, trustworthiness, and a concern for noble deeds, presumably it would be reflective of the excerpt from Pseudo-Phocylides in *Sib. Or.* 2.56-148, which serves as the "test" of righteousness by which people will be judged at the final judgment. Just as Noah gained favour and was saved as a result of his exemplary righteousness in the first (but preliminary) judgment, so too will those (among the Sibyl's audience) who emulate the type of righteousness typified by Noah

and described in the Pseudo-Phocylides excerpt be saved from destruction at the final judgment.

Moreover, this typology may be taken a step further. In 1.282, Noah is described as being saved “through the counsels of the great God.” Such a statement no doubt also serves to strengthen the credibility of the Sibyl’s own message: for just as Noah and his family were saved by heeding the counsels of the great God through Noah, so too can the Sibyl’s audience be saved from future destruction by heeding the counsels of the great God as spoken through the Sibyl. Those who fail to heed this counsel, however, will be judged and destroyed, just as Noah’s contemporaries were.

Second, alongside Noah in this typology, we may also include Noah’s sons, who also seem typical of the righteous of the next world age. Though they are not explicitly named in *Sib. Or.* 1-2, in 1.293, one may derive an implicit identification of Noah’s three sons as “the three great-spirited kings”,³⁶⁸ who are described here as righteous, and who will rule justly for many years with a reign characterized by labour and fair deeds (presumably they will also be instrumental in the development and nourishment of the earth). In this they are typical of the righteous who will emerge out of the Final Judgment described in *Sib. Or.* 2, and will participate in the new world age, also characterized by righteousness and fair deeds (2.313-314). In order to create this element of the typology, it was necessary for the Sibyl to eliminate the episode of Noah’s drunkenness and his dishonouring by his son Ham and his cursing of Canaan, since this flaw in Ham’s credibility would undermine this typology.

Closely linked to this is the replenishing of the earth. In *Sib. Or.* 1, following Gen 6-9, Noah and his family are instructed after the flood to replenish the earth. In

³⁶⁸ Collins, “*Sibylline Oracles*,” *OTP*, 341, n. x.

the long term, this did not prove to be effective in eliminating the corruption that characterized pre-flood humanity. In fact, since this corruption would continue to persist, another judgment or revolutionary event would inevitably become necessary in order to truly eliminate this problem.

In *Sib. Or. 2*, however, since the first attempt was not successful in the long-term, the judgment in the tenth generation would be carried out differently. Unlike the flood, where Noah's family survived to repopulate the earth, after the flood of fire there will be absolutely no survivors. Instead, the physical dead of all generations will be raised. The righteous will be separated from the wicked, with the wicked receiving eternal punishment, and the righteous being restored to live on earth in a world that is divinely reconfigured from the one that was destroyed—a world that will be free and stay free from corruption. Accordingly, the typology between the post-destruction worlds is this: the temporal “golden age” of *Sib. Or. 1* where the three kings will rule righteously (but which will eventually succumb to corruption) is typical of the eternal “golden age” that will follow the judgment of the tenth generation—an age that will finally remain free of corruption.

Aspects from the Flood Narrative not Carried Over into the Sibyl's Typology

One aspect of the flood story that the Sibyl does not carry over into her extensive typology appears to be the ark itself. In the original story of Genesis, it appears, for example, to be typical of the Jerusalem Temple—particularly when the dimensions of these two structures are considered. As Holloway has noted, “it is unlikely that chance

could account for the correspondence in dimensional proportions and structure between Noah's ark and the Solomonic temple."³⁶⁹ He goes on to explain,

The ancients were not incompetent fools; if they had wished to compose a literalistic account of a big, big boat that saved all the animals from drowning in a flood, they would have elected to describe virtually any seaworthy vessel of large draft moored at the nearest harbor, rather than either of the nautical monstrosities that appear in their respective religious texts [i.e. the Gilgamesh Epic and the Genesis FN]. The theological creativity exercised by the authors of the Hebrew Bible on appropriated polytheistic sources is highlighted by the sea-change of a cosmic ziggurat, a universal religious symbol well-nigh universal to Mesopotamian civilization, into a cosmic Solomonic temple, a symbol as peculiar to Judah as one could hope to find.³⁷⁰

Outside of the Genesis FN, the ark was also a symbol or figure which seemed to be of great appeal to other writers of the Second Temple period. Among these is 1 Pet 3:19-22 which sees the ark and the church as correlating symbols of salvation. As Reicke has suggested, "It is mentioned here as a prototype of the church which is conceived as a lifeboat launched upon the sea of time."³⁷¹ In the same way, Kretzer has observed that the writer of 1 Peter presents the ark and the church as equivalent symbols of divine salvation in the face of human wickedness and evil.³⁷² Similar to the writer of 1 Peter, Pseudo-Cyprian's *Treatise against Novatian* also presents a typology between the flood and the ark and the church and persecution: "That ark bore the figure of the church... which was stricken hither and thither to such a degree by the tumultuous waters. Therefore that deluge which happened under Noah showed forth the figure of the persecution which was poured forth over the whole world" (2-5).

³⁶⁹ Holloway, "What Ship Goes There," 349.

³⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 352.

³⁷¹ B. Reicke, *The Epistles of James, Peter, and Jude* (AB, 37; Garden City: Doubleday, 1964), 112.

³⁷² L. J. Kretzer, "On Board the Eschatological Ark of God: Noah-Deucalion and the 'Phrygian Connection' in 1 Peter 3:19-22," in *Baptism, the New Testament and the Church: Historical and Contemporary Studies in Honour of R. E. O. White* (ed. A. R. Cross and S. E. Porter; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), 265.

Unlike the writer(s) of Genesis who pay close attention to the dimensions, materials, and other building specifications for the construction of the ark, or the early Christian writers who made a correlation between the salvific functions of the ark and the church, the writer(s) of *Sib. Or.* 1-2 bother(s) very little (if at all) with these details, but is instead primarily concerned with Noah's righteousness and obedience in carrying out God's pre-flood instructions on flood preparation: God instructs Noah to preach, and Noah preaches; God instructs Noah to build the ark and Noah builds the ark; God instructs Noah to board the ark with his family, and Noah boards the ark with his family; God instructs Noah to exit the ark with his family, and Noah exits the ark with his family, etc. The importance of this obedience to divine instruction is later reinforced by divine speech in 1.282, where it is stated that Noah was saved "through the counsels of the Great God."

As such, it was not the ark that saved Noah; it was Noah's righteousness and obedience to the counsel of God (1.282) that were responsible for his salvation and that of his family. The ark is simply a physical enactment of his obedience. Thus in *Sib. Or.* 2, we do not find any sort of physical vessel of salvation (such as the ark or the temple), but only the great contest for entry into heaven, where attitudes, acts, and speech related to the virtues of justice, honesty, moderation, and mercy are heavily emphasized. In this respect, the persuasive appeal of the Sibyl's message is clear: only those who are diligent in carrying out these divinely inspired instructions on how to prepare for the flood of fire at the end of the age will receive salvation, for no physical vessel will be able to survive that fire.

CONCLUSION

In the opening paragraph of the Introduction, we stated that the purpose of this project was a socio-rhetorical exploration of the development and function of the narrative of Noah and the Flood as it appears in *Sibylline Oracles* 1-2. As such, it entails three major emphases: 1) a 21st century western methodology (socio-rhetorical analysis) which was used to examine, on the one hand, 2) a diverse body of Judeo-Christian (but guised as Greco-Roman) literature (the *Sibylline Oracles*) that emerged primarily during the Second Temple period, and on the other, 3) how a traditional and textual resource (the Genesis Flood Narrative) has been developed and used within this body of literature to further the particular rhetorical purpose of the Sibyl. Thus, throughout the course of this dissertation, we have been able to contribute to the scholarship on each of these three aspects in a number of innovative ways.

First, we have been able to contribute to the ongoing development of socio-rhetorical analysis, and in particular, as to how it pertains to our understanding of rhetorolects (rhetorical discourse types). Based on our analysis of the discourse and major rhetorical *topoi* of *Sib. Or.* 1-2 in relation to the *topoi* of other similar ancient Mediterranean discourses, we suggested that the current socio-rhetorical understanding of rhetorolects should be broadened to better reflect not only early Christian discourse, but the discourse of the entire ancient Mediterranean generally. For early Christians enacted their own discourse through reconfiguration of other rhetorical discourses from other Mediterranean cultures. This is especially clear in the *Sibylline Oracles*, which seems to be an interweaving of various Jewish, Christian, Greco-Roman, and possibly even Gnostic and Babylonian threads of discourse.

In particular, we have sought to affirm the insight in early explorations of socio-rhetorical analysis that the early Christian rhetorical discourses described by Robbins are primarily specific localizations of more general ancient Mediterranean discourse types. Such a position contrasts with recent work in socio-rhetorical analysis in which Christian texts become normative for identifying rhetorolects.

The case in point for this dissertation concerns both the similarities and differences between the discourses to which the *Sibylline Oracles* are most often compared—Judeo-Christian apocalyptic discourse and Greco-Roman Sibylline discourse (in addition to the discourse of Greco-Roman oracles generally)—both of which seem to exhibit the same array of major rhetorical *topoi*, while articulating these *topoi* in remarkably different ways. These differences in articulation stem in large part from the different social locations out of which these discourses emerged, and naturally result in significantly different religious responses to their contemporary social and cultural worlds. The similarities, however, suggest that what we find in Judeo-Christian apocalyptic discourse and Greco-Roman Sibylline (oracular) discourse are two distinct localizations of a single, more generic, ancient Mediterranean discourse type—which we have referred to in this dissertation as mantic discourse.

Second, the implications of this discussion for future development of the socio-rhetorical understanding of rhetorolects are immediately apparent in exploring the Sibylline books as rhetorical productions. To date, the majority of studies carried out on the *Sibylline Oracles* have been through the lenses of various historical-critical methodologies. These have certainly yielded important results. But there has been little, if any, in the way of rhetorical analysis, and nothing that focuses on rhetorical *topoi* and their use in discourse. However, it can be seen from our discussion that a

socio-rhetorical approach offers fresh insight into a number of long-debated questions concerning the *Sibylline Oracles* and their contemporary literary environment.

To this end, based on our prior discussion of rhetorolects, we suggested that what we find in *Sib. Or.* 1-2 (and the *Sibylline Oracles* generally) is a unique blending of two specific localizations of mantic discourse—namely Judeo-Christian apocalyptic discourse and Greco-Roman oracular discourse. These two localizations blend together to create a discourse that was truly unique among the variegated discourses of the ancient Mediterranean. Significantly, this remarkable blending of these two specific localizations of mantic discourse revitalized the character of the Sibyl by incorporating her into the biblical tradition of prophets. By broadening her appeal to encompass both the Greco-Roman and Judeo-Christian worlds, the text gives the Sibyl's words an authority and a malleability that make it possible to adapt her image in a changing rhetorical context—a transformation that would allow her words to continue to speak authoritatively well into the Middle Ages and beyond.

Third, and finally, one of the rhetorical resources that contributed to this transformation was the Noah-Flood narrative—a rhetorical resource that, while permeating the majority of the *Sibylline* books, is used most extensively in *Sib. Or.* 1-2. In chapter 5, we suggested that within the discourses of the Second Temple period, the FN as a topographically and topologically rich rhetorical resource appears to have been of greatest interest to two very different sets of authors: a) the writers of priestly rhetorolect, who saw within the FN a compelling resource that could give legitimacy to their argument for the 364-day calendar and its accompanying implications for religious feasts and festivals, as well as the establishment of pre-Mosaic precedents for various legal prescriptions and priestly responsibilities; and b) the writers of apocalyptic

rhetolect, who saw within the FN the authoritative typological resources necessary to give credence to their own prophecies of cataclysmic destruction and global re-creation. Significantly, the writers of *Sib. Or.* 1-2 seem to draw upon most fully and contribute to this apocalyptic trajectory.

However, unlike a number of apocalyptic texts that seem to blend both priestly and apocalyptic rhetorolects (e.g. the Enoch Astronomical book), the writers of *Sib. Or.* 1-2 actually subordinate the elements of priestly rhetorolect within the FN by eliminating them completely. They appear to do so in order to emphasize the elements of apocalyptic rhetorolect which more usefully contribute to their mantic agenda. This is particularly evident when we consider the prominent ideological positioning of the FN within the argumentation of *Sib. Or.* 1-2. To this end, the Sibyl actually grounds her argument for an imminent end of the world within her ideologically reworked flood narrative. This is particularly evident when we consider the re-articulation of expected Sibylline *topoi* in light of the apocalyptic resources inherent to the FN and its revolutionist, rhetorical response to the world.

In short, during a period in the Greco-Roman world when the influence of the Sibyl slowly had begun to fade, the rhetorical resources inherent to the flood narrative, when made kinetic by the Sibyl, were able to once again infuse her character and her words with a vitality, urgency, and authority. While this may have been an unlikely blending of Greco-Roman and Judeo-Christian rhetorical resources, it can certainly be seen to have had far-reaching effects.

Further Avenues of Study

The contributions to scholarship made in this dissertation, however, are by no means ends in and of themselves; rather, they set the groundwork and agenda for a number

of items related to 1) the continued development of socio-rhetorical method, 2) further avenues of study related to the *Sibylline Oracles*, and 3) the rhetorical texture of the Noah-Flood narrative, especially within the matrix of Second Temple Judaism and Early Christianity.

First, in chapters 3-4 we suggested and demonstrated that there is a need to broaden the current socio-rhetorical understanding of “rhetorolect” to reflect the discourses of the ancient Mediterranean more generally. Such an expansion would allow us to understand better the importance of social, cultural, and ideological location in the formation and development of ancient Mediterranean rhetorical discourse. Specifically, I have suggested that Judeo-Christian apocalyptic and Greco-Roman Sibylline and other oracular discourse be seen as two distinct localizations of a more general discourse type (namely, mantic discourse).

However, given the emphasis in this project on the relevant localizations of mantic discourse, there is still a need to situate and articulate the place of Robbins’ other five early Christian rhetorolects within the broader context of the related rhetorical discourses of the ancient Mediterranean. Such an exercise would allow us to understand more fully the impact of social, cultural, and ideological location on the formation of early Christian discourse. But it would also allow us to understand what was truly novel about early Christian discourse within the context of the ancient Mediterranean where it first emerged.

Second, even though the focus of this project has been on *Sib. Or.* 1-2, the template established in chapters 3-4 could certainly be a starting point for a more complete socio-rhetorical study of the entire Sibylline corpus, for as we have shown, the same major rhetorical *topoi* found in *Sib. Or.* 1-2 permeate the remainder of the

extant collection. However, even beyond a better understanding of Sibylline discourse, it would seem that a socio-rhetorical approach can also contribute to our understanding of some of the complexities inherent to the *Sibylline Oracles*. The most obvious of these is the complex redactional stratigraphy of these discourses. In this respect, I would argue that a socio-rhetorical approach is able to shed valuable light on the cultural and ideological significance of the process of redaction within the *Sibylline Oracles*. I have hinted at this in chapter 4 and have begun to develop this line of reasoning elsewhere.³⁷³ There is, however, still much more that can be said.

Third and finally, chapter 6 focused on the socio-rhetorical analysis of the Noah-Flood narrative in *Sib. Or.* 1-2, but as we have seen in chapter 5, the development of the FN was not exclusive to *Sib. Or.* 1-2, nor was the apocalyptic development of the FN in *Sib. Or.* 1-2 terminal in nature. With respect to the first, there is much more that can be said about the development of the Noah-Flood narrative among the writers of Second Temple Judaism and early Christianity—in particular, the major priestly developments of the narrative found in texts such as *Jubilees* or 4Q252, as well as other Judeo-Christian apocalyptic discourse (e.g. *1 Enoch*). Another important trajectory to consider will be the highly innovative reworkings of the FN found in the *Apocalypse of Adam* and other examples of Gnostic discourse which to date have not been probed from the vantage point of rhetorical *topoi*.

With respect to the second, the development of a primarily apocalyptic trajectory in *Sib. Or.* 1-2 reappears not only in the later Sibylline books (7, 8, and

³⁷³ T. Beech, "Unraveling the Complexity of the *Oracula Sibyllina*: The Value of a Socio-Rhetorical Approach in the Study of the *Sibylline Oracles*," a paper presented at the Christian Apocryphal Texts for the New Millennium conference (University of Ottawa, Ottawa, ON), September 30, 2006.

possibly 11), but also in a number of subsequent texts—most notably in 2 Peter, the *Apocalypse of Paul*, and possibly even in the Qur'an.³⁷⁴

³⁷⁴ T. Beech, "Noah the Preacher of Repentance: The Development of Noachic Speech in *Sibylline Oracles* 1-2 and its Influence on Subsequent Literature," a paper presented at the 2006 Eastern Great Lakes Biblical Society annual conference (Erie, PA), March 24, 2006; *idem*, "The Influence of the Sibyl's Flood Narrative on 2 Peter," a paper presented at the 2007 American Academy of Religion—Eastern International Region annual meeting (University of Waterloo, Waterloo, ON), May 4, 2007.

APPENDIX: LUCAN'S STORY OF THE OPENING OF THE ORACLE AT DELPHI

A relatively typical example of an oracle, at least in terms of its delivery and the *topoi* exhibited therein, is described by Lucan in *Phars.* 5. There he recounts the tale of Appius and the unbarring of the oracular shrine of Apollo at Delphi.³⁷⁵ Lucan tells us that “while the nations and their leaders prepared for war, uncertain of their future and blind to their destiny, Appius alone feared to commit himself to the lottery of battle; therefore he appealed to the gods to reveal the issue of events”; and so Appius ventured to the shrine of Apollo at Delphi, which had at the time been inoperative for many years.

Upon encountering Phemonoe, the priestess at the Temple, Appius laid hands on her and compelled her to rush within the Temple doors and invoke Apollo to prophesy through her. But the priestess was fearful of such an encounter, for it was well known that “if the god enters the bosom of any, untimely death is her penalty, or her reward, for having received him; because the human frame is broken up by the sting and surge of that frenzy, and the stroke from heaven shatters the brittle life.” Accordingly, she sought to dissuade Appius from his eagerness to learn his fate, and offered numerous reasons why the oracle had become dumb:

Either the breath of inspiration has failed yonder outlet and has shifted its path to a distant region of the world; or, when Pytho [that is, Delphi] was burned by the brands of the barbarians, the ashes sank into the vast caverns and blocked the passage of Phoebus; or Delphi is dumb by the will of Heaven, and it is thought enough that the verses of the ancient Sibyl, entrusted to your nation,

³⁷⁵ M. Dillon, *Pilgrims and Pilgrimage in Ancient Greece* (London: Routledge, 1997), 82, has cast much doubt on the usefulness of Lucan's account: “Lucan... wrote from ignorance: he had not been to Delphi and he had no knowledge of Delphic procedure, and his description derives from Virgil's account of Aeneas' visit to the Sibyl at Cumae.” However, as we have already suggested, Lucan's account, whether true or fictive, represents a particular cultural understanding of oracular practice and discourse that was apparently not uncommon, and in fact, widely accepted.

should tell forth the hidden future; or else Apollo, accustomed to exclude the guilty from his shrine, finds none in our age for whose sake to unseal his lips.

Not having dissuaded Appius from his quest, however, Phe-monoe was then thrust by her supervising priest into the inner shrine. Justifiably fearful of the oracular recess of the inner shrine, she halted by the entrance and began "counterfeiting inspiration and uttering feigned words from a bosom unstirred." Her efforts, however, were unconvincing, as "Her words, that rushed not forth with tremulous cry; her voice, which had not power to fill the space of the vast cavern; her laurel wreath, which was not raised off her head by the bristling hair; the unmoved floor of the temple and the motionless trees—all these betrayed her dread of trusting herself to Apollo."

Appius perceived that the oracle was counterfeit, and with threats of punishment, compelled her to return to the inner shrine, where she hesitantly yielded and availed herself to the inspiration of Apollo:

As fully as ever in the past, he forced his way into her body, driving out her former thoughts, and bidding her human nature to come forth and leave her heart at his disposal. Frantic she careers about the cave, with neck under possession; the fillets and garlands of Apollo, dislodged by her bristling hair, she whirls with tossing head through the void spaces of the temple; she scatters the tripods that impede her random course; she boils over with fierce fire, while enduring the wrath of Phoebus. Nor does he ply the whip and goad alone, and dart flame into her vitals: she has to bear the curb as well, and is not permitted to reveal as much as she is suffered to know. All time is gathered up together: all the centuries crowd her breast and torture it; the endless chain of events is revealed; all the future struggles to the light; destiny contends with destiny, seeking to be uttered. The creation of the world and its destruction, the compass of the Ocean and the sum of the sands—all these are before her.

Possessed by Apollo, Phe-monoe is compelled to sift through the course of history in search of the fate of Appius. When she found it,

First the wild frenzy overflowed through her foaming lips; she groaned and uttered loud inarticulate cries with panting breath; next, a dismal wailing filled the vast cave; and at last, when she was mastered, came the sound of articulate speech: "Roman, thou shalt have no part in the mighty ordeal and shalt escape the awful threats of war; and thou alone shalt stay at peace in a

broad hollow of the Euboean coast." Then Apollo closed up her throat and cut short her tale.

Still possessed by Apollo, she is driven from the temple, and the frenzy continues: her eyes roll wildly, she becomes so pale so as to inspire fear, and her breast begins to heave voiceless sighs. Suddenly, Apollo snatches the secrets of heaven away from her, and the "knowledge of the future went back to the tripods of the god; and down she fell, recovering with difficulty."

Content with the oracle delivered to him by Phemonoe, Appius merrily departed, unaware that he had been deceived by a "riddling" oracle, and unalarmed by the nearness of his impending death. For little did he realize that the "broad hollow of the Euboean coast" where he would stay alone at peace, was actually his tomb.³⁷⁶

³⁷⁶ Lucan, *Phars.* 5.65-235.

VERSIONS AND ENGLISH TRANSLATIONS OF THE SIBYLLINE ORACLES

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ABBREVIATIONS

AB	Anchor Bible
<i>Adv. haer.</i>	<i>Adversus haereses</i> (Irenaeus)
<i>Aen.</i>	<i>Aeneid</i> (Virgil)
<i>Ann.</i>	<i>Annales</i> (Tacitus)
<i>An. post.</i>	<i>Analytica Posteriora</i> (Aristotle)
ANRW	<i>Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt: Geschichte und Kultur Roms im Spiegel der neueren Forschung</i>
<i>Ant.</i>	<i>Jewish Antiquities</i> (Josephus)
<i>Apol.</i>	<i>Apologia</i> (Justin Martyr)
<i>Apoc. Adam</i>	<i>Apocalypse of Adam</i>
<i>Apoc. Paul</i>	<i>Apocalypse of Paul</i>
<i>Apoc. Zeph.</i>	<i>Apocalypse of Zephaniah</i>
<i>Aug.</i>	<i>Divus Augustus</i> (Suetonius)
BA	<i>Biblical Archeologist</i>
2 Bar.	2 Baruch
3 Bar.	3 Baruch
BTB	<i>Biblical Theology Bulletin</i>
CBQ	<i>Catholic Biblical Quarterly</i>
<i>Civ.</i>	<i>De civitate Dei</i> (Augustine)
1 Clem.	1 Clement
CQ	<i>Classical Quarterly</i>
<i>Deor. Conc.</i>	<i>Deorum concilium</i> (Lucian)
<i>De or.</i>	<i>De oratore</i> (Cicero)
<i>Descr.</i>	<i>Graeciae description</i> (Pausanias)
<i>Div. Aurel.</i>	<i>Divus Aurelianus</i> (Flavius Vopiscus)
1 En.	1 Enoch
2 En.	2 Enoch
<i>Fin.</i>	<i>De finibus</i> (Cicero)
FN	Flood Narrative (of Genesis 6-9)
GCS	Griechischen Christlichen Schriftsteller
<i>Herm. Vis.</i>	Shepherd of Hermas, <i>Vision</i>
<i>Hist.</i>	<i>Historiae</i> (Herodotus)
HTR	<i>Harvard Theological Review</i>
<i>Inst.</i>	<i>Divinarum institutionum libri</i> (Lactantius)
JCS	<i>Journal of Cuneiform Studies</i>
JECS	<i>Journal of Early Christian Studies</i>
JJS	<i>Journal of Jewish Studies</i>
JSNTSup	Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement Series
JSOT	<i>Journal for the Study of the Old Testament</i>
JSOTSup	Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement Series
JSP	<i>Journal for the Study of the Pseudepigrapha</i>
JTS	<i>Journal of Theological Studies</i>
<i>Jub.</i>	<i>Jubilees</i>
L.A.B.	Pseudo-Philo
L.A.E.	<i>Life of Adam and Eve</i>
LCL	Loeb Classical Library

LXX	Septuagint
3 Macc.	3 Maccabees
Metam.	Metamorphoses (Ovid)
MT	Masoretic Text
Op.	<i>Opera et dies</i> (Hesiod)
Phars.	<i>Pharsalia</i> (Lucan)
Ps.-Phoc.	Pseudo-Phocylides
Pun.	<i>Punica</i> (Silius Italicus)
Pyth. orac.	<i>De Pythiae oraculis</i> (Plutarch)
QJS	<i>Quarterly Journal of Speech</i>
11QMelch	Melchizedek
Rhet.	<i>Rhetorica</i> (Aristotle)
RR	<i>Review of Religion</i>
Rust.	<i>De re rustica</i> (Varro)
SJT	<i>Scottish Journal of Theology</i>
Sib. Or.	<i>Sibylline Oracles</i>
SNTSMS	Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series
SRA	Socio-rhetorical Analysis
ST	<i>Studia theological</i>
T. Isaac	<i>Testament of Isaac</i>
T. Adam	<i>Testament of Adam</i>
VT	<i>Vetus Testamentum</i>
ZAW	<i>Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft</i>
ZNW	<i>Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft</i>