

Rome's Own Sibyl: The Sibylline Books in the Roman Republic and Early Empire

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Dissertation Abstract

My dissertation, entitled *Rome's Own Sibyl: The Sibylline Books in the Roman Republic and Early Empire*, examines the role of the Sibylline Books in Roman society and politics. It explores thereby key issues in Roman republican history, such as the complex relationship between religion and politics, the interaction between Roman and non-Roman, and the nature of Roman republican religion itself.

The Sibylline Books, composed in Greek hexameter, provided ritual instructions for appeasing the gods after a prodigy – a sign conveying their anger – had occurred. In the Republic, prodigies were a matter of official concern, discussed not only among whispering flocks of superstitious old women, but also on the floor of the Roman Senate itself. This body solicited and enforced the advice of the *duumviri sacris faciundis* (later the *decemviri*, then the *quindecimviri*), elite Roman priests who had the exclusive right and duty to interpret the Sibylline Books, whose content was a “state secret.”

The text of the Books themselves is, except for one oracle preserved by Phlegon, and another by Phlegon and Zosimus, entirely lost. My dissertation focuses not on the content of the oracles, but on their context: prodigy reporting and expiation as we see it at work in the lists compiled by antiquarians and historians, in particular Livy. By recording prodigies and ritual responses in a specific historical context, these reports allow us to see the Books “in action,” as they reflected and effected changes in Roman society and politics.

My dissertation comprises an introduction and six chapters. The introduction lays out the most important sources, both ancient and modern, for my dissertation. The first chapter examines the Roman context of the Sibylline Books, looking at the location of the Books, the composition of the priesthood that read them, and the timing of expiation in Rome. The goal of this chapter is to show that the Sibylline Books, though written in Greek, operated in a very Roman world.

The second chapter examines the Books as text, and the ways in which this text was applied in Roman expiation. This chapter demystifies the Books' nature and origins. It shows that they were not a fixed collection dating back to the late regal period, but an assembly of oracles gathered and revised over time. Priestly reinterpretation and the timely addition of new oracles granted the Books a flexibility that enabled them to adapt to a changing world. In addition, this chapter examines the secrecy that surrounded the texts, and questions whether the oracles offered prophetic or ritual responses. Finally, it looks at the ways in which these oracles were applied, with rituals being repeated, discarded, and modified over time.

The third chapter explores the foreign nature of the Sibylline Books and the expiatory rituals that they advised. It investigates the alleged origins of the Books, recorded in Roman tradition. It also explores the character of the rituals advised by the

Books, and asks to what extent the ceremonies recommended by these Greek oracles were truly Greek.

The last three chapters explore the political and social applications of the Sibylline Books as they evolved over time. In Chapter 4, I look at the application of the Sibylline Books to issues of Roman politics and community until the destruction of the Books in the Capitoline fire of 83 BC. The next chapter examines the use of the Sibylline oracles in the late Republic, after the assembly of a new collection in 76 BC. The crisis of the republican system of government produced great changes in the expiation of prodigies and the use of the Sibylline Books. My study of this crisis shows that Sibylline expiation was an integral part of the republican system of government and could not survive unaltered when that system came under threat from “big men” who overshadowed their contemporaries. In the final chapter, I will explore Augustus’ treatment of the Sibylline Books. He edited the texts, moved them to the Palatine Temple of Apollo, and used them to enact one of his most dramatic religious performances, the Ludi Saeculares of 17 BC. This chapter examines how Augustus adapted the Sibylline Books to his own broader religious program of “restoration.”

I am writing under the direction of Professor Harriet Flower, Princeton University; Professor Denis Feeney, Princeton University; and Professor Andreas Bendlin, University of Toronto at Mississauga.

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I consider myself particularly fortunate to have had such an incredible group of scholars to help me with my dissertation. Professor Denis Feeney, with his impressive depth of knowledge and understanding, always provided insightful advice and timely encouragement. Professor Andreas Bendlin of the University of Toronto at Mississauga kindly agreed to read my dissertation before even meeting me, and his advice and insights into Roman religion have helped me a great deal.

I am especially grateful to my adviser, Professor Harriet Flower, for her guidance and support throughout this project. This dissertation began in her Roman Republic seminar, when I wrote a paper on Magna Mater. Through this work I developed an interest in Rome's religious response to crisis, and Harriet led me from this broader topic to the Sibylline Books. I could not have begun this project, therefore, without her guidance, and I certainly could never have finished it. Her ability to clear up complicated issues, and complicate simple ones – to solve over lunch questions that had been consuming me for days – is astounding. I never left one of our lunches without feeling enlightened and energized about my work. Her advice and support on other matters – publication, jobs, and more – has proved invaluable.

I would like to thank my colleagues, fellow graduate students and bowling partners; I am tremendously blessed to have had such great companions with whom to face the obstacles of graduate school. I am especially thankful to have had one friend, Jessica Clark, who was not only a member of my cohort, but also an advisee of Harriet Flower and a student of the Roman Republic. In graduate school it is a rare joy, I think, to have one person with whom to share interests and experiences – digging in Polis, Cyprus; organizing a conference; and precepting together.

My family has been a tremendous support not only while I have written my dissertation, but long before. It was my parents who taught me to value learning. Every time I needed encouragement, I always found my mom on the other end of the phone. My dad helped me keep everything in perspective, reminding me so often that “all history is in the past.”

Finally, I would like to thank my fiancé, Ariel. His encouragement, advice, and proofreading can be seen in every page of this dissertation. He has shown me that love truly endures all things, even the dissertation process.

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Introduction

The Sibylline Books: The Sources

ANCIENT SOURCES

This dissertation concerns the Sibylline Books in Rome, a collection of Greek oracles controlled by the Roman State and used to expiate prodigies, signs of the gods' anger. The Roman prodigy and expiation system – the means by which the Romans determined and carried out rituals intended to appease the gods – is the single aspect of Roman religion about which we are best informed. The use of the Sibylline Books, the primary means of expiation in Rome, is particularly well-documented. However, because the oracles were rarely published (as I will show in Chapter 2 below, the Senate kept close guard over the texts), we have very little evidence of the actual contents of the Books. Fragments of only two oracles, one dating from the Republic and the other from the time of Augustus, survive.¹

The Republican oracle is recorded only by Phlegon of Tralles, a freedman of Hadrian who wrote a *Book of Wonders* containing all sorts of fantastic tales and strange things. Phlegon dates this oracle, which describes among other rituals a hymn to be sung to expiate the birth of a hermaphrodite, to 125 BC. Seventy lines of the Greek hexameter of the oracle are preserved, but there are three lacunae, and approximately thirty lines are missing at the end. The poem was arranged in acrostics, with the first letters of the verses corresponding to the first lines of the text. Diels (1890) argued that although the oracle was apparently made public in 125 BC and associated with the birth of a hermaphrodite

¹ See the Appendix for the Greek text of these oracles.

in that year, the text quoted by Phlegon was actually a combination of two separate oracles. The Augustan oracle, on the other hand, is recorded both by Phlegon and Zosimus, a Greek historian of the early 6th century AD who used Phlegon as a source. This oracle advised the celebration of the Ludi Saeculares, which took place in 17 BC. It consists of 38 lines of Greek hexameter, and it is not written in acrostics. I will discuss these oracles further in later chapters.

Many other oracles calling themselves “Sibylline” exist, but these are not from the official Roman collection. Written by pagan, Jewish, and Christian authors, they would have been composed and circulated privately over a period of many centuries, but their material would not have been included among the official Sibylline Books of the Roman State. Only a few fragments of pagan oracles survive, but we possess several books, numbered I to XIV, of Jewish and Christian oracles.² These texts are apocalyptic in character, and thus very different from pagan oracles; they combine Greek myths with Jewish and Christian ones.³ Study of these oracles would benefit the scholar of the Republican Sibylline Books only in giving a sense of what might be expected of private Sibylline oracles in the Roman Empire, but they are hardly an indication of the contents of the official Books of the Roman State.

Since the information that can be gleaned from existing Sibylline oracles is very limited, a scholar of the Books must turn to the accounts of the consultations of the Books given by ancient historians and antiquarians. Bruce MacBain has compiled a

² Though Books IX and X repeat material from the earlier eight books; see Momigliano (1988) 7. For the pagan oracles that were not included in the Sibylline Books in Rome, see Alexandre (1841) 2.118-28, Crönert (1928) 57-9, Parke (1986) 47-51, Eumelos fr. 8 Bernabé = 12 Davies, Zosimus *Hist.* 2.37.1, *IK* ii.224.

³ See Momigliano (1988) 3ff. and Lightfoot (2008) 3ff. for the transition from pagan to Jewish and Christian oracles, and the differences between these types of oracles.

useful list of all of these citations (there are approximately sixty definite consultations of the Books during the Republic and Empire; most are recorded by multiple sources.)⁴ The main sources for the use of the Sibylline Books are Livy and Julius Obsequens, a 4th century AD epitomizer of Livy who documented his lists of prodigies and expiations.

Obsequens, however, was selective in his recording of prodigies; for the years 190-167 BC, for which both Livy's and Obsequens' work is extant, we can see that Obsequens took great liberty in trimming down Livy's prodigy accounts. In particular, Obsequens is more interested in tales of strange prodigies than in the expiatory rituals with which the Romans responded, and therefore we are often left to wonder what priesthoods recommended what rituals, and how they were performed. Furthermore, because Obsequens' collection is extant only for the years 190-11 BC (he began his epitomy with 249 BC, but the first 60 years have been lost), the loss of Livy's second decade is a great misfortune for those studying the use of the Sibylline Books in the Republic. This leaves a gap of approximately 75 years (between 292 and 218 BC) for which we have very little information regarding prodigy reporting and expiation. Other authors, including Varro, Cicero, Dionysius of Halicarnassus, Valerius Maximus, Pliny, Plutarch, and Dio, help to fill in the gaps of our knowledge, and they supplement Livy's accounts. But their interest in prodigies is not as extensive as that of Livy and Obsequens.

Despite the general reliability of Livy's prodigy lists, there is a major discrepancy that should be discussed. The prodigies of Livy's first decade differ greatly from those of his later decades, both in kind and in number. "The overwhelming bulk of the evidence

⁴ There are only four recorded instances of the use of the Sibylline Books during or after the time of Augustus. The vast majority of the consultations of the Books occurred during the Republic. See MacBain (1982) Appendix A.

for this system of dealing with the prodigies comes from the later republican period, so the problem once again is whether we are justified in assuming that these practices date back at least to the early period of the Republic.”⁵ In his entire first decade, covering the period from the beginning of Rome to 293 BC, Livy records only 19 prodigy lists; in his extant later decades, covering the period from 218 to 167 BC, he records 52. In addition, the early lists are often very brief, sometimes mentioning only one prodigy, whereas the later lists tend to include several prodigies.⁶ And while in the later lists aberrations of nature – the birth of a hermaphrodite, the speech of a chicken, a rain of blood – predominate, these elements are much less common among earlier prodigies. Instead, pestilence is the most often mentioned early prodigy. It is cited in 9 of Livy’s 19 first decade prodigy accounts, but appears in only 5 of the 52 later lists.

What is surprising in these numbers is not the frequency of early pestilences – 9 in 200 years is much less frequent than 5 in 50 – but the fact that pestilence is so common in Livy’s first decade to the exclusion of other types of prodigies. This may reflect a historical shift in the system of prodigy reporting and expiation. Significant changes are known to have taken place in the Roman prodigy and expiation system during the fourth and third centuries BC. During this time, the Romans began accepting prodigy reports from all over Italy, Sicily, and other more distant places, with the result that the frequency and types of prodigy reports were inevitably altered.⁷ In fact, it may have been as a result of such changes that the duumvirate, the priesthood in charge of reading the

⁵ Beard, North, and Price (1998) 38

⁶ Seventeen prodigies are listed for the year 214 BC, one of the lowest points of the Second Punic War. See Livy 24.10.

⁷ Beard, North, and Price (1998) 38: “There obviously must have been developments and modifications over the period; if nothing else, as Roman power expanded over Italy, prodigies were recognized throughout the whole peninsula, not just in the immediate area of Rome itself – and this geographical extension alone must have affected the way prodigies were reported, investigated, and handled.”

Sibylline Books, was expanded to ten members, in order to handle a larger number of prodigies from an extended geographical area. The incomplete nature of Livy's early prodigy accounts, and the loss of his second decade, make the details of these changes impossible to trace.

The very rarity of early prodigy reports – averaging one prodigy every 20 years – and the absence of certain very obvious types of prodigies suggests that a good deal of the early material is missing from the historical record.⁸ In particular, since Livy is our primary source for Republican prodigies, this may mean that Livy himself gave little credence to early prodigy reports, or that he wished to insert prodigy accounts only in later, better documented periods, as a device intended to impose a steady rhythm on the structure of his Roman year.

Yet while much material may be missing from the earlier accounts, most of the early Republican prodigies that are recorded may be historical. Many of the early prodigies recorded in our sources are events such as famine or pestilence that would have been significant in their own right because of the damage that they caused, rather than the disaster that they threatened. Some were related to important ceremonies, including the

⁸ According to Livy, the first Roman lightning prodigy occurred in 295 BC (Livy 10.31). However, it is unlikely given the significance of lightning signs in Etruscan culture, which was so influential on Rome, that lightning was not considered a prodigy in Rome before 295 BC. Certainly, Livy does not describe every prodigy and expiation that occurred in early Roman history. For example, he fails to report the vowing of the Ceres temple, advised by the Sibylline Books, in 496 BC. In addition, he identifies the *lectisternium* performed in 399 BC as the first such ceremony in Rome (Livy 5.13), and the one of 364 BC as the third (Livy 7.2), but he fails to mention the second. Obviously, either he or his sources are exercising some selection in the material to be recorded. For possible reasons behind the development of the prodigy lists in Livy's narrative, see Beard, North, and Price (1998) 38-39: "It could have been a major change in procedure, that resulted in the lists being publicly available for the first time [in the 3rd century BC]; but it could have been a change in practices of recording (or even just the chance preservation of a set of documents) that enabled Livy to include that kind of information. Certainly there is no statement in any of our historical accounts that prodigies played a fundamentally different role in the early Republic."

dedications of new temples or performance of rituals such as the *lectisternium*.⁹ Thus for the early republic, the sources tend to record only those prodigies that would have left a deeper mark on Roman history – the ones that fit more appropriately into the narrative. For while pestilence may explain why army recruitment was low and thus why a year was without war, a chicken's words rarely have a tremendous impact upon the narrative proper. Whether the omission of the chicken is an issue of early record keeping or of narrative style is impossible to determine. But the fact that these early prodigy accounts are so different from later ones adds credibility to them, since it proves at least that these are not anachronistic retrojections of later prodigy accounts. Although the lists may not be complete for the early Republic, therefore, the prodigies and expiations that our sources record may in many cases be historically accurate.¹⁰

Despite the abundance of information on ancient prodigies and expiations, we must ask how reliable this information is, and from what sources the prodigy lists ultimately derive. In her 1971 article "Prodigy Lists and the Use of the *Annales Maximi*," Elizabeth Rawson argued that the prodigy lists recorded in our sources did not derive from the *Annales Maximi*, as has typically been assumed, but from a collection of random sources, which included prodigy lists from specific locales and notices recorded in books of marvels. Her key pieces of evidence for this theory are the doublets found in the

⁹ In his account of the *lectisternia*, Livy numbers the celebrations from one to five (though he fails to record the second celebration). This may be evidence that he took this information from a list of *lectisternia*, which was recorded because of the importance of the ceremony. See Oakley (1997) on Livy 7.2.2: "At 27.1 and V.13.5 the *lectisternium* is decreed on the advice of the Sibylline Books, and this seems to have been the regular procedure. L.'s careful notices both of each individual *lectisternium* and its place in the series suggests that his material goes back to an archival source; and we know that this information was present in the annalistic tradition at an early date, since D.H. 12.9.1-3 shows that Piso (fr. 25) recounted the first *lectisternium* at some length."

¹⁰ Some of the accounts, of course, are obviously legendary and should not be believed. But many seem to be true. See below for a discussion of the prodigies and expiation of 461 BC, which included a prophecy that predicted coming events too accurately, and therefore should not be accepted as genuine.

sources, with the same prodigies occurring in back-to-back years, and the recurring presence of rather minor towns in the lists, such as the small and insignificant Sabine town Reate, for which eight different prodigies (seven monstrous births of mules or foals) are recorded in our sources. The doublets, she claims, show that several different texts – not only the *Annales Maximi* – were being drawn on for lists of prodigies, while the frequent appearance of these small towns in the lists proves that the sources were taking their facts from various local records and legends. As Bruce MacBain writes, “It is, at first, striking that the three great antiquarians of the late Republic and early Principate – Aelius Stilo, Terentius Varro, and Verrius Flaccus – are all connected with towns that are heavily represented in our lists: Lanuvium, Reate, and Praeneste.”¹¹ Rawson concludes that the lists contain only a smattering of the prodigies that the Romans would have expiated, and that they therefore are very unreliable accounts of Roman prodigy and expiation.

Bruce MacBain has, however, countered Rawson’s argument, I believe successfully. He argued that the doublets, being very few (twenty at most, and probably much fewer), could all be explained by the problems of ancient record keeping, rather than a conflation of different sources. And he pointed out that while Aelius Stilo and Verrius Flaccus were connected with important prodigy-reporting areas, there is no evidence that prodigy lists were included in their work. Furthermore, while Münzer has shown that Pliny drew his prodigy lists from Varro, there is no mention of Reate, or of Sabineland in general, in Pliny’s lists. MacBain goes on to suggest reasons why those towns that our sources claim reported many prodigies might have done so in reality, based upon their historical, mythical, and religious connections to Rome. This does not

¹¹ MacBain (1982) 11

mean, however, that the prodigy reports included in our sources certainly came from the *Annales Maximi*.¹² There may have been another source, some sort of priestly or historical records, from which the lists were drawn. In any case, MacBain has shown that the lists cannot be dismissed as unreliable off-hand. “The burden of proof,” as he states, “will properly remain on those who wish to see the lists in Livy/Obsequens as heavily distorted by the influence of special epitomes. Such a contention seems not demonstrable from any of the available evidence.”¹³

MODERN SCHOLARSHIP

Compared to the wealth of ancient citations, there is a real paucity of modern scholarship on the Sibylline Books. Two of the most significant works remain Hermann Diels’ *Sibyllinische Blätter*, a small volume published in 1890, and Wilhelm Hoffmann’s *Wandel und Herkunft der Sibyllinischen Bücher in Rom*, a Leipzig dissertation written in 1933. Diels’ book offers an important exploration of the Republican oracle recorded by Phlegon; it is Diels who first argued that this oracle was actually the amalgamation of two different oracles. He offered proof that the composition of these oracles could not have occurred before the Second Punic War. In indicating the development of the Books over time, Diels broke from the accepted scholarly opinion that the Books were a fixed collection of oracles that existed without change from the beginning of the Republic to the destruction of the Capitoline Temple.

Hoffmann (1933), writing more than forty years after Diels’ work was published, complained that although Diels’ ideas were accepted by scholars, they were not truly

¹² See North (1986) 255

¹³ MacBain (1982) 23

incorporated into the scholarly tradition, so that the implications of his efforts had not been investigated fully. Hoffmann attempted to carry on Diels' work himself, looking further into the idea that the Books had a fluid rather than static character. He traces three major stages in the development of the nature of the Books. First, he asserts that the Books were initially simply a collection of expiations, a list of rituals to be performed when prodigies were reported. The Books did not originally contain an element of prophecy, he claimed, but only recipes for pleasing the gods. According to Hoffmann, this was evidence of the Etruscan, rather than Greek, origin of the Books, since he posited that they were more similar to Etruscan texts of expiation than Greek prophetic oracles. Second, Hoffmann claimed that although the Books began as purely expiatory texts, they developed a prophetic character over time, beginning in the Second Punic War, but becoming more apparent later in the second century BC. Finally, Hoffmann asserted that the Books originally had no connection with the Sibyl at all, but instead were sacred books from Etruria; it was not until the first century BC that the oracles were associated with the Sibyl.

A great deal of later scholarship has looked at the Books through a broader lens, including them in more general studies of prodigies and expiations, or of the Sibyl in antiquity. Raymond Bloch's book *Les prodiges dans l'antiquité classique*, published in 1963, is one such study. Bloch examines the systems of prodigy and expiation in three areas of the ancient world: Greece, Etruria, and Rome. His comparisons of these three systems led him to the same conclusion that Hoffmann had reached, that the Romans' view of prodigies as signs of the gods' displeasure, and thus as stimuli toward rituals intended to bring reconciliation, was ultimately derived from the Etruscans. Like Diels

and Hoffmann before him, he also noted the changing nature of the Romans' conception of prodigies, with a Greek influence apparent during the Second Punic War and later, when the Romans began viewing prodigies not only as signs of the gods' displeasure, but also as portents of specific things to come.

Bruce MacBain has also studied the Sibylline Books within the framework of prodigy and expiation, but his focus was entirely Roman, his interest in Greece and Etruria only contingent upon their interactions with Rome. In his book *Prodigy and Expiation*, published in 1982, MacBain investigated Rome's system of prodigy and expiation and its implications for the relationship between Rome and the rest of Italy. Though he emphasizes the fact that the political or social advantages resulting from religious actions did not necessarily imply governmental manipulation of religion, MacBain's interest in prodigies is primarily political. He suggests that the Romans' system of prodigy and expiation was meant in part as a diplomatic gesture toward other areas of Italy, where many of these prodigies would have been observed, and where expiations would sometimes have occurred. For this reason, he focuses much more on the activities of the *haruspices* than those of the *decemviri*, since he claims that the *haruspices*, foreign priests imported from Etruria, actually served as ambassadors to Rome for their homelands. Thus MacBain's interest in prodigy and expiation focuses more on intra-Italian politics than on the significance of the rituals for the Romans themselves.

H. W. Parke is a third author who has studied the Sibylline Books within a larger context. His book *Sibyls and Sibylline Prophecy in Classical Antiquity*, published posthumously in 1988, is an investigation of the figure of the Sibyl from the archaic

period through the character's usurpation by Christians. Though his first chapter is concerned with the nature of Sibylline oracles, it actually has little to do with the 'Sibylline Books' of early Rome, the official oracles of the Roman State. It is presumably for this reason that Parke goes into detail about Rome's Sibylline Books only in the appendix of his book. In this supplementary chapter, Parke provides a helpful history of the Books, highlighting the more interesting consultations of the oracles recorded by Roman historians. However, this chapter is only a basic overview of the history and use of the Books throughout the Roman Republic and Empire. Though Parke's opinions are at many points more nuanced than those of Hoffmann, who assumes too often a fully sincere reading of the oracles by the *decemviri sacris faciundis*, the Roman priests who interpreted the Books, Parke is much more interested in laying out the facts than in interpreting them.

Veit Rosenberger has looked at the wider subject of prodigy reporting and expiation in his book *Gezähmte Götter: Das Prodigienwesen der römischen Republik* (1998). Rosenberger is very interested in the Roman mentality underlying prodigy reporting and expiation. In the first chapter, he examines the steps by which Romans reported and responded to prodigies. Next, he looks at prodigies themselves, identifying them primarily as disruptions of natural boundaries. He attempts to determine which of these disruptions caused the Romans the most fear. In the third chapter, he examines expiatory rituals as a means of uniting the Roman community in a crisis. And in the final chapter, he shows how the system of prodigy and expiation was a product of the republican form of government.

In her book *Public Portents in Republican Rome* (2003), Susanne Rasmussen also explores the broader topic of Roman prodigy and expiation. Rasmussen takes a “sociological approach” to the sources, in order to determine the significance of prodigy and expiation in defining the Roman community and constructing Roman identity. She rejects what she sees as the traditional scholarly views of prodigy and expiation in Rome: 1) the religio-historical, which presents the Romans as turning to expiation in fear in times of crisis; and 2) the historical, which depicts prodigy and expiation as a tool for political manipulation. Rasmussen sees Roman prodigy and expiation as a sort of science, based on observation and systematization. She attempts to show that “Inside Rome, public portents preserved traditional values, ensured and maintained social balance, and asserted Roman identity in accordance with *mos maiorum*; externally, public portents functioned to incorporate and consolidate foreign cults and promote Rome’s policy of expansion.”¹⁴

Another contribution to note is that of David Potter, who although focusing on prophecy in the later Roman Empire, does include in his work some background information on the Sibylline Books of the Roman Republic. His book *Prophecy and History in the Crisis of the Roman Empire*, published in 1990, is defined by Potter as a “historical commentary on the *Thirteenth Sibylline Oracle*.” This oracle, which shows clear Judaeo-Christian authorship, must have had little in common with the official Sibylline corpus of the Roman Republic. Instead of being part of the collection administered by the State, the *Thirteenth Oracle* would have circulated privately. Although it would have been the product of many different hands and times (like other oracles in circulation), it seems to be most applicable to the mid-third century AD. In a

¹⁴ Rasmussen (2003) 254

second book, *Prophets and Emperors*, published in 1994, Potter examines the role of prophecy in the Roman Empire and imperial administration. In each of these books, Potter mentions the Sibylline Books of the Republic in order to provide background for privately circulated Sibylline oracles under the Empire, but since the nature of the State oracles is so different from that of these popular prophecies, the later oracles can teach us little about the Sibylline Books. For this reason, Potter's work, although significant for the scholar of the popular imperial oracles, is less relevant for anyone studying the Republican Sibylline Books controlled by the senate.

Finally, J. L. Lightfoot has recently written on the first and second books of Judaeo-Christian Sibylline Oracles. Her book *The Sibylline Oracles: With an Introduction, Translation, and Commentary on the First and Second Books* (2007) provides an excellent commentary and translation of these oracles, which are a strange amalgamation of Judaeo-Christian and pagan myth (the text follows the story of Adam and Eve with an account of the different ages of man.) The book offers an introduction dealing with the Sibyl in antiquity, but is mostly focused on the transition between the pagan and Jewish/Christian Sibyl, and the issue of how this prophetic figure was adapted by monotheistic writers.

MY DISSERTATION

My own analysis of the Sibylline Books rests primarily on the accounts of their use recorded in the ancient historians and antiquarians. I attempt to place the consultations in their historical context to determine what roles they played in Roman society and politics. I build on Diels' observation that the content and application of the

oracles were evolving over time, and I trace the development of the Sibylline Books as it coincided with the evolution of the Roman State. Many times, I propose political motivations behind particular ceremonies and interpretations drawn from the Books, but I do not intend to give the impression that the Books were simply a tool for political manipulation. The oracles addressed religious and political concerns simultaneously, and it is only through their success in appeasing the gods that the oracles had any validity at all.

Chapter 1

The Roman Context of the Sibylline Books

PRODIGY AND EXPIATION IN ROME

Understanding Roman religion requires a great leap of imagination. Imagine living in a world where cows and chickens spoke; where milk, lead, or meat rained down from the sky; where five-legged mules carried messages from the gods. The Romans lived in such a world. These are all examples of *prodigies*, signs by which the gods communicated with Rome. A prodigy could be any breach in what the Romans thought was the natural or divinely ordained order of the world – either an aberration in nature, like the birth of a hermaphrodite, or a disaster that affected the Roman state, such as a plague or a terrible defeat in battle. For the Romans, a prodigy was almost always a bad sign, letting them know that the gods were angry.¹⁵

The practice of looking for signs may not seem very extraordinary to us. After all, some people today have their palms read, or examine tea leaves, or obsess over the words of a fortune cookie. What is extraordinary about Rome, though, is that prodigies, these messages from the gods, were not simply chatted about in the kitchens of superstitious old women; they were discussed by the Roman elite on the very floor of the Senate. In Rome, prodigies were not simply a matter of personal concern; they held

¹⁵ Common words for prodigies in Latin are *prodigium*, *ostentum*, *monstrum*, *portentum*, and *miraculum*. Rosenberger (1998) 8 distinguishes the differences in the terms (though these are not always applicable): *ostentum* and *portentum* tend to denote prodigies dealing with inanimate objects, *monstrum* and *miraculum* with animate nature; *prodigium* is a generic term for all types of prodigies. Cicero *de Div.* 1.42 mentions most of these terms: *Quia enim ostendunt, portendunt, monstrant, praedicunt; ostenta, portenta, monstra, prodigia dicuntur.* *Omina*, Rosenberger (1998) 8-9 states, were different from prodigies in that they foretold particular events. *Omina* usually referred to individuals and were signs of particular events, rather than general warnings of the gods' anger toward the State. *Omina* were not expiated. See also Rosenberger (2005) 235.

import for the entire Roman State, and as such were dealt with by the Roman Senate. In fact, a State prodigy was technically defined simply by a decision of the Senate: an event became a prodigy only when the Senate said so.¹⁶

Despite the extraordinary nature of prodigies, the Senate had a fairly standardized routine for dealing with them. Prodigy reports would be collected throughout the year, and delivered to the Senate by a consul or a praetor at the beginning of the next year. Since the prodigies were signs of the gods' anger, the Senate had to determine what action to take to restore the gods' favor to Rome – the *pax deorum*.¹⁷ For the Romans, this meant in almost every case taking ritual action, performing a religious ceremony to please the gods. We call these rituals *expiations* (*procurationes* in Latin). These ceremonies included the introduction of new gods into Rome, the performance of sacrifices, the procession of choruses through the city, and many other rituals. The Senate could order these expiations itself, but it could also turn to one of the expert priesthoods to seek their advice: the *pontifices*, the *haruspices*, or the *duumviri sacris faciundis*.¹⁸ On matters that touched the *pontifices* in particular, such as prodigies occurring in the Regia or concerning the Vestal Virgins, these priests would be consulted. More often, the *haruspices*, experts in the *Etrusca disciplina*, would be brought in from Etruria to advise expiations. But Livy tells us that the most dire prodigies, the ones

¹⁶ We know that some events were not accepted as prodigies by the Senate. Livy 3.10.5-7 tells us that in 461 BC, the speech of a cow was accepted as a prodigy, but the same event was rejected as a prodigy in the previous year. Livy 5.15.1 records that in 398 BC, the Senate rejected several prodigies because there were too few witnesses, and because the Romans were on bad terms with the Etruscans and thus could not seek haruspical advice. Likewise, a palm tree that had sprung up in a basin and a spear that suddenly caught fire were rejected as prodigies in 169 BC (see Livy 43.13.3-8).

¹⁷ The ancient sources rarely use the specific term *pax deorum* in the context of prodigy reporting and expiation, but it is obvious from a passage of Livy that the restoration of the *pax deorum* was the goal of expiation. See Livy 24.11.1, which immediately follows a description of expiatory ceremonies: *Perpetratis quae ad pacem deum pertinebat, de re publica gerendo et quantum copiarum et ubi quaeque essent consules ad senatum rettulerunt*.

¹⁸ These priests were later called the *decemviri sacris faciundis*, then the *quindecimviri*, after their membership was increased in 367 BC and again under Sulla. See below.

considered most threatening to the Roman State, demanded the attention of the *duumviri sacris faciundis*, who read and interpreted the *Libri Sibyllini*, the Sibylline Books.¹⁹

These priests, elite Roman men, were almost always members of the Senate themselves.

A DIFFERENT KIND OF GREEK ORACLE

The Sibylline Books were a collection of oracles written in Greek. Roman legend claimed that the Books had been brought to Rome during the regal period by a foreign Sibyl, a Greek prophetess. They were controlled by the Roman State and consulted only at the behest of the Senate, in regard to prodigies that were deemed relevant to the State. To understand the process of consulting the Sibylline Books, we may examine one fairly typical case from the early 2nd century BC: the consultation of the oracles in 191. In this year, reports came to the Senate of a number of prodigies: at Tarracina and Amiternum, it had rained stones; at Minturnae, the Temple of Jupiter and shops around the Forum had been struck by lightning; at Volturnum, two ships were struck by lightning and burned. As a result of these prodigies, the Senate ordered the *decemviri sacris faciundis* to consult the Sibylline Books, which were housed in Rome at the Capitoline Temple of Jupiter. After applying to the Books, the *decemviri* advised a number of ritual actions: that a fast be held in honor of Ceres every five years; that a nine-day period of sacrifice (*novemdialis*) be conducted; that the people, wearing garlands, take part in a day of public prayer (*supplicatio*); and that the consul P. Cornelius should perform sacrifices to

¹⁹ See Livy 22.9 for the idea that the most dire prodigies were expiated through the Sibylline Books. The Sibylline Books were also called the *Libri Fatales*, or simply *Libri*.

the gods and with the animals that the *decemviri* commanded. After these ceremonies, the consul left for his province.²⁰

Perhaps the best way to grasp the idiosyncrasies of the Sibylline Books in Rome is to contrast the events of 191 BC with consultations of the Greek oracle of Delphi. The famous “wooden walls” oracle provides a perfect comparison. According to Herodotus, after the Battle of Thermopylae, the Athenians awaited the approach of the Persians in terror. They sent ambassadors to consult the Pythia at Delphi to discover the best means of dealing with the Persian threat. She first pronounced dark and foreboding words, but at the insistence of the legates, she offered a more optimistic utterance: the Athenians would find safety behind a wooden bulwark. Back in Athens, the Pythia’s obscure words sparked a great debate. One group, led by the city’s elders, claimed that these wooden walls were the ancient fortifications surrounding the citadel. Another group, which included the rising politician Themistocles, maintained that this oracle referred to the wooden ships of the Athenians, and thus supported a naval encounter. In the end, Themistocles’ argument won out, and the Athenians began building the navy that would help to bring down the Persians.²¹

In comparing the Sibylline oracle of 191 BC with the “wooden walls” prophecy, a number of characteristic features of Sibylline consultations become clear. First, and most obviously, the *Libri Sibyllini* were based on a written collection of oracles, not oracles delivered by a living, raging prophetess – one who could be convinced to soften her words by a persistent delegation. Secondly, while the Delphic oracle could be approached by a number of people, from individuals (even non-Greek kings) to city-

²⁰ See Livy 36.37.2-6 for the account of the prodigies and expiations of 191 BC.

²¹ See Herodotus 7.140-4 for the “wooden walls” oracle.

states (here, Athenians), the Sibylline Books were only consulted for prodigies deemed relevant to the Roman State, and were controlled by the Roman Senate. Thirdly, while the meaning of a Delphic oracle was often a matter of widespread debate, only the priests in charge of the Sibylline Books could actually read and interpret the Books, which were rarely made public. And finally, while the Delphic oracle often gave advice concerning social, political, or military decisions – like how can we defeat the Persians? or even whom should I marry? – the Roman Sibylline oracles gave almost exclusively ritual advice, instructing the Romans on what ceremonies to perform to restore their good relationship with the gods.

The Sibylline Books may have been written in Greek, and the Romans may have attributed them to a foreign Sibyl. But they were nevertheless very Roman. The city of Rome, with its citizens, magistrates, and temples, was the center of Roman expiation. Though prodigies were reported from all over Italy and even other areas of the Mediterranean world, expiation was almost invariably a purely Roman affair. To understand the significance and role of the Sibylline Books, therefore, we need to look at them first and foremost in their Roman context. This chapter investigates this Roman context of the Sibylline Books – their place in the city of Rome, the position of prodigy reporting and expiation in the Roman calendar, the identities of the priests who read the Books, and the oracles' relationship to the Roman State.

THE CAPITOLINE TEMPLE AND THE SIBYLLINE BOOKS

The legend of the introduction of the Sibylline Books to Rome is one of Rome's most charming tales. Dionysius of Halicarnassus, who took his story from Varro, gives

the oldest extant account. He says that a certain woman, a traveler from another land, arrived in Rome with nine books. She offered to sell these to Tarquinius Superbus, the last king of Rome. The king, slow to recognize the significance of the books, refused to buy them and sent the woman away. She returned a short time later, after she had burned three of the nine books. She offered to sell the remaining six to Tarquin at the same price as before. Yet Tarquin, not afraid to repeat a mistake, mocked the woman again. When she left, she burned three more books. She returned a final time and offered to sell the last three to the king at the original price. When the king summoned his augurs to seek their advice, the priests lamented the loss of the six books and advised the king to purchase the remaining three at any cost. Tarquin bought the books, and the woman mysteriously disappeared from sight. The king placed the oracles in the basement of the Capitoline Temple of Jupiter and instituted a new priesthood, the *duumviri sacris faciundis*, to watch over the Books and interpret their oracles. These priests, chosen from the most distinguished men in Rome, served for life. Two public slaves were appointed to assist them.²²

Throughout the Roman Republic, the Sibylline Books stayed hidden in the Capitoline Temple of Jupiter, the imaginative center of Roman society. Traditional Roman stories link the temple and the Books closely together. Both were manifestations of the will of the Tarquins, brought into the city as part of a grand scheme of regal power,

²² The story shows how valuable the Books were, as in the end Tarquin was forced to buy three books at a price that he would not pay for nine. This account comes from Dionysius of Halicarnassus 4.62. Other versions of the story can be found in Lactantius *Div. Inst.* 1.6; Servius *ad Aen.* 3.445, 6.72, and 6.336; Lydus *de Mensibus* 4.47; Isidore of Seville *Etymol.* 8.8; Zonaras 7.11; Pliny *NH* 13.88; Solin 2.16f.; and Aulus Gellius *NA* 1.19. Lactantius, Lydus, and Isidor identify the king as Tarquinius Priscus; Dionysius of Halicarnassus, Zonaras, Pliny, Solin, and Gellius claim that it was Tarquinius Superbus. Lactantius and Dionysius both claim to derive their accounts from Varro, but they name different kings. The story shows how valuable the Books were, as in the end Tarquin was forced to buy three books at a price that he would not pay for nine.

and both were appropriated by Republican Rome as its own State symbols when the last Tarquin fell. When Dionysius of Halicarnassus tells the story of the Books' arrival in Rome, he emphasizes their connection to the Capitoline Temple. He follows the story of the temple's construction with the tale of the Books' arrival in Rome. Dionysius fails to report where the oracles came from (they were delivered by a mysterious old woman), or where they were stored before the dedication of the Capitoline Temple.²³ He only tells us where they finally came to reside – a stone chest in the basement of the temple. Thus in Dionysius' account the Books have no definite origin, and no temporary haven, but only a final destination.²⁴

This vital connection between the Sibylline Books and the Capitoline Temple of Jupiter is not simply a product of Dionysius' imagination. In a religious system in which everything had its proper place, the choice of the Books' location must have been very deliberate. If they were placed in the principal temple of Rome and never even imagined to be located elsewhere, then this basic fact cannot have lacked causes and consequences. To understand the role of the Books in Roman society we need to examine the significance of their location.

When the Elder Tarquin mapped out the foundations of the Capitoline Temple of Jupiter, he displayed a vision that far eclipsed the sites of Rome. According to Tacitus, "King Tarquinius Priscus had vowed it during the Sabine War, and had laid the foundations more in hope of future greatness than in proportion with the modest

²³ According to Dionysius, this dedication occurred in the third year of the Republic.

²⁴ For Dionysius' story of the temple's construction, see Dionysius of Halicarnassus 4.59-61. For the arrival of the Books in Rome, see Dionysius of Halicarnassus 4.62.

resources of the Roman people at the time.”²⁵ Though the matter has long been debated by scholars, recent excavations of the temple prove just how enormous the structure really was.²⁶ The podium, bearing down on the Capitoline’s peak with the weight of stone upon stone, measured an incredible 55 meters by 62 meters. Such a huge temple was an “argument in stone”: it proclaimed the grandeur of Rome and its king in no uncertain terms. The massive platform was required to support the weight of divinity within. Jupiter, Juno, and Minerva each possessed a cella in the temple, Jupiter’s being the largest and central room. Other gods also claimed a spot, including Terminus, Iuventas, and Mars. These deities, prior inhabitants of the Capitoline, had refused to move when asked to relocate to lesser shrines, but instead chose to share this monumental temple with the king of the gods.

Some scholars claim that Tarquin had intended this temple as a pan-Latin sanctuary, a means for the Romans to gain religious and thereby political clout among their neighbors.²⁷ If that was his goal, then his hopes were disappointed. Visitors, standing on the banks of the Tiber or in the markets of Rome, could crane their necks to see the temple towering over the city, but they would never approach the sanctuary to join the Romans in common rite. The temple, funded by conquest, stood not as a symbol of Latin unity, but of Roman economic and military power.

According to legend, the temple’s connection to Rome alone was evident from the outset. When workers were digging the temple’s foundations, they uncovered a divine omen proclaiming the future greatness of Rome. This proclamation came in a gruesome

²⁵ Tacitus *Histories* 3.72: *Voverat Tarquinius Priscus rex bello Sabino, ieceratque fundamenta spe magis futurae magnitudinis quam quo modicae adhuc populi Romani res sufficerent.*

²⁶ See Sommella (1997-8) and Sommella (2000).

²⁷ See Steinby (1993) 1.145.

form: a decapitated head, undecayed and dripping blood as if it had just been removed from its body. Olenus, the *haruspex* who interpreted the omen, said that it heralded power for the State that possessed it, which would become the “head of Italy”. According to this etiological tale, it was from the *caput Oleni* that the Capitoline Hill derived its name.²⁸

Though the Capitoline Temple may have been intended as a symbol of regal power, it was quickly transformed into a symbol of the Republican State upon the expulsion of the kings. Ancient sources could claim that the temple was dedicated only after the Republic began, thus making it wholly Republican.²⁹ Livy even puts the dedication in the Republic’s first year, maintaining that one of Rome’s first consuls, Horatius, conducted the ceremony. Livy’s account of the event underscores the importance of this dedication, as Horatius chose to continue the ceremony even after he had received news of his son’s death.³⁰ Nails hammered into the wall of Minerva’s *cella* counted the years since the Republic’s foundation, so that the very existence of the Republic was driven into the walls and reverberated throughout the temple each year. In the words of Harriet Flower, “Regardless of the historical accuracy of this traditional chronology, it is notable that despite its regal and Etruscan aspects, the Capitoline Temple became most closely identified with Rome as a city and with its characteristic republican culture, as it was to develop over the subsequent centuries.”³¹ Thus the work

²⁸ See Dionysius of Halicarnassus 4.60-61, Pliny *NH* 28.15.16 for the *caput Oleni*.

²⁹ See Livy 2.8, 6.3.8; Polybius 3.22; Tacitus *Hist.* 3.72; Plutarch *Popl.* 14; cf Pliny *NH* 33.19.

³⁰ Livy 2.8: Horatius paused just long enough to order the body carried out for burial, but did not leave his place at the doorpost of the temple.

³¹ Flower in Gardener and Osterloh (forthcoming). The temple became such a symbol of Rome that during the period of Roman colonization, a *Capitolium*, along with a forum, was a common feature for those towns built in the image of Rome.

of the kings was taken over by their conquerors, and became a symbol and safeguard of the power of their new government.

The temple was cluttered with tokens of the gods' favor toward Rome, and symbols of Roman success. Inside, an Etruscan chariot evinced the promise of Rome's great destiny. According to legend, this terracotta chariot had grown miraculously in its kiln, symbolizing thereby the extension of boundaries of the city that possessed it.³² The spoils of victory strewn throughout the temple, including the golden bowls of Camillus which remained in the temple until its destruction in 83 BC,³³ declared the support that the gods had given Rome and whispered the promise that such help would come again. From this temple, the gods kept a watchful eye over the Romans, especially in battle. Even those gods who were in the temple only as guests played special roles in leading the Romans to victory over their enemies. Terminus served to protect and extend Rome's boundaries; Juventas watched over the young men – the soldiers – of Rome; and Mars, of course, the father of the Romans, led his sons in battle.³⁴

In a city where the Senate met on consecrated ground, and the gods received sacrifice from the highest-ranking politicians, the Capitoline Temple was not only a religious center, but also a political one. Each year, when the annual dance of Roman politics began anew, the first steps were taken at the Temple of Jupiter Optimus Maximus. Here, the Senate held its first meeting of the year, and the consuls and praetors

³² For the Etruscan chariot, see Pliny *NH* 28.2.16, Festus 342 L, Plutarch *Publ.* 13.2.4.

³³ For the golden bowls of Camillus, see Livy 6.4. These bowls commemorated victories over the Volscians, the Aequi, and the Etruscans. Livy tells us that the bowls, inscribed with Camillus' name, were placed in the shrine of Jupiter at the feet of a statue of Juno.

³⁴ For Terminus, see Ovid *Fasti* 2.50, 641-84. For Juventas, see Dionysius of Halicarnassus 3.69-70, Livy 5.54.7.

offered their inaugural sacrifices to ensure the gods' favor on their terms of office.³⁵ But it was in matters of war that the temple was most visible. This was where wars began, with a declaration of the Senate. Before leaving to take command of their armies, the consuls and praetors would climb the hill to sacrifice to the gods. Taking their departure from the temple, they would pray to return to it in triumph, wearing the garb of Jupiter Optimus Maximus as the mark of the greatest distinction a Roman man might bear.³⁶ At the temple of Jupiter, rising high above the city on the peak of the Capitoline Hill, the leaders of Rome approached most closely to the gods.

This, then, was the home of the Sibylline Books. On certain days – rare, according to our sources, occurring far less than annually – another pair of elite men, besides consuls and praetors, could be spotted approaching the temple. In their official capacity, these men, the *duumviri sacris faciundis*,³⁷ entered the temple only by order of the Senate, when some dread prodigy compelled the Romans to turn to the Sibylline Books for answers. There, Jupiter, the Roman god of divination *par excellence* before Apollo burst onto the scene, watched over the sacred texts.³⁸

The Books, which advised the Romans on the proper methods of placating the angry gods, traveled a parallel course with the temple itself. Each was a product of the reign of the Tarquins, and each survived beyond the destruction of the throne to become a

³⁵ For the consuls' inaugural sacrifices, see Livy 22.1.6, 41.14.7; Ovid *Fasti* 1.75, 79; Ovid *ex Pont.* 4.4. For Senate meetings on the Capitol, see Cicero *Leg. Agr.* 1.18, *Dom.* 14, *Sest.* 129; Livy 23.31.1, 26.1.1, 30.27.1; Appian *BC* 3.50; Ser. *Aen.* 3.134, 4.201; Lyd. *Mens.* 4.3.

³⁶ For the Senate's declaration of war, see Livy 33.25.7, Appian *BC* 7.5. For the departure of the consuls and praetors for the provinces, see Livy 21.63.9, 42.49.1. For the triumphal vows, see Livy 38.48.16, 45.39.11.

³⁷ In 367 BC, they would become the *decemviri sacris faciundis*. I will discuss the transformation of the priesthood below.

³⁸ See Cicero *de Leg.* 2.20, *Phil.* 13.12 for Jupiter as the god of the augurs (*interpretes Iovis optumi maximi*.) The first temple to Apollo was begun in Rome in 433 BC, advised by the Sibylline Books in expiation of a plague that had ravaged the city. This Apollo, however, was a healer god, not a god of divination. This aspect of the deity was only introduced in Rome much later. See Gagé (1955) for the Apollo cult in Rome.

symbol of the Republican State. Like the temple, the Books were entirely Roman, consulted only in the case of prodigies which the Senate deemed relevant to the Roman State. In other words, Rome never became an Italian Delphi, with an oracle that could be approached by many nations. The messages of the Sibylline Books were intended only for Rome.

This exclusivity magnified the symbolic value of the Books, as they became, like the Capitoline Temple of Jupiter, a pledge of the great destiny of Rome. The Books were a window to the will of the gods, and the temple a doorway to their favor. In the Books, the Romans could find instructions for soothing ruffled divinities; at the temple, they could take action to secure the gods' support. Roman successes bore witness to the effectiveness of their worship and intimated that as long as the temple and the Books survived, Rome's tie to the gods could not be cut.³⁹

It is true that, unlike the huge Capitoline Temple, an architectural behemoth looming high above the city for all to see, the Sibylline Books led a shadowy existence as a repository of knowledge hidden in a stone chest underground. As I will discuss in the next chapter, the Senate jealously guarded this knowledge, realizing that access to the gods meant access to power. The Capitoline Temple, atop Rome's central height, stood as the safest place to guard the Books. Even the Gauls who sacked Rome did not destroy the Books or the temple.⁴⁰ In fact, after the Gauls left, the Romans used the Sibylline Books to purify their city.⁴¹

³⁹ See Flower in Gardener and Osterloh (forthcoming) for the impact in Rome of the destruction of the Capitoline Temple of Jupiter.

⁴⁰ Though this has been debated by modern scholars, there is no literary or archaeological evidence for the destruction of the Capitoline Temple of Jupiter at the time of the Gallic sack.

⁴¹ See Livy 5.50 for the use of the Sibylline Books to restore the *pax deorum* in Rome after the Gallic sack.

During the Republic, the two symbols of Roman power and its communion with the gods always stood together, occupying the same space, and asserting the same claims on divine favor and human respect. Yet in the end, both the temple and the Books would meet the same fate, as the fire of 83 BC would force their ashes to mingle, and the hope of a slow rebirth would rise up from the ruins. It was only after the Republic fell that these two great symbols of the power of the State were irrevocably separated, when Augustus transferred the Books to his new Palatine temple of Apollo. But by this time, the Books no longer stood as a great counsel to the Roman State, so that their move from the most important Republican temple of Rome was simply a physical manifestation of a shift that had already occurred.

THE PRIESTS AND THE BOOKS

The greatest obstacle to the study of Roman republican religion is simply a lack of evidence, yet in regard to Roman prodigy and expiation, we possess an abundance of information. The pages of ancient historians and antiquarians, particularly Livy and his epitomizer Julius Obsequens, are filled with stories of prodigies and expiations; for the period of the Republic, we have more than 150 separate prodigy lists, most of which mention multiple prodigies, and are attested by several sources.⁴² As Rome's most important tool of expiation, the Sibylline Books are featured prominently in these ancient accounts.

Confronted with this wealth of information, the most surprising fact is how little we actually know about the priests who interpreted the Books. Of the three major

⁴² For Obsequens, see Schmidt (1968).

priestly colleges (the *pontifices*, *augures*, and *decemviri*), the *decemviri* is the one of which we are least informed. While we know the identity of 66 pontiffs and 55 augurs for the period of 210-44 BC, we know only 31 decemvirs – about half the number of the other priesthoods.⁴³ And while they frequently offer their expiatory advice in the extant portions of Livy's third, fourth, and fifth decades, we have no idea how they came up with this advice, or what methods they used to interpret the Sibylline Books.

The priesthood, we know, underwent two major transformations during the Roman Republic. First, in 367 BC it was transformed from a two-man post held exclusively by patricians (the *duumviri sacris faciundis*) to a ten-man college divided evenly between patricians and plebeians (the *decemviri sacris faciundis*). This change was initiated by the plebeian tribunes Lucius Sextius Sextinus Lateranus and Gaius Licinius Stolo.⁴⁴ Then, during the late Republic (probably under Sulla), the membership of the priesthood was again increased, this time to 15, and the name of the college was changed to the *quindecimviri sacris faciundis*.⁴⁵ This chapter will only deal with the first two phases of the priesthood (the duumvirate and the decemvirate); the changes under Sulla will be discussed in the fifth chapter of this dissertation.

The Evolution of a Priesthood

Given the poor documentation of the early centuries of Roman history, it is not surprising that so little is known about the priesthood that interpreted the Sibylline Books before 367 BC, the *duumviri sacris faciundis*. Ancient sources identify only two by

⁴³ See Rasmussen (2003) 173-4, Hahm (1963).

⁴⁴ See below for the formation of the decemvirate.

⁴⁵ Cicero *ad Fam.* 8.4 provides the first mention of the *quindecimviri*. It is often assumed that since Sulla increased the pontificate and augurate to fifteen members each, he was also responsible for this modification of the decemviral college.

name: Marcus Atilius, an unfaithful *duumvir* who was killed by Tarquin for copying out Sibylline oracles, and T. Quinctius Cincinnatus Capitolinus, the dictator of 380 BC.⁴⁶

With so little evidence, even the most basic facts about the nature of this priesthood are in doubt. Though the ancient sources imply that it was a permanent priesthood, J. Rüpke has claimed that the *duumviri sacris faciundis* were appointed by the Senate solely on an *ad hoc* basis, to perform rites in the event of dire prodigies.⁴⁷ The name of the priesthood supports this theory, since the Senate often created two-men boards for specific and short-term purposes in the Republic.⁴⁸

The *duumviri sacris faciundis* may have begun as a temporary priesthood, appointed to deal with specific problems. At some point, however, this priesthood must have become permanent. We cannot be certain when this development occurred, or what motivated the change. Since our sources do not mention this shift at all, but instead imply that the priesthood was permanent all along, the change may have taken place very early. The *duumviri sacris faciundis* must have been a permanent college at least before 367 BC, when the priesthood was increased to ten members. For it is hard to imagine such a tremendous and sudden increase in the membership of a priesthood that had

⁴⁶ For M. Atilius, see Dionysius of Halicarnassus 4.62, Val. Max. 1.1.13, Zonaras 7.11.1, and below. See Livy 6.5.8 for T. Quinctius Cincinnatus Capitolinus.

⁴⁷ See Rüpke (2005) under the name T. Quinctius T. f. L. n. Cincinnatus Capitolinus for this theory on the development of the decemvirate.

⁴⁸ For the *duoviri perduellioni iudicandae*, see Cicero *Rab. perd.* 12; Livy 1.26.5, 6.20.12; for the *duoviri aedi dedicandae*, see Livy 2.42.5, 23.21.7, 23.30.14, 23.31.9, 34.53.5, 34.53.7, 36.36.5, 40.34.4; for the *duoviri aedi locandae*, see Livy 7.28.5, 22.33.8, 40.34.6, 40.44.10; for the *duoviri agris dandis assignandis*, see *Lex agr.* (Corp. I² 535 a. 111 a. Chr.) 28, 57, 59, 62, 65, 67, 69, 76, 77, 78, 80, 96; for the *duoviri viis purgandis*, see *Lex Iul. Munic.* (Corp. I² 593 a. 45 a. Chr.) 51; Cass. Dio 54.26.7; for the *duoviri aquae perducendae*, see Frontinus *de Aq.* 6. In several instances, these texts make clear that these two-men boards were established solely for the purposes of the moment.

previously existed only on an *ad hoc* basis. In 367 BC, the priesthood became the largest college in Rome; surely it had at least been a standing college before this date.⁴⁹

Faced with the silence of our sources, these conjectures regarding the early development of the priesthood are simply speculative exercises. Speculation gives way to facts when, in 367 BC, the college experiences a major overhaul. In this year, Livy tells us, the plebeian tribunes Lucius Sextius Sextinus Lateranus and Gaius Licinius Stolo pressed to open the *duumviri sacris faciundis* to the plebeians:

When they had been reelected for the tenth time, the tribunes Sextius and Licinius passed a law requiring that part of the *decemviri sacris faciundis* be chosen from among the plebeians. Five patricians and five plebeians were appointed. It seemed that by this step a path was made to the consulship. Satisfied with this victory, the plebeians yielded to the patricians, with the result that the discussion over the consulship was given up for the time being, and military tribunes were appointed.⁵⁰

According to Livy, this change, which radically transformed the size and make-up of the priesthood, had been conceived in the previous year, but delayed until the army had returned to Rome:

⁴⁹ See Dionysius of Halicarnassus 4.62 for the king's appointment of the first *duumviri*. As Bouché-Leclercq pointed out long ago, the traditional system of cooptation by which the major priestly colleges chose new members would hardly be possible with an enrollment of only two men, since if one of the priests died, the remaining priest would simply choose his next colleague without having to justify his selection to anyone. Perhaps the *duumviri* worked differently from the other priesthoods, being appointed by the Senate rather than chosen through cooptation. See Bouché-Leclercq (1879) 291. Bouché-Leclercq (1879) 292 suggests that the death of both priests was the motivation behind the transformation of the priesthood in 367 BC. However, this would fail to explain both the integration of the college between patricians and plebeians, and the vast increase in membership from two to ten. The other major priesthoods, the pontificate and augurate, each had four members. Surely if the Romans simply wished to ensure the continuity of the college, four would have seemed a more sensible number for the enrollment of the duumvirate.

⁵⁰ Livy 6.42.2-3: *Refecti decumum iidem tribuni, Sextius et Licinius, de decemviris sacrorum ex parte de plebe creandis legem pertulere. Creat quinque patrum, quinque plebis. Graduque eo iam via facta ad consulatum videbatur. Hac victoria contenta plebes cessit patribus ut in praesentia consulum mentione omissa tribuni militum crearentur.* Livy is our only source for the development of the decemvirate, but this should not give us reason to doubt his account, or to impugn the significance of the transformation. Livy is also our only source for the Lex Ogulnia of 300 BC, which opened the pontificate and augurate to plebeians, and was certainly a major religious and political development. See Livy 10.6-9 for the Lex Ogulnia, another result of the action of plebeian tribunes.

When [Sextius and Licinius] saw that speeches of this type were well-received [speeches concerning a power-sharing between patricians and plebeians], they proposed a new measure: that in place of the *duumviri sacris faciundis* ten men would be appointed, and that half of these would be plebeian and half patrician. They deferred voting on all these bills until the return of the army that was besieging Velitrae.⁵¹

The delay in voting marks the significance and divisiveness of the bill, postponed until the army – with all its plebeian soldiers – returned to Rome. Livy must have recognized the fundamental importance of this change, since he mentions the plebiscite twice – first in the account of 368 BC, and then in the events of the following year. The bill renovated the duumviral college in two major ways: the priesthood was divided evenly between patricians and plebeians, and the enrollment of the priesthood was sharply increased from two to ten. Livy's narrative places this transformation of the duumvirate at a critical year in the Conflict of the Orders, the struggle of the plebeian class to gain political power in Rome. In order to understand the shift in this priesthood, we must examine it in the wider context of this conflict.⁵²

The year 367 BC, when the priesthood of the duumvirate was opened to the plebeians, was a crucial time in the Conflict of the Orders. In this year, the plebeian tribunes Lucius Sextius Sextinus Lateranus and Gaius Licinius Stolo restored the consulship and secured plebeian access to the office. Before this time, the consulship had

⁵¹ Livy 6.37.12: *Huius generis orationes ubi accipi videre, novam rogationem promulgant, ut pro duumviris sacris faciundis decemviri creentur ita ut pars ex plebe, pars ex patribus fiat; omniumque earum rogationum comitia in adventum eius exercitus differunt qui Velitras obsidebat.*

⁵² Time and anachronism have cast their long shadows over the Conflict of the Orders, so that it is almost impossible to distinguish historical fact from dramatic legend, the Roman past from the authors' present, in the ancient sources. The surviving accounts of the period derive from historians who lived decades, even centuries, after the conflict had ended. They give us a confused amalgamation of several different conflicts: not only the patrician-plebeian battles over protection, debt, and political participation that raged in the early Republic, but also the optimates-populares struggles that were waged in the late second and early first centuries BC. See Raaflaub Ch. 1 in Raaflaub (2005) for a discussion of the problems of our sources for this period. See Raaflaub Ch. 8 in Raaflaub (2005) for a discussion of the various phases of the Conflict of the Orders.

been supplanted by the consular tribunate, which had a flexible enrollment always higher than two (it was fairly stable at six from the end of the fifth century BC). Plebeians very rarely held this post.⁵³

According to Livy, Sextius and Licinius' battle for plebeian rights had begun much earlier, when they were first elected to the tribunate in 376 BC. Each year, for nine years, the plebeians reelected these tribunes, and each year, for nine years, they failed to achieve their goals. But the entire State felt their presence: for some period during the 370's BC (Livy claims it was five years, Diodorus one⁵⁴), unfilled curule chairs collected dust while the pair obstinately blocked magisterial elections. In their tenth year as tribunes, their efforts finally paid off, and they passed bills on land ownership, debt bondage, and the consulship.⁵⁵ Sextius was the first plebeian to benefit from this Licinio-

⁵³ See Cornell (1995) 336 for a chart with data on the consular tribunate. See Broughton (1951-2) *MRR* I for the names and source citations for all known consuls and consular tribunes of the early Republic. The persistence of the consular tribunate is difficult to explain. Cornell (1995) 336-7: "In all humility we have to admit that we do not know why the new magistracy was instituted, nor what determined the decision to have tribunes rather than consuls in any given year or series of years." It may be that the Romans saw an advantage in having more generals, with consular tribunes left to look after the city while the army was away (serving perhaps the function of the later praetors). One of the most difficult questions concerning the consular tribunate is why it was favored by the patricians and resented by the plebeians. Plebeians certainly had access to this post, as their rare but definite elections proved. But it hardly gave them a significant share in the government. It may be that the tribunate was a post of lesser power and responsibility than the consulship. One indication of this is the fact that no consular tribunes ever celebrated a triumph (Zonaras 7.19.5). For a discussion of the power of the consular tribunes, see Richard (1992) 239ff., Sealey (1959) 529, Badian (1990) 469, and Linderski (1990) 45.

⁵⁴ Livy 6.34ff., Diodorus 15.75. The discrepancy is likely due to the holes in the magisterial *fasti* for this period, which led Livy or his source to offer the intervention of the tribunes as an explanation for the list's incompleteness.

⁵⁵ There is some confusion over their legislation. Livy maintains that Sextius and Licinius secured a guaranteed consular position for the plebeians each year, yet in several years after 355 BC patricians again managed to occupy both consulships. His later account of the Lex Genucia of 342 BC confuses the issue further. Although he claims that this law allowed the plebeians to hold both consulships, they did not in fact attain this honor until 172 BC – 170 years later! Other literary sources confirm that 367 BC was a critical year in the plebeian movement. The confusion probably derives from the desire of Livy or his sources to enhance the significance of the Licinio-Sextian legislation, possibly resulting from their own failure to perceive the tremendous gravity of the tribunes' actual accomplishments. The consular *fasti* show that after this date the consulship was restored, and plebeians were repeatedly elected to the office – no small feat for a pair of plebeian tribunes. Their overhaul of the duumvirate may also be accepted as historically accurate; such an innovation would have been clearly evident in the priestly lists. See Cornell (1970).

Sextian plebiscite, serving as consul in 366 BC.⁵⁶ His partner in legislation, Licinius, became consul shortly thereafter.⁵⁷

The opening of the consulship was the culmination of the plebeian movement of Sextius and Licinius, marking the end of their ten-year run as tribunes and the beginning of the next phase of their political careers. But it was not their first incursion into the patrician monopoly of power. To many Romans, the complete transformation of the priesthood that interpreted the Sibylline Books, which the sources say had a history even longer than the consulship, must have been as startling as the reform of the consulship. In Rome, not only did the patricians maintain a strict monopoly on all the major priesthoods, but stability was also a fundamental characteristic of Roman religion. Members of priestly colleges served for life, and their system of cooptation ensured that no new members could enter a college without the group's approval. The mixing of plebeians and patricians – two groups set apart by birth – must have seemed antithetical to the system of consensus which held priestly colleges together.⁵⁸

The disruption in the duumvirate was unprecedented and at the time unparalleled, since the two other major colleges – the *pontifices* and the *augures* – remained unchanged.⁵⁹ As a result, their membership (four in each college⁶⁰) was substantially

⁵⁶ For Sextius' consulship, see Livy 7.1.2, Diod. 15.82.1, *Fast. Cap.*, Chr. 354 (Mamercino et Laterano), Plut. *Cam.* 42.5, Cassiod.; cf. *Fast. Hyd.* and *Chr. Pasc.* on 365; Degrassi 32f., 104, 398f; Broughton (1951-2) *MRR* I.

⁵⁷ Sources differ on the date of Licinius' consulship. For 364 BC, see Livy 7.2.1, Diod. 15.95.1, *Fast. Cap.*, Val. Max. 2.44, Plutarch *RQ* 107. For 361 BC see Diod. 16.6.1 (who thus has Licinius serving two consulships within a few years' time), *Fast. Cap.*, Broughton (1951-2) *MRR* I.

⁵⁸ Cicero *ad Fam.* 3.10 claims that no one who was an enemy of any member of the augural college could be appointed augur. If the same guideline for cooptation applied in 367 BC, this meant that the patricians and plebeians who held the decemvirate could not be enemies.

⁵⁹ There were only three major priestly colleges in Rome until 196 BC, when the *tresviri epulones* (later the *septemviri epulones*) were created. For these four colleges, see Mon. Anc. 2.16, Suetonius *Aug.* 100, Cass. Dio 53.1.5, *Fasti Praenesti* 17 Jan. (CIL 6.903.921, 5.6416, 2.2062). Augustine tells us in *CD* 6.3 that Varro's *Ant.* was arranged according to the three original priestly colleges, the *pontifices*, the *augures*, and

lower than that of the newly constituted *decemviri*. Only in 300 BC did these colleges follow the precedent of the *decemviri*, increasing their numbers by admitting plebeian members. After these latter changes, the constitution of each of the three colleges remained stable for two more centuries; only Sulla, who never balked from change, would disrupt the priesthoods again.

According to Livy, the creation of the decemvirate in 367 BC was a crucial step in the plebeians' rise to power, but his interpretation raises more questions than it answers. He claims that the integration of the priesthood cleared the plebeians' path to the consulship, but he fails to explain the tribunes' interest in this expiatory priesthood. Was the duumvirate of special importance to the plebs, or was it of small value to the patricians? Did the plebeians fear that the patrician *duumviri sacris faciundis* would attempt to block their legislation on the consulship?⁶¹ Did they feel a special tie to this priesthood? It was through the duumvirs, after all, that the patron goddess of the plebs – Ceres – had been brought to Rome.⁶² Or was the change driven instead by the patricians,

the *decemviri*. See Vanggaard (1988), Beard and North (1990), and Szemler (1972) for general studies of Roman priesthoods.

⁶⁰ The numbers of the pontifical college are debated, confused by the question of the inclusion or exclusion of the *pontifex maximus* himself in the roll of the college. Hahn (1963) 73 adds one to the membership of the pontifical college, claiming that there were nine *pontifices* after 300 BC. After the Lex Ogulnia of 300 BC, five of the nine augurs and four of the eight pontiffs were plebeian. See Livy 10.6-9.

⁶¹ According to Livy, the priesthood had turned against the plebeians before. In 461 BC, a Sibylline warning against civil strife was allegedly used to block the plebeian tribunes' Terentilian law, intended to outline the rights and powers of the consuls. However, this account is obviously not historical, since the Books make a prophecy that simply coincides too closely to the events of the following year. See Livy 3.10 for this prophecy. In 399 BC, the Senate claimed that a plague expiated by the Books was caused by the gods' displeasure with the election of plebeian consular tribunes. As a result, no plebeians were elected to this office in the following year. (Livy 5.13-14) Yet in this case, it is the Senate, not the duumviri, who offer an anti-plebeian interpretation. Thus there is no strong evidence for the use of the Sibylline Books against the plebs, though given the nature of our sources for early Roman history, nothing can be refuted with certainty.

⁶² For the temple of Ceres see Dionysius of Halicarnassus 6.17.2-3, Pliny *NH* 35.154.

who were willing to give up their sole share in the duumvirate in order to retain their power in the other major priesthoods, the pontificate and the augurate?⁶³

Regardless of the reasons behind the change, the creation of the decemvirate was a crucial moment in Roman history: it helped to define a new republic. The reformed college became a microcosm of the emerging ruling class in Rome, the *nobiles*, composed of elite patrician and plebeian families. For the first time in Roman history, the plebeians could lead the Romans in maintaining the welfare of the state, and securing the favor of the gods toward Rome. They could claim a role in the State's relation to the divine, and thus refute any religious arguments against their holding the consulship.⁶⁴ In this new republic, the plebeians took a step toward full integration in the Roman community, acting on behalf of the city in maintaining the *pax deorum*, and directing the citizens in ceremonies of restoration. They had a share of the power, being entrusted with the preservation of the State's most holy books, and working alongside the Senate in restoring divine favor toward Rome. The decemvirate thus stood as a priesthood through which community was built and fostered, and peace could be secured within Rome. The

⁶³ Perhaps it is significant here that the *duumviri* dealt with foreign oracles and often introduced foreign rites, while the *pontifices* and *augures* were quintessentially Roman priesthoods. Certainly the augurate and pontificate were more esteemed in later periods. However, any difference in the value of the major priesthoods in the later period may be due to the long patrician ownership of the augurate and pontificate. During the 67 years after the duumvirate was opened to the plebeians, the value of the other two major priesthoods may have increased as a result of patrician exclusivity. We possess archaeological evidence for this sort of patrician elitism: the sarcophagus of P. Cornelius Scapola. The sarcophagus, discovered in a Scipionic tomb in 1956, is inscribed with only one honorific title: *pontifex maximus* (See Pisani Sartorio 1988). Since it is very unlikely that anyone who rose to such a high religious rank would have held no magistracies, the inscription was probably intended as one last statement of Scapola's patrician superiority: he was appointed chief pontiff at a time when only patricians served in the college. Thus the relative importance of the priesthoods in later times may have little to do with their importance in the early Republic. In addition, it should be noted that the plebeians were not pulling punches at this time: they were aiming for the consulship, the highest magistracy of the State, and thus may not have been inclined to settle for the duumvirate just because it was the least important priestly college.

⁶⁴ See Livy 6.41 for the religious arguments against the plebeians' holding the consulship, which center upon their inability to hold the auspices.

college was a harbinger of change, in which innovation was welcome. I shall show in my third chapter other ways in which this innovatory spirit was made manifest.

The Priests in Action

Most of the *duumviri* and later the *decemviri sacris faciundis*, whether patrician or plebeian, would have been members of the Senate, and many would have held a consulship at some point in their lives. As has already been shown, we know the identities of only two *duumviri*: Marcus Atilius, a priest during the regal period who was executed by Tarquin; and T. Quinctius Cincinnatus Capitolinus, dictator of 380 BC. We are likewise ill-informed of the identities of the early *decemviri*, of whom we know only two before 218 BC, when the Second Punic War and Livy's third decade began: M. Aemilius Numida and M. Livius Salinator.⁶⁵ Unfortunately, we do not know the names of any of the priests who served between 367 BC, when the decemvirate was opened to the plebeians, and 300 BC, when the pontificate and augurate were integrated. If we were better informed, we might see that this priesthood served as an important means of designating rising political leaders, especially among plebeians, who did not have the opportunity to serve in the other priestly colleges until 300 BC.

For the better documented period after 218 BC, it appears that the *decemviri* may have been the least significant of the major priesthoods. In comparison with the pontificate and the augurate, the ancient sources record the names of fewer *decemviri* for

⁶⁵ M. Aemilius Numida and M. Livius Salinator are listed as *decemviri* who helped to direct the Ludi Saeculares in 236 BC. This celebration was invented by Augustan antiquarians (see Ch. 6 below), but the identities of the priests may be accurate for this year. See CIL I 1² p. 29. M. Aemilius Numida may be the same *decemvir* who died in 211 BC (Livy 26.23.7; Astin 1972 23). Palmer believes that M. Livius Salinator was the consul of 219 and 207 BC. If he was priest in 236 BC, he was very young, about 18 years old.

the period of the Republic, despite their larger enrollment after 367 BC.⁶⁶ Of those who are identified, fewer are of consular rank. In fact, in his study of the priestly lists for 218-167 BC, Hahm placed the three major priesthoods in the following order of descending importance: augurate, pontificate, and decemvirate. His conclusions were based upon the magisterial rank of the holders of the priesthoods, their estimated ages at the time of their appointment, and the degree to which the priesthood might have served as a stepping stone to higher political offices.⁶⁷ Though scholars may disagree on the order of the first two priesthoods, no one would be likely to argue that the decemvirate was most important.

Just as the identities of the priests are mostly unknown, so the activities of the *duumviri sacris faciundis* are often obscure. The vagueness of their title – “the two men in charge of the rituals to be performed” – does little to clarify the priests’ actions. Certainly, their primary function was to interpret the Sibylline Books. The Books were central to the priesthood; in Dionysius’ legend of the origins of the college, the Books precede the priests. The *duumviri* consulted these oracles only at the request of the Senate to identify the religious ceremonies necessary to expiate a prodigy. But we are completely in the dark about the process by which the priests chose the correct oracle. It was certainly more than random selection; since specific expiations often corresponded to specific types of prodigies, experience and precedent must have played a part in the priests’ decisions.⁶⁸ Furthermore, the one Sibylline oracle that we have extant from before the fire of 83 BC specifies the type of prodigy – the birth of a hermaphrodite – to

⁶⁶ Rasmussen (2003) 173-4. Ancient sources also treat the *decemviri* less often than the other priests (Rasmussen 176).

⁶⁷ Hahm (1963)

⁶⁸ The birth of a hermaphrodite, for example, was often expiated by a hymn and procession of 27 maidens. See Ch. 2 below.

which the rituals reply. Thus some prodigies could be matched with specific types of expiations, and specific oracles. Others, however, would have been more obscure: who could have guessed, for example, that the rains of stone in 205 BC, a prodigy that was typically expiated by the *novemdialis*, would have required the introduction of the Oriental goddess Magna Mater?

Our ignorance of the process by which the *duumviri* chose their oracle underscores our general ignorance of the composition of the Sibylline Books. Vergil describes the Sibyl's oracles as words written on leaves.⁶⁹ Perhaps the true Roman collection was a disorganized assembly of scraps of paper, from which the priests chose new oracles when they were uncertain about how to proceed. John Scheid, on the other hand, proposes that the priests may have taken a more active approach to the consultation of the Books, extracting lines from the texts and composing oracles based upon an acrostic framework.⁷⁰ The resulting oracles, then, would have been of the priests' own authorship, based on a "Sibylline" framework. However, this theory is entirely speculative; there is no firm evidence for this method of consultation.

The work of the priests went beyond the simple choice of oracles. They often had a part in directing the ceremonies that they recommended. In 217 BC, for example, the *decemviri* supervised a *lectisternium* to ensure its proper performance. In 436 and 225 BC, they dictated to the people the words of an expiatory prayer. Yet though the *decemviri* often directed such ceremonies, this supervisory role was not set in stone. In 218 BC, it was the praetor who made vows on behalf of the people. In 174 BC, the

⁶⁹ Vergil *Aen.* 6.74-5: *Foliis tantum ne carmina manda/ne turbata volent rapidis ludibria ventis*. See also Phlegon *Mirab.* 10 ln. 42: Ἐν πετάλοισιν ἔμοις.

⁷⁰ See Scheid (1998).

pontifex Marcius Philippus dictated the formula of a vow that had been advised by the *decemviri*.⁷¹ The rules for expiation were never hard and fast.

In addition to their supervisory function, the *decemviri* sometimes took a very active role in the ceremonies that they advised. In 461 BC, they offered expiatory sacrifices; in 217 BC, they sacrificed in the forum of Ardea; in 207 BC, they wore laurel garlands and purple-bordered togas and took part in a ceremonial procession; in 190 BC, they offered unweaned animals by night; in 167 BC, they sacrificed fifty goats in the Roman Forum; and in 133 BC, they offered victims to Ceres at Enna in Sicily. In 212 BC, the *decemviri* performed sacrifices according to the *Graecus ritus*, by the advice of the *Carmina Marciana*.⁷² But again, there was a high degree of variation in expiatory ceremonies. Often, it was the consuls or other magistrates who offered expiatory sacrifices, and other priests and part or all of the Roman community were involved in the ceremonies. The advice of the *decemviri* displayed a remarkable flexibility.

Furthermore, the *decemviri* may have played a broad advisory role in the acceptance or rejection of oracles. In 213 BC, the urban praetor conducted a search for private oracles among the populace. One of these oracles, the *Carmina Marciana*, was presented to the Senate. The oracle advised that games be held to Apollo. After hearing the words of the oracle, the Senate ordered the *decemviri* to consult the Sibylline Books

⁷¹ For the *lectisternium* of 217 BC, see Livy 22.9-10; for the *obsecratio* of 436 BC, see Livy 4.21.5 and Orosius 2.13.8; for the ceremonies of 225 BC, see Plutarch *Marc.* 3, Dio 12 (Zon. 8.19), Orosius 4.13.3, Pliny *NH* 28.12 and 30.3.12, and Livy 22.57.6; for the vows of 218 BC, see Livy 21.62, Val. Max. 1.6.5, and Dio 13 (Zon. 8.22.5); for the prayer of 174 BC, see Livy 41.21.10-13, Obsequens 10, and Pliny *NH* 2.99.

⁷² For the ceremonies of 461 BC, see Livy 3.10.5-7, Dionysius of Halicarnassus 10.2.2-6, Pliny *NH* 2.147, Val. Max. 1.6.5, Lydus *de Ost.* 6; for the sacrifice at Ardea, see Livy 22.1.8-20, Plutarch *Fab.* 2, Macrobius *Sat.* 1.6.13-14, Orosius 4.15.1, and Val. Max. 1.6.5; for the procession of 207 BC, see Livy 27.37.4-15; for the night-time sacrifices of 190 BC, see Livy 37.3.1-6, Obsequens 1; for the sacrifice in the Roman Forum, see Livy 45.16.5-6, Obsequens 11; for the ceremonies in Sicily, see Obsequens 27a, Cicero *Verr.* 2.4.108, Val. Max. 1.1.1, Lact. *Inst. Div.* 2.4.29, Diod. 34/35 frg. 10; for the rites of 212 BC, see Livy 25.12; Macrobius *Sat.* 1.17, 25-30; Cicero *Div.* 1.115; Servius *ad Aen.* 6.70.72; Dio 15 (Zon. 9.1).

about these ceremonies. After the *decemviri* had examined the Books and reported their findings to the Senate, the Senate decided to conduct the games as they advised.⁷³

Finally, the *decemviri* may have had some role in supervising the cults and rites that were introduced by the Sibylline Books. Among the prodigies he lists for 98 BC, Julius Obsequens mentions that while the *decemviri* were offering sacrifices in the temple of Apollo, no head was found on the victim's liver, and a snake was seen at the altar. Obsequens' prodigy lists are notoriously incomplete, and this sacrifice may have been part of an expiatory ceremony that he failed to indicate. But it is possible, since Apollo's temple had been built by the advice of the Sibylline Books in 433 BC, that the *decemviri* were offering sacrifice at the temple as part of a continued program of supervision of the cult. Much later evidence may point in this direction: under the empire, the college was involved in the appointment of Magna Mater's priests in the colonies.⁷⁴ The Romans had welcomed Magna Mater to Rome by the recommendations of the Sibylline Books at the end of the Second Punic War, and the college's involvement in the cult in later centuries may indicate a long-term association with the cults that the Sibylline Books had introduced.⁷⁵

A QUESTION OF TIMING: EXPIATION AND THE ROMAN CALENDAR

Among Roman historians, the Beard-North-Price conception of Roman religion as a 'religion of place' – in which the physical location of Rome, its temples and landmarks, were central to Roman religious beliefs and practices – is by now widely known. In this

⁷³ See Livy 25.12; Macrobius *Sat.* 1.17, 25-30; Cicero *Div.* 1.115; Servius *ad Aen.* 6.70.72; Dio 15 (Zon. 9.1) for the *Carmina Marciana*. For the acceptance of new oracles in Rome, see North (2000).

⁷⁴ Scheid (2003) 123.

⁷⁵ For the *quindecimviri* as priests of Apollo, see Livy 10.8.2, Plutarch *Cat. Min.* 4; for their role in the cult of Magna Mater, see Lucan 1.599, Statius *Silvae* 1.2.176. See also Parke (1988) 212.

section, I will present Roman religion as not simply a religion of place, but also a religion of time. The significance of the calendar to Roman religion, and of religion to the Roman calendar, is well known. Yet by examining the timing of prodigy reporting and expiation at Rome, I hope to prove that even those religious acts that were not inscribed on the calendar could have their own particular place in the year. First, I will show that although prodigies could occur at any time during the year, they were expiated predominantly at the beginning of the year before the new consuls left for their provinces. Then, I will examine the practical and ideological implications of this timing.

One of the details of Livy's prodigy lists which is most open to question is the timing of expiations. In his first decade, prodigies and their expiations generally have no specific chronological place in the year. Instead, they are typically placed at the end of the year's account as part of a list of events that occurred at some point during the course of that year. In the extant portion of his later decades – years for which Livy's sources would have been more reliable – the expiation of prodigies is almost always set at the beginning of the year. Of the 52 years recorded in Books 21-45, Livy assigns expiations to 40 years. Some years see multiple expiations, but almost all of them – 36 out of 40 – have an expiation at the beginning of the year. Unlike in the first decade, Livy makes clear that these are not intended to be summary lists of the year's prodigies and expiations, disconnected from the chronological narrative. Instead, they hold a particular place in time, as part of the beginning-of-the-year duties to be performed before the consuls left for their provinces.⁷⁶

⁷⁶ Livy 32.29.1: *Priusquam consules praetoresque in provincias proficiscerentur, prodigia procurari placuit* . . . ("Before the consuls and praetors set out for their provinces, it was decided that the prodigies should be expiated.")

This pattern is surprising for two reasons. First, it implies that prodigies, signs of the gods' displeasure with the Romans, were collected throughout the course of the year, and their expiation delayed until the beginning of the next year. Second, the expiatory ceremonies – the rituals performed to regain the favor of the gods – frequently hindered the consuls' departure to their provinces, delaying them from performing their most important task of leading the Roman army in battle.⁷⁷

These effects are so startling that many scholars believe Livy's placement of expiation to be historically inaccurate, intended to give a false impression of high systematization in the Roman government and to paint a flattering portrait of the religious piety of the Romans.⁷⁸ From a literary point of view, it allows Livy to get all of the year's prodigies out of the way at the start of the year, so that he does not have to interrupt the narrative further with separate accounts of each prodigy and its expiation.

In his book on *The Origins of the Annalistic Tradition*, Bruce Frier sets this practice of placing expiation at the start of the year firmly within the annalistic tradition. Frier identifies a number of events that mark the transition between Livy's years. Among these are the entry of magistrates into office, the allotment of provinces and voting of troops, the expiation of prodigies, the reception of embassies, and the consuls' departure for the provinces. He argues that some elements of this pattern, including the placement of expiations, are more a matter of annalistic convention than a reflection of historical reality. He proposes that this convention may be traced back to Fabius Pictor.⁷⁹

⁷⁷ Flamininus himself was delayed before departing for the Macedonian War: *Consulem T. Quinctium . . . properantem in provinciam prodigia nuntiata atque eorum procuratio Romae tenuerunt*. ("The announcement of prodigies and their expiation held the consul Titus Quinctius in Rome when he was trying to hurry to his province.") (Livy 32.9.1)

⁷⁸ See, for example, Frier (1979) and Rawson (1971).

⁷⁹ Frier (1979) 272ff.

Elizabeth Rawson offered further evidence against Livy's timing of expiations, citing the inconvenience of detaining the consuls from their provinces, and the perceived need to expiate prodigies when they occurred. The strongest support for her argument comes from Cicero's *de Haruspicum Responsis*. Written in 56 BC, the speech concerns the interpretation of a prodigy by the *haruspices*. Through various chronological clues in the text, we know that the expiation of this prodigy occurred during the course of the year, and not at the beginning.⁸⁰

Yet two important objections may be raised to using this passage to discredit Livy's timing. First, even in Livy, the timing of prodigy reporting at the beginning of the year is only a significant trend; he includes exceptions in his own text. Thus one exception from Cicero hardly refutes Livy's general timing. Second, one cannot understand the expiations of the middle Republic based upon Cicero's own experience: Cicero, like Livy, lived in a dramatically different world, the Rome of the post-Sullan era. After Sulla, the consuls stayed in the city year-round, and thus their departure for war offered no pretense for the performance of expiatory ceremonies at the beginning of the year.⁸¹

Cicero's testimony does not, therefore, refute Livy's accounts of expiation, but what about the other annalists? The line between literary fiction and historical reality is impossible to draw, yet we have little reason to doubt the accuracy of Livy's claims here. In fact, if his placement of prodigies at the beginning of the year derives from a long annalistic tradition, as Frier suggests, we may find Livy's account even more trustworthy, since it would be drawn from authors who had first-hand knowledge of republican

⁸⁰ Rawson (1971) 158-9. See Lenaghan (1969) for Cicero's *de Haruspicum Responsis*.

⁸¹ Rawson (1971) 159 also notes this difference between the age of Cicero and the middle Republic.

expiatory practices. Furthermore, the typical sequence of events in which Livy places prodigies is by no means unbelievable. We know, in fact, that elections *were* held at the end of the year, consuls took office at the beginning of the next year, and then they departed for their provinces. The administrative tasks that Livy places between their election and departure are all in line with the consuls' preparations for departure and their rare presence in the city.

I see no reason to doubt Livy's placement of expiation at the beginning of the year. But why does this timing matter? The rich evidence that we possess for Roman expiation is wasted unless we locate its ritual context, and the timing of the rituals is a crucial part of this context. In the remainder of this section I will show why expiating at the beginning of the year would have been both more practical and more meaningful than expiating prodigies when they occurred.

A practical advantage of this timing is that the ceremonies would have been less disruptive to Roman political life. In the first place, it would limit the number of days in which expiatory ceremonies would be performed, and thus would be less restrictive to public business throughout the year. A single year could see ten or more prodigies. Expiating these together would have reduced the demands on the senate, the priests, and the people, who were frequently asked to participate in days of public prayer. In addition, removing prodigies from the chronological context of their occurrence reduced the opportunities for manipulating their interpretations for political purposes, which we see several times in the later Republic. In other words, if the expiation were disconnected from the chronological setting of the prodigy, it would be much more difficult for anyone to tie the omen to a particular event through its expiation.

Furthermore, the expansion of Roman power and interests created a need for greater organization. Annual wars in increasingly distant areas meant that the consuls spent very little time in the city of Rome. Thus if the Senate desired consular participation in expiatory rituals – either as performants or observers – the beginning of the year was the best time to schedule them. One or both consuls were already expected to remain in the city for some time in order to perform administrative business and to lead the Latin Festival. In addition, the expansion of Roman territory created a subsequent expansion in the area from which prodigies might be reported, and a higher number of prodigies to be expiated each year.⁸² The simultaneous expiation of a number of prodigies would reduce the amount of time required for these ceremonies.

We can see several reasons, then, why this custom of expiation at the start of the year might have been very practical. It caused limited social and political disruption during the year, and it contributed greater organization to an increasingly complex governmental system. Yet everyone knows that practicality is not the only driving force behind religion, even Roman religion. To the Romans, a prodigy was almost always a bad thing, communicating the anger of the gods and the threat of coming danger. A logical objection, therefore, to the expiation of prodigies together at the start of the year, is that this allowed the prodigy – the sign of the gods’ anger – to go “untreated” for

⁸² There are some clues, in fact, that the Romans’ expanded areas of interest, and increased military and political responsibilities, led to the establishment of the beginning of the year as a time for expiations. During the course of the ten books and 75 years of Livy’s lost second decade, the Roman prodigy and expiation system expanded to include all of Italy, and the timing of prodigies became set at the beginning of the year. This may simply be a result of the unreliability of Livy’s sources for the very early period, but it is possible that it represents a real historical shift. We can speculate about when this change took place. Obsequens’ epitome of Livy may offer a clue. His decision to begin his compilation with 249 BC may be the result of the standardization of Livy’s prodigy reports at this time. A third century BC date for this increased systematization would fit in well with our knowledge of Roman history, corresponding to Rome’s emergence as a dominant power in Italy and the Mediterranean. The pressures of an expanded empire led to the fixed date of the consuls’ entry into office in 223 BC; the same pressures could very well have elicited a greater organization in the expiation of prodigies. See Beard, North, and Price (1998) 38.

possibly several months. However, I would argue that the assurance that the prodigy *would* be expiated, like the assurance that a vow *would* be fulfilled, was generally enough to assuage the gods' anger.

Roman time, after all, was far different from our own. For example, in 217 BC, at one of the lowest points in their war against Hannibal, the Romans vowed a *ver sacrum*, the offering of all the livestock born in a particular spring, to be fulfilled if the gods preserved the Roman State for five years. This vow was not fulfilled until 195 BC, 21 years after it was made. Likewise, aberrations in the Roman calendar meant that agricultural festivals would not necessarily take place at the correct moment in the year – during harvest, for instance. But John North explains that this was not necessarily a great problem in Roman religion:

Meanwhile, the whole case depends on the assumption that the Romans were very simple-minded or 'primitive' in their conception of the relation between religious act and agricultural process; if one is to believe that the precise date of the religious act is essential to the relationship, one must say also that if the act were not performed at the right moment, the crops would die, the harvest fail, or the stored grain rot. Nothing known to us about the Romans and their gods suggests that this was true; what we should rather expect is that the gods would stay favourable provided the ritual was properly performed at the time prescribed by the priests, following tradition and rule.⁸³

In the same way, the knowledge that prodigies would be expiated by the priests at the proper time and in the proper way may have been enough to assure the Romans that the favor of the gods would continue.

Furthermore, one of Livy's prodigy lists reveals that the reporting and expiation of prodigies could be granted some flexibility in order to maintain religious and social order. According to Livy, in 193 BC, before the consuls left for their provinces,

⁸³ North (1996) 603

earthquakes were reported as a prodigy so frequently that the people grew tired of the *feriae* required to expiate them. Senate meetings could not be held, and public business could not be conducted, because the consuls were too busy with expiations. In order to limit the holidays, the Senate authorized the consuls to issue a decree, that on a day on which a holiday was already being performed for one earthquake, no other earthquakes could be reported.⁸⁴ Thus we see that religious practices could be sacrificed to practical concerns.⁸⁵

By expiating at the start of the year, the Romans made clear that the rituals looked forward rather than backward – that the ceremonies were performed for the purpose of obtaining the gods' favor for the year. By expiating prodigies outside the context of their occurrence, the Romans took the emphasis away from the negative event of the prodigies themselves, and placed it on the positive action of expiation, which, through the diligence of the performants, was virtually always successful in obtaining the gods' favor. If all prodigies are expiated "en masse" at the beginning of the year, the emphasis is placed more on the expiation than on the prodigies themselves, which become simply divine "objections duly noted" during the course of the year and addressed only in a yearly full-out cathartic ritual. Placed at the beginning of the year and timed on the same rhythm as

⁸⁴ Livy 34.55.1-5: *Principio anni quo L. Cornelius Q. Minucius consules fuerunt terrae motus ita crebri nuntiabantur ut non rei tantum ipsius sed feriarum quoque ob id indictarum homines taederet; nam neque senatus haberi neque res publica administrari poterat sacrificando expiandoque occupatis consulibus. Postremo decemviris adire libros iussis, ex responso eorum supplicatio per triduum fuit. coronati ad omnia pulvinaria supplicaverunt edictumque est ut omnes qui ex una familia essent supplicarent pariter. item ex auctoritate senatus consules edixerunt ne quis, quo die terrae motu nuntiato feriae indictae essent, eo die alium terrae motum nuntiaret. provincias deinde consules prius, tum praetores sortiti.*

⁸⁵ It is noteworthy, however, that the Senate could not ignore a prodigy once it was reported. In 193 BC, the Senate could order a hold on the reporting of prodigies, not their expiation, in order for the consuls to be able to continue with their own business. This does not mean, however, that *all* prodigies had to be expiated immediately; it is significant that these earthquakes occurred in the time after the consuls took office, but before they left for their provinces. This was the crucial period for expiation.

political life, this ultimate expiation assumes itself an intensely "portentous" character for the fate of the Roman state.

The act of expiation was thus fundamentally positive. The timing of the ceremonies gave the consuls and the priests the chance to clean the slate, to give the State its annual tune-up, before the consuls went off to war. In the end, the rituals were not only a method of gaining the gods' favor, but also a means of verifying or proving it. When the ceremonies had been performed, and the outcome of the sacrifices had been favorable, the Romans could have full confidence in the gods' blessings on their year.

The consuls' involvement in expiatory ceremonies emphasized their role as religious leaders in Rome, and their responsibility for their own year in office. If a consul failed in his martial duties, his failure could be attributed to impiety. If he achieved the pinnacle of success, he would ride through the city in the garb of Jupiter Optimus Maximus. For the Romans religion played a key role in the success or failure of a consul, and his participation in religious rituals offered an important means of expressing his piety toward the gods.

The performance of these expiations at the beginning of the year, which had the potential to delay the consul's departure for his province, provided him with the opportunity to express not just his piety toward the gods, but also his acceptance of his position within the Roman political system. The importance of this expression is illustrated in the story of Gaius Flaminius, the consul defeated at Trasimene. Livy tells us that Flaminius, fearful of being delayed in Rome by the auspices or Latin Festival, took office in his province, and thus failed to perform the proper religious ceremonies of the new consul. This was viewed as an act of hostility not only toward the gods whom he

neglected, but also toward the Senate.⁸⁶ By refusing to perform these ceremonies and subject himself to the Senate's authority – and the authority of the *mos maiorum* with which all Romans had been educated – Flaminius revealed a fatal flaw in his personality: he was too independent. The performance of expiatory rituals was a way for the consuls to express their acceptance of higher authorities – not only the gods, but also the Republican system – even at the potential cost of their own glory in the provinces.

In conclusion, even though it is impossible to prove definitively the historical veracity of any ancient source, I hope to have demonstrated some of the interesting implications of Livy's narrative as we have it. It is especially important to examine those shown features of Roman religion that we do not easily understand. This may give us powerful clues to the interrelation between religion and politics in Rome, and the relationship between the Romans and their gods.

CONCLUSION

In this chapter, I have painted a picture of the Sibylline Books in their Roman context, describing the location of the Books in Rome, the identity of the priests who read them, and the synchronicity of prodigy and expiation with the Roman political calendar. I hope to have demonstrated that, despite the “foreign” character of the Sibylline Books, they were rooted in a quintessentially Roman context, being placed in the most important temple of the State, interpreted by elite Roman men who were typically also senators, and consulted at the beginning of the Roman political year.

The “Romanness” of these oracles may be evidenced in the inscription of the *Lex Ursonensis*. This text discusses the creation of two local priesthoods in the *colonia*

⁸⁶ Livy 21.63

Genetiva Iulia, founded under Julius Caesar: *pontifices* and *augures*.⁸⁷ The *quindecimviri* are not mentioned. This priesthood, it seems, could not exist outside Rome; the Books by which it operated never left the city, and they could not be copied. While prodigies occurred all over Italy, the reports were carried to Rome, and Roman expiation was focused on the city itself. In the next chapters, I will examine how these Books were used in Rome, both in religious and political contexts.

⁸⁷ See the *Lex Ursonensis* Ch. 66, Crawford (1996) 1.401. The text makes clear that augurs and pontiffs could be found in other colonies, too: *quos pontifices quosque augures C(aius) Caesar, quique iussu eius colon(iam) deduxerit, fecerit ex colon(ia) Genet(iva), ei pon<t>ifices eique augures c(oloniae) G(enetivae) I(uliae) sunt, eiq(ue) pon<t>ifices auguresque in pontificum augurum conlegio in ea colon(ia) sunt, ita uti qui optima lege optumo iure in quaque colon(ia) pontif(ices) augures sunt erunt.*

Chapter 2

The Nature of the Oracles

THE SIBYLLINE TEXT

In this chapter, I will explore the nature of the Sibylline oracles – their composition and contents and the expiatory rituals that they advised. Due to the Senate's restrictions on the oracles' publication, we possess only one record of a Sibylline oracle from the Republic: seventy lines of Greek hexameter recorded by Phlegon of Tralles, a freedman of Hadrian who wrote a *Book of Marvels*. According to Phlegon, this oracle was first published as a result of a consultation of the Sibylline Books in 125 BC, necessitated by the terrible prodigy of a hermaphrodite's birth in Rome.⁸⁸ As one of the most chaotic years of the Gracchan era, the events of 125 BC may help to explain this rare publication of a Sibylline oracle. In this year the consul M. Fulvius Flaccus, an ally of Gaius Sempronius Gracchus, raised a petition to grant citizenship to individual Italians.⁸⁹ The petition, the first of its kind in this troubled era leading up to the Social War, failed when the Senate sent Fulvius to assist Massilia against the Salluvii. As a result of the failure of the petition, Fregellae revolted against Rome. This Latin colony, which had remained staunchly loyal to Rome in the wars against Pyrrhus and Hannibal, was crushed by the Romans in 125 BC.

Thus the year 125 BC was marked by controversy not only among the Roman ruling elite, but also between Rome and an important Latin town. The revolt of Fregellae

⁸⁸ For this oracle, see Phlegon *Mir.* 10 = *FGrH* 257 F 36 X, in the Appendix.

⁸⁹ In 122 BC, the former consul M. Fulvius Flaccus stooped to a tribunate to support Gracchus. He died with Gracchus in the following year.

signalled the instability of Rome's Italian empire and the ultimate ineffectiveness of the Senate's attempts to settle the Italian question after the death of Tiberius Gracchus. In a period of great crisis, the Senate's publication of a Sibylline oracle may have helped to alleviate the concerns of the people by focusing their attention on the renewal of the *pax deorum*. On the other hand, with such terrible conflict dividing the ranks of the elites, the oracle may have been published against the will of the Senate by one of the *decemviri* who represented a particular faction. The oracle, which advised expiatory ceremonies to Ceres and to Juno, pointed back to rituals performed to Ceres at Enna after the death of Tiberius Gracchus. Perhaps the ceremonies of 125 BC were intended to renew a pact with the goddess formed immediately after Tiberius Gracchus' death.⁹⁰

Thus the strife of the Gracchan era has favored us with a unique example of a Sibylline oracle, or according to Diels two separate oracles combined together to respond to the hermaphrodite prodigy of 125 BC.⁹¹ Almost 30 lines of the first oracle are extant, advising expiatory ceremonies to Demeter and Persephone, requiring the participation of women of all ages: maidens, matrons, and elderly women. The second oracle, consisting of approximately 40 lines, recommends ceremonies to Demeter, Persephone, and Hades; Apollo; and Hera.

The structure and contents of this oracle make it plain that the myth of the 6th century BC origins of the Books is, at best, a very simplified version of a more complex development. In the first place, the oracle is written in acrostics, with the first letters of

⁹⁰ See Diels (1890) for further discussion of the relation between the events of 125 BC and the publication of the oracle.

⁹¹ See Diels (1890) 90ff. for the identification of two separate oracles within the one oracle we have. He dates these to 207 and 200 BC. The combination of Sibylline oracles demonstrates a certain flexibility in the reading of the texts by the *decemviri*, since they were able to combine two oracles to respond to one prodigy.

each verse spelling out the first verse or verses of the entire hexametric poem. By the late republic the acrostic form was considered an essential and authoritative trait of Sibylline oracles; according to Cicero and Varro, those oracles that were not written in acrostics were expunged from the collection.⁹² Through the acrostic format, the reader was able to verify that each line of the oracle was in its proper place and that the text had not been modified.⁹³ According to Diels, however, the acrostic form first became popular only in the Alexandrian age, about 300 years after the time when, according to our sources, the Sibylline Books arrived in Rome.⁹⁴

Clues in the content of the fragment also indicate a later date than the 6th century BC. The second oracle contains a telling prediction: “Then a Trojan will liberate you from your miseries and from the land of Greece.”⁹⁵ With its reference to Troy and to Greece, the oracle must date to a time after the Romans became involved in Greek affairs, and after the Trojan legend became well-known in Rome. Thus a date in or after the third century BC is inevitable.⁹⁶ This is assuming, of course, that the oracle was written according to a Roman system of understanding, rather than a Greek. And a clue in the text strongly suggests that this was the case. In the 16th line of the first oracle, the

⁹² See Cicero *de Div.* 2.54.112, Varro in Dionysius of Halicarnassus 4.62.6.

⁹³ Diels (1890) 36 claims that the acrostic form was surprisingly infrequent in oracular literature. Perhaps the Romans were particularly concerned that their own collection might be tampered with, or that suspicions of manipulation of the oracles might arise.

⁹⁴ See Diels (1890) 34ff. The earliest surviving example of such an acrostic dates to around 193 or 190 BC, and was discovered in Egypt. According to Cicero *de Div.* 2.54.111-112, Ennius used acrostics in one of his works, as he spelled out *Q. Ennius Fecit* with the first letters of twelve lines.

⁹⁵ Phlegon *Mir.* 10 ln. 69: Τρώς δὴτ' ἐκλύσει σε κακῶν, ἅμα δ' Ἑλλάδος ἐκ γῆς. The meaning of this passage is debated. It may also be translated, “Then a Trojan will liberate you, and help will come from the land of Greece.” In any case, the references to Troy and Greece should date the oracle to the third century BC at the latest, when Rome became involved in Greek affairs.

⁹⁶ Diels (1890) 90ff. dates the two oracles to 207 and 200 BC, but MacBain (1982) 134-5 dates the inclusion of Ceres in the androgyne expiation to 133 BC. I believe that MacBain is correct. In either case, however, the oracles are definitely later than the early sixth century BC.

prophetess advises the Romans to perform rites “in the Greek style”.⁹⁷ A Greek person who was writing oracles for a Greek audience would not have needed to remind Greeks to do things the Greek way.

In fact, because of the poor quality of Greek composition, Diels believes that the oracles were written by people – possibly Romans – who were more versed in Greek ritual than in the Greek language. Scheid proposes that this was the *decemviri* themselves, and that they composed the oracles by extracting lines from the Sibylline Books and using them to form acrostics giving expiatory advice.⁹⁸ I find this explanation unlikely, since it would mean that the first line or lines of the poem, which must often have been a fairly standard oracular introduction, were the only part actually recorded in the Sibylline Books.⁹⁹ But in any case, this oracle was certainly written with the Romans in mind, by someone familiar with the practices of Roman religion.

Thus the myth of the arrival of the Sibylline Books into Rome falls apart with the scrutiny of Phlegon’s oracles. Parts of the Sibylline collection were written much later than the 6th century BC, and they were composed not by an outsider, but by people familiar with the workings of the Roman religious system. However, the fact that the oracles recorded by Phlegon date to the 3rd century BC or later does not mean that the entire collection was a late invention. Later Roman sources, at least, believed that the oracles came into Rome at a very early date. Given the strong Greek influence in early

⁹⁷ Phlegon *Mir.* 10 ln. 16: Παῖδας, ὅσας πάρος εἶπα, κέλευ’ Ἀχαιστὶ τὰδ’ ἔρδειν.

⁹⁸ See Scheid (1998).

⁹⁹ For example, the acrostic of the first oracle recorded by Phlegon spells out this rather unremarkable statement: Μοῖραν ὀπισθομαθῶν, τίν’ ἔφυ πάς εἰς τόπον ἐλθεῖν. The end of the oracle is cut off, but if it continued for many more lines, the lines on which Scheid would claim the entire oracle would have been based are these: “The fate of mortals, who only afterwards learn what place each person is to go, and all the prodigies and plagues of the goddess Destiny this loom of mine will reveal, if you consider these things in your mind, trusting in its strength . . .” (Trans. Hansen (1996) 40). It is difficult to believe that the *decemviri* would have composed a text from such insignificant lines.

Rome, it is not impossible that Greek oracles were present in Rome from a very early time.¹⁰⁰ Furthermore, it is difficult to accept that a traditional Roman priesthood, the *decemviri sacris faciundis*, would have been completely reworked in the third century BC to become centered around oracular texts that had had no place in Rome before that date.¹⁰¹

It may be accepted, then, that the Romans possessed a collection of oracles from a very early date, and perhaps even that they were originally composed in Greek. But this was not a fixed collection; the *decemviri* added new oracles as the Roman world changed. Thus the Sibylline Books had no particular origins. The original texts may have come from Etruria or Magna Graecia, but the entire collection was probably gathered from a number of places over a number of years. It is essential to keep in mind the development of the Sibylline collection over time, as we examine how the oracles were applied at different moments in Rome's history.

SECRECY, KNOWLEDGE, AND POWER

In a well-known passage, Cato advises the farm-owner to prevent his *vilicus* from resorting to various forms of divination: *Aruspicem, augurem, hariolum, Chaldaeum nequem consuluisse velet*.¹⁰² Many scholars, reading Cato as a voice of reason rising up against superstition, have understood this sentence as a criticism against divination in general, setting the irrational foreign slave against the sophisticated Roman estate

¹⁰⁰ Feeney (1998) 51 cites archaeological evidence for the early presence of Greek myth in the public ideology of Rome. See also North (1996) 618.

¹⁰¹ Dating the oracles to 367 BC, when the *duumviri* became the *decemviri*, does not solve the problem of the oracles' origins, since the problematic elements exhibited in Phlegon's oracles – the acrostic form and the references to Troy and Greece – probably arose after this date.

¹⁰² Cato *de Ag.* 7.4

owner.¹⁰³ However, John North has interpreted the passage in a completely different light: Cato is not impugning divination in general, but saying instead that “the *vilicus* should be kept in his proper place and not be allowed to impinge on his master’s control of the whole enterprise.”¹⁰⁴ Instead of marking divination as a superstitious, non-Roman enterprise, Cato, the quintessential old-fashioned Roman, considered the art the province of the Roman estate owner alone. It was not the field of the foreign, or a symptom of false religion; access to divination was a privilege that accompanied power.¹⁰⁵

This is particularly true in the case of the Sibylline oracles. In Roman religion, power tended to be diffused through religious and state offices like sap through a tree’s branches. The major priesthoods were all colleges, made up of multiple members who could claim no enmity between themselves¹⁰⁶; the religious influence of each individual was curbed by a limit of one priestly office per person; and religious concerns cropped up among priests, magistrates, and senators alike. This diffusion of religious responsibility was especially evident in the Roman prodigy and expiation system, which, at least in theory, invited the participation of the entire populace, from the lowly farmer who had heard his cow speak, to the consul who slit the throat of the expiatory victim.¹⁰⁷ Yet while many people may have been involved in the process of prodigy reporting and expiation, ultimate control rested with the Senate. The Senate determined a prodigy’s validity, chose the priests who would advise its expiation, approved the plan of the priests and set it in motion, and even decided how much information should be made available to

¹⁰³ See, for example, Warde Fowler (1911) 296-8.

¹⁰⁴ North (1990) 59.

¹⁰⁵ North (1990) 60: “This suggests a connection between the exercising of power and the right of access to divination.”

¹⁰⁶ See Cicero *ad Fam.* 3.10.9 for the rule against coopting a member’s enemy into the augural college.

¹⁰⁷ North (1990) 53: “It would be very difficult to make a simple statement as to where ‘divination’ was, or who had the power to control it. The question needs to be asked: why should that have been so?”

the people. Prodigy and expiation rested firmly in the hands of the Roman senate, a body composed of representatives of the leading families in Rome.

Working together to expiate a prodigy, the *decemviri* and the Senate represented two sides to the solution: the *decemviri* possessed the knowledge of the Sibylline Books, the Senate the authority to enact their advice. The Senate's approval of the priests' expiatory advice may have been completely perfunctory, but it was necessary. Though they were in charge of the Books, the priests could not even read the oracles without the Senate's permission, much less perform their ceremonies or divulge their contents. The legend of Marcus Atilius warns of a grave fate for those who transgressed this last rule: the horrible death of the parricide.¹⁰⁸ Dionysius of Halicarnassus relates that this Atilius was one of the first duumvirs appointed by Tarquinius Superbus to guard the Books. But Atilius betrayed his trust, apparently by copying out the oracles. When one of the slaves appointed to assist the duumvirs reported Atilius' crime to the king, Tarquin had Atilius sewn up into a bag and thrown into the sea.

Atilius' story may not be historical, but it nevertheless offers a compelling testimony to the veil of secrecy that surrounded the Sibylline oracles.¹⁰⁹ The *decemviri*, along with the slaves appointed to serve them, were the only men who would ever see the Sibylline Books.¹¹⁰ The reason for this strict secrecy lies in the Books' potentially dangerous ability to locate and legitimate power. To the Senate, the work of the *decemviri*, and the field of divination in general, offered a powerful affirmation of their

¹⁰⁸ For Marcus Atilius, see Dionysius of Halicarnassus 4.62, Val. Max. 1.1.13, Zonaras 7.11.1.

¹⁰⁹ This was not the punishment for divulging oracles in historical times. In 56 BC Cato Minor made an oracle public without the permission of the Senate, and our sources do not mention any punishment for him – certainly not the punishment of the parricide! See Ch. 5 below.

¹¹⁰ Perhaps these slaves were intended to assist with reading the Greek. After all, knowledge of Greek was very unusual in Rome until the third century BC.

own rule, yet carried with it always a potential threat to stability. For this reason, the Senate sought to control access to the oracles very strictly, just as Cato's estate owner managed divination on his farm.

As long as public divination was under the authority of the Roman Senate, and as long as expiatory efforts were successful, the glory accorded to the gods would rebound upon the Roman State. It was the Senate, not the priests, who stood as true mediators between the Romans and their gods,¹¹¹ and it was in large part the Senate whose reputation was bolstered by the renewed favor of the gods. If, after expiations were performed, a plague ended or a battle was won, this offered proof that the Roman government was in a right relationship with the gods. The intimate knowledge of the divine over which the State claimed a monopoly was thus confirmed by its success, and this knowledge promised further success in the future.

In the hands of its enemies, however, the power of the Sibylline oracles to legitimize authority might also be turned against the Senate. Toward the end of the republic, a certain Sibylline oracle, whether authentic or invented, was divulged to the people. This oracle proclaimed that three Cornelii would rule Rome. In 63 BC, Publius Cornelius Lentulus Sura claimed that this oracle applied to him – that he would be the third Cornelius to rule after Sulla and Cinna. Joining with Catiline, he led the conspiracy in the city, but was apprehended and executed before he could see the prophecy fulfilled. But the prophecy did not die with Lentulus Sura. Apparently only a decade after Sura's death, another Cornelius, Lucius Cornelius Lentulus Crus, adopted the oracle for

¹¹¹ Beard and North (1990) 31: "The principal focus of mediation in Republican Rome was the Senate."

himself.¹¹² He sided with Pompey in the civil wars, and was killed in Egypt one day after his commander.

The use of oracles was not limited to overt claims of power. Divine backing could also be more subtle, accruing to the owner of an oracle who could boast an accurate prophecy or a successful expiation, evidence that the man was in communion with the gods and thus in touch with great power. A more likely threat was not direct opposition to the Roman government, but a subtle undermining of the Senate's authority. Resorting to personal oracles to address public prodigies displayed a lack of trust in the mechanisms of the State to restore the *pax deorum*. This was perhaps the Senate's greatest motivation in not divulging Sibylline oracles to the people. If the people knew the words of the oracles, they could offer an opposing interpretation to that of the Senate, or use the oracle later when a similar prodigy occurred. As I will show below, the *decemviri* themselves sometimes reused oracles, or at least tended to perform the same types of expiations for particular types of prodigies.

The silence of our sources supports the idea that the Senate rarely made oracles public.¹¹³ And since both Cicero and Varro claim that the trademark of a Sibylline oracle was its composition in acrostics, it is obvious that these writers, despite their erudition, had never seen an oracle from the early Republic when acrostics did not exist. Like the

¹¹² On Lentulus Sura, see Cicero *Cat.* 3.4.9; Sallust *Cat.* 47.2 and 55.3-6; Plutarch *Cic.* 17.4; Appian *BC* 2.4. On Lentulus Crus see Caesar *BC* 1.4.2, 3.104.3; Plutarch *Pompey* 80.4.

¹¹³ Other oracles that may have been published are the *Carmina Marciana* (not part of the Sibylline Books, but under the authority of the *decemviri*; see below) and the oracle advising the introduction of Magna Mater to Rome. Livy does not provide the exact words for either of these oracles, but it is not inconceivable that though he was acquainted with the oracles, he chose not to include them verbatim in his text, since they would have been very confusing (as Phlegon's text shows), and since the Sibylline Books were written in Greek. It is easy to understand why our sources would have chosen to omit an oracle even if the words were known, and thus it may be the case that many more oracles were published than we are aware of. The important thing, however, is that the Senate exercised absolute control over their publication.

man who buried his talent in the Christian parable, the Senate hid the oracles underground as the surest way to protect their ownership.

The significance of the senatorial monopoly on public divination can best be illustrated by a story of its near breakdown: the collection of oracles in 213 BC. Livy tells us that at this point in the Second Punic War, after they had suffered a number of terrible defeats against Hannibal, the Roman people began to search for divine help through foreign rites. The Senate, disturbed by this desperate grasp for aid, ordered the urban praetor Marcus Aemilius to turn the people from their un-Roman ways. Aemilius issued an edict approved by the Senate that anyone who possessed written oracles, prayer formulae, or instructions for sacrifice should turn them in to him, and he prohibited sacrifice by foreign ritual, i.e. sacrifice not approved by the Roman Senate, in a public or sacred place.¹¹⁴

When the writings were collected, they were not immediately destroyed; instead, they were examined for true prophecies. According to Livy, one such oracle was found: the *Carmina Marciana*, a prophecy of the legendary Italian seer Marcius written in Latin. The first part of the oracle was a prophecy about Cannae, which told of the disaster that had occurred, and of the Romans' inability to avoid it. This prophecy, describing as it did an accurate account of the loss, gave credence to the second half of the oracle. This latter part included instructions for expiatory ceremonies, involving games to Apollo, and a promise that this god would destroy Rome's enemies. Though Livy's text here is confused, and it is hard to locate the actors of the story, it seems that the praetor brought the oracle before the Senate, where it was read aloud (*recitatum*), and the Senate spent

¹¹⁴ For the people's adherence to foreign rites and the collection of religious texts, see Livy 25.1.

one day deciphering its meaning.¹¹⁵ On the next day, the Senate ordered the *decemviri* to consult the Sibylline Books about games to Apollo, and after the priests reported their findings to the Senate, the Senate decided that these games should be held and sacrifices conducted by the *decemviri* according to the Greek rite.

This official discovery and use of a non-Sibylline oracle was exceptional; this is the only documented time that such an event took place during the Roman Republic. In the early years of the Second Punic War, the Romans' repeated failures in battle signaled the ineffectiveness of the Senate's intercessions with the gods. As a result, the people began turning to non-approved, non-Roman means of appeasing the gods, and the Senate's religious authority was thus undermined. Resorting to foreign rites was tantamount to saying that the Roman government had failed, and especially at this time when its credibility was so weakened, the Senate could not bear such criticism. It took action to remove oracles from public access, and to set itself up once again as the primary arbiter of truth in Roman public divination. For instead of destroying all of the oracles, the Senate kept and heeded one: one among many, a sign that the Senate and the *decemviri* alone possessed the power to differentiate true oracles from false ones.

It seems very likely that the Senate allowed this oracle to be published, for although Livy does not quote it verbatim, he claims to give the tenor of the words, and thus to be familiar with the text of the prophecy. This oracle, with its circumstantial relevance to Cannae and the war with Hannibal, could hardly have posed much threat in the hands of the people. Instead, its publication served to strengthen the authority of the

¹¹⁵ For the *Carmina Marciana*, see Livy 25.12 and Diels (1890). We must assume that when the oracle was read aloud (*recitatum*), it was to the Senate, since Livy makes it clear that it was the Senate that would later bring in the assistance of the *decemviri*. Likewise, we may assume that it was the senators who deliberated on the meaning of the oracle, since the verb (*sumpserunt*) is plural: *ad id carmen expiandum diem unum sumpserunt*, and since the *senatus consultum* followed on the next day (*postero die*).

Senate and the priests, who could claim an access to knowledge (the Sibylline Books, which had been used to verify Marcius' oracle) that no individual possessed, the experience to judge true oracles, and the ability to unify the people in worshipping the gods.

RITUAL OR PROPHECY?

The most famous oracles of antiquity are those on which history-changing decisions hinged – the prophecies whose obscure words, made clear only through hindsight, helped to shape great lives and kingdoms. These oracles boasted a privileged knowledge of the future. The “wooden walls” oracle, upon which hung the fates of Greece and Persia, has already been discussed. Another renowned oracle, delivered decades before to Croesus, also dealt with the Persians. When Croesus asked if he should engage in war with the Persians, the Delphic prophetess replied that if he attacked the Persians, he would destroy a great empire. Trusting in the Pythia's words, he waged war on the Persians. But Croesus was defeated and his empire lost. When he reproached Apollo's oracle for its ruinous deceit, the god revealed to him the error of his logic; it was only then that Croesus realized that the great kingdom to be destroyed was his own.¹¹⁶

This oracle stands as the dramatic peak of the legend of Croesus, offering both climax and resolution to the story of his defeat. Compare this to one of Livy's accounts of the consultations of the Sibylline Books. In 179 BC, a storm overturned several statues on the Capitoline, and lightning damaged a number of temples. Furthermore, it was reported to the Senate that a three-footed mule had been born in Reate. The Senate

¹¹⁶ For Croesus' reproach of the oracle and Apollo's response, see Herodotus 1.90-1.

ordered the *decemviri* to consult the Sibylline Books, and the priests advised sacrifices and a day of public prayer.¹¹⁷

These are, it seems, two very different kinds of oracles. The first offered a prophecy, the second ritual directions. But is this the only type of oracle contained in the Sibylline Books? Certainly, some Greek oracles offered ritual advice; might the Roman Sibylline oracles, in turn, have contained some prophecies? Did the Sibylline oracles contain prophecies for the future and interpretations of contemporary events, or were they simply “recipe books,” as John Scheid has called them, offering step-by-step ritual instructions for pleasing angry gods?

The reason this question – whether or not the Sibylline Books contained prophecies – is so difficult to answer is of course that Sibylline oracles were as a rule not published. As a result, the question “What was in the oracles?” must be largely abandoned, and must instead be replaced by “What was divulged of the oracles’ contents?” In other words, we must examine the impact of the Sibyl’s words rather than the words themselves.

Though ancient authors rarely attribute specific prophecies to the Sibylline Books, it seems that many of them believed that the prophecies were there. In his *de Natura Deorum*, written in 45 BC, Cicero lists three divisions of Roman religion: rituals, auspices, and the interpretation of signs:

Omnis populi Romani religio in sacra et in auspicia divisa sit, tertium adiunctum sit, si quid praedictionis causa ex portentis et monstris Sibyllae interpretes haruspicesve monuerunt.

The whole religious system of the Roman people has been divided into rituals and auspices, with a third part added to this: whatever predictions

¹¹⁷ Livy 40.44.3-5

the interpreters of the Sibylline Books or the *haruspices* warn against because of portents and unnatural events.¹¹⁸

According to Cicero, the interpreters of the Sibylline Books – in his day, the *quindecimviri sacris faciundis* – and the Etruscan *haruspices* made predictions (*praedictionis*), offering warnings (*monuerunt*) of the bad things portended by prodigies. Thus Cicero defined the *quindecimviri* not as priests who advised and directed expiatory rituals, but priests who offered prophecies or interpretations.

However, a number of objections might be offered for applying this succinct phrase of Cicero to the activities of the *decemviri* in the early and middle Republic. In the first place, as I will show in Chapter 5, the use of the Sibylline Books was dramatically altered in the disturbances of the late Republic. The original Sibylline Books had been destroyed, and an entirely new set assembled. Contrary to traditional practices, these new oracles were often applied to specific political problems, and they were frequently made known to the public. In the second place, as John North points out in a study of Cicero's *de Divinatione* (written in 44 BC, one year after *de Natura Deorum*), Cicero's focus on divination as knowledge of the future derives from his philosophical preoccupations. And, as North suggests, the examples of divination that Cicero cites prove that the practice of divination was, even in Cicero's mind, much more than simple prophecy. He tells the story of the discovery of a lost statue head through divination, a matter concerning the present, not the future; and he describes diviners' detection of previous ritual error, which concerned the past.¹¹⁹ Neither of these consultations resulted in prophecies of the future.

¹¹⁸ Cicero *de Natura Deorum* 3.2.5

¹¹⁹ North (1990) 61

Putting Cicero's statements aside, there is some evidence of Sibylline prophecies in the accounts of the historians themselves. The first alleged Sibylline prophecy occurred in 461 BC. In this year, Rome was racked with class conflict, as the plebeian tribunes tried to pass the Terentilian Law against the will of the patricians. This law, first proposed in the previous year by the tribune Gaius Terentilius Harsa, aimed at establishing a written legal code. According to Livy, whose account is supported by Dionysius of Halicarnassus, a number of terrible prodigies occurred in the year 461 BC: the sky glowed, great quakes shook the earth, a cow spoke, and flesh rained from the sky. In response to these prodigies, the Sibylline Books *pericula a conventu alienigenarum praedicta, ne qui in loca summa urbis impetus caedesque inde fierent; inter cetera monitum ut seditionibus abstineretur* ("predicted dangers from a crowd of foreigners, lest an attack be made against the highest places in the city and a slaughter ensue; among other things they warned the Romans to abstain from civil strife").¹²⁰

According to Livy, the plebeians accused the patricians of using the oracle to block their law, and the words of the oracle went unheeded as civil strife continued in Rome. In the following year, the prophecy was fulfilled, as the Sabine Appius Herdonius, with a mob of exiles and slaves, occupied the Capitoline Hill. This situation was made worse by the political struggles in Rome. The tribunes, believing that the occupation was a sham intended to block their law, hindered the war against Herdonius by focusing their attention on their own law rather than on the enemy.¹²¹

This account is the clearest example of a Sibylline prophecy before 83 BC, but it is also the most easily discredited. The story comes too early in Rome's history, in an era

¹²⁰ Livy 3.10.5-7, see also Dionysius of Halicarnassus 10.2.2-6; Pliny *NH* 2.147; Val. Max. 1.6.5; Lydus *de Ost.* Ch. 6

¹²¹ For Appius Herdonius' occupation of the Capitol, see Livy 3.15f.

touching more upon legend than history. Furthermore, the prophecy is too accurate to be believed, corresponding too closely with the events of the following year. If we could date the origins of this legend, it might at least show us what a Roman of a later era – perhaps the late Republic – believed *could* be contained in the Sibylline Books. But how helpful would this information be, anyway, if the Sibylline oracles were rarely made public, and the Romans could only make guesses about their content?

Accounts of later Sibylline oracles offer stronger evidence for some prophetic content in the Books. In 189 BC, a Sibylline oracle was used to warn the consul Gnaeus Manlius Vulso not to cross the Taurus range with his army. In 143 BC, the Books were used to prevent Marcus Rex from building an aqueduct to the Capitoline Hill. In 87 BC, the Senate used a Sibylline oracle to support the banishment of Cinna and six tribunes from Rome.¹²² In each of these cases, we are not informed of the words or even the general tenor of the oracles. But there must have been some element of prophecy, or at least of interpretation, in the texts in order to warrant these very practical applications.

Finally, a few Sibylline oracles offered warnings, interpretations of prodigies, or promises of good fortune. In 228 BC, after a lightning bolt hit the Capitoline Hill, the Sibylline Books warned the Romans to beware of the Gauls. The Sibyl was hardly sticking her neck out here – fear of the Gauls seems to have been a default position for the Romans – but this was nevertheless an interpretation rather than a ritual prescription. In 266 BC, the Sibylline Books identified the cause of a plague (the desecration of

¹²² For the Taurus range oracle of 189 BC, see Livy 38.45.3; for the aqueduct oracle of 143 BC, see Frontinus de Aq. 7.5 and Livy ep. Oxy 54; for the Cinna oracle of 87 BC, see Granius Licinianus in Flemisch (1904), book 35 p. 15

temples). And in 205 BC, Livy tells us that the Books proclaimed that the introduction of Magna Mater would drive the foreign foe from Italian soil.¹²³

The surviving Sibylline oracle from the original Roman collection offers a last bit of evidence for Sibylline prophecies. Of the seventy extant lines of the text, which actually consists of two separate oracles combined, there is one prophetic line: Τρῶς δῆτ' ἐκλύσει σε κακῶν, ἅμα δ' Ἑλλάδος ἐκ γῆς. In the proper vein of ancient prophecy, the meaning of this line is obscure. It may be either “Then a Trojan will free you from evils, and from the land of Greece” or “Then a Trojan from the land of Greece will free you from evils.” Further confusion derives from the fact that any Roman might be called a Trojan, and thus the application of the oracle could be very broad. Though Phlegon claims that it was published in 125 BC, John North suggests that it applies better to 83 BC, when Sulla returned from Greece to march on Rome.¹²⁴

Regardless of its meaning, this line is certainly a prophecy of some sort. Yet it must be stressed that the vast majority of the oracle was dedicated to ritual concerns – sacrifices to be offered and hymns to be sung to Ceres and Proserpina and Juno. The prophecy was secondary to the ritual injunctions, and may in fact have simply been a means of validating the oracle by placing it in the prophetic tradition – in other words, by giving it the elements that a “Greek” oracle was supposed to have. Furthermore, it is impossible to measure to what extent this oracle is representative of the entire collection, and to what extent it is exceptional. Perhaps the fact that we have the oracle at all – the

¹²³ For the oracle of 266 BC, see Augustine CD 3.17, Orosius 4.5.7; for the oracle of 228 BC, see Cassius Dio 12 frg. 50; for Livy’s account of the Magna Mater oracle, see Livy 29.10.4-5.

¹²⁴ North (2000) 104

fact that it was published contrary to custom – proves that it was in some way extraordinary.¹²⁵

Given the rarity of prophecy in the Sibylline oracles as recorded by our sources, we are faced with two possibilities: 1) our sources are suppressing a prophetic element commonly found in Sibylline oracles, or 2) prophecy was never an important part of the Sibylline oracles as they were made known to the Roman community.¹²⁶ North, rightly claiming that “the religious life the Romans knew was richer and more varied than the one the annalists chose to report,” implies that there was a stronger tradition of prophetic texts in the Roman Republic than the sources show.¹²⁷ There is evidence, after all, for a prophetic Sibylline tradition reaching back into very early times. The pagan, Jewish, and Christian oracles that survive today (apart from the two oracles from the Sibylline Books) are largely prophetic in content. Though most of our evidence is from Jewish and Christian sources, there obviously must have been some prophetic content in the pagan oracles to motivate the Jews to adopt the pagan Sibyl as the mouthpiece of their prophecies in the first place. There is even Roman evidence from the first century BC for a tradition of Sibylline prophecy. In his *Fourth Eclogue*, Vergil makes famously sweeping prophecies concerning the coming Golden Age, and does so with a reference to

¹²⁵ We possess the text of one other Sibylline oracle from Rome, but it comes from the collection assembled after the fire of 83 BC. As will be shown in Chapter 6, this oracle, which led to the performance of the Ludi Saeculares in 17 BC, was an archaizing amalgam of several different oracles. It ends with a promise, not a prophecy: “Remember to keep these injunctions always in mind, and all Italian earth and all the earth of the Latins will always bear the yoke on its neck under your rule.” (Phlegon *Long Lived Persons* 5, trans. Hansen (1996) 57). Again, these lines come at the end of the oracle, a sort of afterthought to accompany the ritual prescriptions. Since they may reflect a broader Roman Sibylline tradition, these words are significant. In 17 BC, the *quindecimviri* did not take this opportunity to publish a prophecy in favor of Augustus, but instead ended the oracle with a promise (by that time anachronistic) of Rome’s continued domination in Italy. Perhaps prophecy was never a major component of the Sibylline oracles in Rome.

¹²⁶ We can make no claims as to the presence or absence of prophecy in the texts themselves, since so little is known about the written oracles.

¹²⁷ North (2000) 107

the Sibyl: *Ultima Cumaei venit iam carminis aetas;/magnus ab integro saeculorum nascitur ordo./Iam redit et Virgo, redeunt Saturnia regna,/iam nova progenies caelo demittitur alto.*¹²⁸ As Momigliano points out, “This poem seems to indicate that Virgil knew of authentic Sibylline prophecies of his time dealing with radical historical changes”¹²⁹

I would argue, nonetheless, that prophecy was not an important part of the Sibylline Books in Rome in the early and middle Republic. In the first place, given the ancient historical sources’ broad interest in prophecy, it is unlikely that they would fail to report more prophetic announcements issued from the Sibylline Books. As has already been shown, Livy included the obviously fictional prophecy of 461 BC in his histories; episodes like this one added a compelling dramatic element to historical work. Rather than avoiding them, ancient historians seem to be drawn to them.

Secondly, the fact that the annalists record a number of prophetic interpretations that *do not* derive from the Sibylline Books proves that they were not opposed to stories of prophecy in general. For the second century BC, our sources record at least six separate accounts of haruspical interpretations: In 172 BC, the *haruspices* predicted victory for the Romans against Perseus. In 152 BC, they prophesied death to all Roman magistrates. In 130 BC, they predicted success for the Romans and sorrow for the Greeks. In 126 BC, they predicted sedition. In 114 BC, they prophesied *infamia* for the Vestal Virgins and the knights. In 102 BC, the *haruspex* Aemilius Potensis prophesied destruction for the *haruspices* and their children.¹³⁰

¹²⁸ Vergil *Fourth Eclogue* ln. 4-7

¹²⁹ Momigliano (1988) 5

¹³⁰ For 172 BC, see Livy 42.20.1-6; for 152 BC, see Obs. 18; for 130 BC, see Obs. 28, Augustine *CD* 3.11, and Cassius Dio 24 frg. 84.2; for 126 BC, see Obs. 29, Pliny *NH* 2.203, Orosius 5.10.11, Strabo 6.2.11; for

More importantly, however, it seems that in one of these examples – the prophecy of 172 BC – the Senate may have consulted the *haruspices* precisely because they offered a form of prophetic interpretation that the Sibylline Books rarely gave. In this year, lightning destroyed the *columna rostrata* of M. Aemilius, a prize of naval victory from the First Punic War. The Romans, preparing for war against Perseus, were anxious about this prodigy. In a highly unusual move, the Senate requested the expiatory advice of both the *haruspices* and the *decemviri* for this single prodigy. The *decemviri* responded with prescriptions for extensive rituals to appease the gods, including a *lustratio*, *supplicatio*, sacrifices in Rome and at the promontory of Minerva, and games lasting ten days in honor of Jupiter Optimus Maximus. The *haruspices*, on the other hand, replied with a prophecy: the destruction of the monument foretold the extension of Roman boundaries and the destruction of the enemy. Surely in this instance the Senate, anxious about the preparations for their war, consulted both these priesthods precisely because they knew that they would offer different types of responses: the *haruspices* gave a prophecy favorable to the Roman war effort, while the *decemviri* advised elaborate rituals to ensure the gods' favor and mark the significance of the event.

The *Carmina Marciana*, the verses of the Latin seer Marcius discovered in the praetor's collection of oracles in 213 BC, offer further support to the idea that prophetic interpretations of the Sibylline Books were the exception and not the rule. Two Marcian oracles were discovered in this collection; the first, which Livy claims to paraphrase in his text, prophesied the Roman defeat at Cannae.

Priore carmine Cannensis praedicta clades in haec fere verba erat: 'amnem,
Troiukena, fuge Cannam, ne te alienigenae cogant in campo Diomedis

114 BC, see Obs. 37, Livy *Per.* 63, Orosius 5.15.20-2, Cassius Dio 26 frg. 87, Plutarch *QR* 83, Pliny *NH* 2.98 and 147; for 102 BC, see Obs. 44.

conserere manus. Sed neque credes tu mihi, donec compleris sanguine campum, multaque milia occisa tua deferet amnis in pontum magnum ex terra frugifera; piscibus atque avibus ferisque quae incolunt terras iis fuat esca caro tua; nam mihi ita Iuppiter fatus est.' Et Diomedis Argivi campos et Cannam flumen ii qui militaverant in iis locis iuxta atque ipsam cladem agnoscebant.

In the first oracle the defeat at Cannae was predicted in more or less these words: 'Flee the River Cannae, Trojan-born, lest the foreigners force you to arms in the field of Diomedes. But you will not believe me, until you have covered the field with blood, and the river carries off your many dead soldiers from the fruit-bearing land into the great sea; may your flesh be food for the fish and birds and wild animals who live in those lands. For Jupiter tells me it is fated thus.' And those who had fought in those places recognized the plains of the Argive Diomedes, and the River Cannae and the defeat itself.¹³¹

This oracle of Marcius, discovered three years after the defeat at Cannae, claimed to foretell this very event. It must have been published, since Livy claims to paraphrase the oracle. He says that the accuracy of this prophecy gave authority to the second *carmen*, which advised games to Apollo. The *decemviri* were called on to help conduct these games; if Livy's paraphrase of the second oracle is accurate, they were even mentioned in the *Carmen Marcianum* itself.¹³²

As I will show below, the *Carmina Marciana* were "discovered" (they were certainly too accurate to be a genuine oracle) at precisely the time that the Sibylline Books had lost some of their authority, after their expiations had repeatedly proved unsuccessful in bringing the Romans victory over Hannibal. In proclaiming a prophecy, the oracles of Marcius may have been doing something that the Sibylline Books never did, and thus offering a new sort of oracular response to deal with the problems of the Second Punic War. Certainly, the prophecy was needed to give authority to this new

¹³¹ Livy 25.12

¹³² Livy's second oracle is obviously not a close rendering of the original text. Though Livy claims that the second oracle was more cryptic than the first, his version is very clear. This could, nevertheless, be Livy's own paraphrase or interpretation of the text.

oracle. This would not have been a concern with the Sibylline Books, which drew their authority from their age and from the successes of the Roman State, which the Books ensured. Furthermore, the sort of prophecy contained in the *Carmina Marciana* – a prophecy obviously written after the fact – could not have been made by the Sibylline Books; what sort of legitimacy would the Senate and the *decemviri* have had if they claimed that a warning against this terrible disaster had been in their hands all along?

Thus we see that prophecy was not suppressed in the ancient accounts; it was simply credited, in most cases, to priesthods and oracles other than the *decemviri* and the Sibylline Books. At least before the Books' destruction and reassembly in the early 1st century BC, the *decemviri* tended to offer only expiatory advice, and not interpretations of events or prophecies of things to come. Whether this is because the Books did not typically contain such information, or because the actual content of the oracles was so closely guarded, is impossible to establish.

SIBYLLINE EXPIATION

Since the Sibylline oracles were rarely published, we can only really study them through their application – the rituals that they advised in response to prodigies. In examining Roman expiatory rites, we find that though there are some important patterns and trends in Roman expiation, the practice was characterized not so much by systematization, but by tremendous flexibility. As we have already discussed, there were a number of channels through which prodigies might be expiated in Rome. The Senate could either arrange an expiatory ceremony itself, or it could consult any of three priesthods experienced in dealing with prodigies: the *decemviri*, the *haruspices*, or the

pontifices. Yet there were no hard and fast rules by which the Senate decided which priesthood should be consulted for specific prodigies; no one prodigy type always called for the consultation of the Sibylline Books. Perhaps the most terrible prodigies – the *taetra prodigia*, as Livy says – demanded the attention of the Sibylline Books.¹³³ But certainly the heinousness of the prodigy was determined not only by the event itself, but by the historical circumstances surrounding its occurrence, and thus the Senate's decision was subjective.

Bruce MacBain's study of the *haruspices* shows this flexibility very clearly. Although there are certainly some prodigies that *tend* to demand haruspical attention, such as lightning strikes or monstrous births, most could also be expiated by other priesthoods, especially the *decemviri*. In fact, only the rare prodigies of sex change in humans and flames from the earth – each occurring only twice in Roman history – were never expiated by other priests.¹³⁴ This lack of correspondence between particular prodigies and particular priesthoods of expiation may be due in part to the tendency to expiate prodigies in groups, treating them not as individual problems, but as clusters of terror to be addressed *en masse* at the beginning of the year.

The rain of stones is the one prodigy whose expiation was most standardized, but even in this case there were exceptions. Usually, a rain of stones was expiated by a *novemdialis* – a nine-day ceremony to Jupiter. This expiation was so standard, in fact, that the Senate often initiated it without consulting any of the priests. But in 344 BC, a rain of stones accompanied by darkness was expiated by *supplicatio*, and in 205 BC,

¹³³ Livy 22.9

¹³⁴ MacBain (1982) Appendix D

plans were laid to install the Magna Mater cult in Rome because of frequent rains of stones.¹³⁵

Thus particular prodigies were not always addressed by the same priesthoods, nor with the same expiatory ceremonies. But each priesthood did display certain expiatory tendencies, advising ceremonies that were fairly characteristic of their own group. The *decemviri*, for example, often advised rituals of sacrifice and *supplicatio*, or public prayer. Though these ceremonies were typical for the *decemviri*, they were rare for the *haruspices*.¹³⁶ And while the *decemviri* often advised expiations that involved large segments of the Roman community, such as *ludi* in honor of a god, or alterations to the broader Roman religious system, such as the introduction of new deities, the *haruspices* typically advised simpler ceremonies. Perhaps due to their foreign status, these priests never bore such a lasting impact on Roman religion. On the other hand, the *haruspices* were often involved in the disposal of living prodigies, such as drowning androgynes (people who had both male and female genitalia). And as has already been mentioned, the *haruspices* tended to offer more prophecies or interpretations in response to prodigies.

Significantly, even with those expiations that were most typical of the *decemviri*, there were marked variations in the ways that these ceremonies were performed. The *supplicatio* provides a useful example of expiatory variations. In 344 BC, the *decemviri* advised that the Romans and their neighbors participate in a *supplicatio*; in most other years, only those in Rome were involved.¹³⁷ In 193 BC, families worshipped together in

¹³⁵ For examples of the *novemdialis* performed apparently without consulting the Sibylline Books, see Livy 1.31.2, 21.62.5-6, 25.7.7, 26.23.5, 27.37.1, 27.37.5, 30.38.8-9, 34.45.8, 38.36.4, 39.22.3, 44.18.6; for the *novemdialis* performed by the advice of the Sibylline Books, see Livy 35.9.4, 36.37.3-4.

¹³⁶ See MacBain (1982) Appendix D

¹³⁷ For the *supplicatio* of 344 BC, see Livy 7.28.6-8. This ceremony was again extended outside the city in 181 and 180 BC; see Livy 40.19.1-5 (Obs. 6) and Livy 40.37.1-3.

supplicatio. In 188 BC, the ceremony was conducted at the crossroads. In 193, 191, 180, and 169 BC, the people wore wreaths for the ritual. In 436 BC, the *duumviri* conducted the prayer; in 174, the *pontifex* Quintus Marcius Philippus led it. There were similar variations in the ceremonies of sacrifice. Of course, the deities worshipped and the victims offered varied, but the locations and performants of the ceremonies changed as well. In 217 BC, the *decemviri* sacrificed in the forum at Ardea; in 191 BC, the consul offered sacrifices in Rome. In 190 BC, the *decemviri* sacrificed unweaned animals by night, with the help of ten free-born boys and ten girls; in 108 BC, thirty native virgins sacrificed in Cimolia. And in 143 BC, sacrifices were conducted at the border of Gallic territory.¹³⁸

We see, therefore, that even those rituals most typical of the *decemviri* were never static; the priests altered them as they saw fit. These slight modifications of traditional rituals helped to customize them, perhaps, for particular prodigies and particular circumstances. More importantly for the *decemviri*, the fact that expiatory ceremonies changed over time, and thus were never totally predictable, revealed the specialization of their work and validated their own efforts. Expiation demanded a specific knowledge that did not rely simply on precedent; no other Roman could do a decemvir's job.

The prodigy of pestilence, which occurred frequently throughout the Roman Republic, offers an interesting case study for the relationship between a particular prodigy, the priests who expiated it, and the rituals that they advised. Pestilence, which certainly should be classified among Livy's *taetra prodigia*, was almost always expiated

¹³⁸ For 436 BC, see Livy 4.21.5, Orosius 2.13.8; for 217 BC, see Livy 22.1.8-20, Plutarch *Fab.* 2, Macrobius *Sat.* 1.6.13-14, Orosius 4.15.1, Val. Max. 1.6.5; for 193 BC, see Livy 34.55.1-5; for 191 BC, see Livy 36.37.2-6; for 190 BC, see Livy 37.3.1-6, Obs. 1; for 188 BC, see Livy 38.36.4, Obs. 2; for 174 BC, see Livy 41.21.10-13, Obs. 10, Pliny *NH* 2.99; for 143 BC, see Cassius Dio 22 frg. 74, Obs. 21; for 108 BC, see Obs. 40.

by the Sibylline Books. But there were a few exceptions. In 472 BC, *pontifices* ended a plague by punishing an unchaste Vestal Virgin; in 463 BC, the Senate responded to a pestilence with the first *supplicatio*; in 364 BC, the *pontifices* expiated a plague with a *lectisternium*; and in 180 BC, the Senate asked the *pontifex maximus* to look into ways to appease the gods to end a plague.¹³⁹ The rest of the plagues that were considered prodigies were expiated by the *decemviri* through various ceremonies. The following were the result of Sibylline consultations after plagues: in 433 BC, a temple was vowed to Apollo; in 399 and 348 BC, *lectisternia* were held; in 293 BC, a temple was vowed to Aesclepius; in 266 BC, shrines were restored; in 249 BC, the Ludi Saeculares were conducted; in 181 BC, a *supplicatio* and festival were held *per totam Italiam*; in 180 BC, a *supplicatio* was held *in urbe et per omnia fora conciliabulaque*; in 174 BC, a *supplicatio* was performed and a vow offered by the people; and in 142 BC, another *supplicatio* was held.¹⁴⁰ We see in this list certain trends: *lectisternia* were a common response to pestilence in the fourth century BC, while the *supplicatio* was common in the second. The most important fact, however, to be gleaned from this list is that the *decemviri* could respond to the same prodigy in a number of different ways.

Expiation ceremonies could be one-time events, unique rituals never to be repeated; they could be repeated only on the basis of need, as signaled by the occurrence

¹³⁹ For 472 BC, see Dionysius of Halicarnassus 9.40.1-4; for 463 BC, see Livy 3.7.6-8, Orosius 2.12.2, Dionysius of Halicarnassus 9.67; for 180 BC, see Livy 40.37.1-3. Our source for the *pontifices*' involvement in the lectisternium of 364 BC is Augustine *CD* 2.8. Though Livy 7.2.1-7 describes the ritual, he does not attribute it to the *pontifices*. Augustine may be wrong; see below. Another plague in 208 BC was expiated by making the Ludi Apollinares, first performed in 212 BC, an annual event (Livy 27.23.5-7), but Livy does not identify the priesthood that instituted this change.

¹⁴⁰ For 433 BC, see Livy 4.25.3; for 399 BC, see Livy 5.13.4-8, Dionysius of Halicarnassus 12 frg. 9, Augustine *CD* 3.17; for 348 BC, see Livy 7.27.1; for 293 BC, see Livy 10.47 and *Per.* 11, Plutarch *QR* 94, Val. Max. 1.8.2, Aug. *CD* 3.17, Orosius 3.22.5, *de Vir. Ill.* 22.1, Ovid *Metam.* 15.622ff.; for 249 BC, see Livy *Per.* 49, Censorinus *DN* 17.8, Fest. 441.4, Schol. ad Hor. *CS* 8; for 142 BC, see Obs. 22, Orosius 5.4.8.

of prodigies; or they could become institutionalized into the Roman calendar so that they were performed on a regular basis. The Floralia of 238 BC and the Saturnalia of 217 BC were instituted as annual events; the *ieiunium Cereris* of 191 BC was to be performed every five years; the Ludi Apollinares, which was established by the *Carmina Marciana* but confirmed by the Sibylline Books, officially became annual in 208 BC; and the Ludi Saeculares of 249 BC were to be repeated every one hundred years. Likewise, the Sibylline Books' introduction of new gods, such as Ceres, Apollo, Aesclepius, and Magna Mater, permanently altered the religious landscape of the city.¹⁴¹

At the opposite extreme, a number of ceremonies were performed one time and never again. This may be either because they were considered suited only to particular circumstances, or because they seemed to have failed at appeasing the gods. For example, the Sibylline Books advised a *ver sacrum* only once, in 217 BC. The Romans vowed the *ver sacrum*, an offering to the gods of the produce of a single spring, after C. Flaminius' terrible defeat at Trasimene. In committing to the *ver sacrum*, the Roman people vowed that if they were kept safe for the next five years, in the midst of their war against Hannibal, they would sacrifice to Jupiter all of the livestock – pigs, sheep, goats, and cattle – born in one spring. Despite the five-year time frame, this vow was only fulfilled in 195 BC, twenty-one years after it had been made. The offering was repeated in 194 BC because the *pontifex maximus* determined that it had not been performed properly in the previous year.¹⁴² This delay may have been the result of the scarcity brought about by the war against Hannibal. Yet it should also be noted that the vow of

¹⁴¹ For the Floralia, see Pliny *NH* 18.286; for the Saturnalia and other expiations of 217 BC, see Livy 22.1.8-20, Plutarch *Fab.* 2, Macrobius *Sat.* 1.6.13-14, Orosius 4.15.1, Val. Max. 1.6.5; for the *ieiunium Cereris* of 191 BC, see Livy 36.37.2-6; for the Ludi Apollinares see Livy 27.23.5-7.

¹⁴² For the vowing of the *ver sacrum* in 217 BC, see Livy 22.9-10. For the fulfillment of the vow in 195 and again in 194 BC, see Livy 33.44 and 34.44.

217 BC hardly turned the Romans' luck around; one year later, they suffered one of the most catastrophic defeats of the Second Punic War, the Battle of Cannae. And the *ver sacrum*, whether because it was deemed to have failed, or because it was only appropriate to the most desperate of circumstances, was never advised again by the Sibylline Books.

Other rituals were also unique. In 108 BC, after ill-omened birds were spotted in Rome, and a man ate another man in the quarries, the Sibylline Books advised a sacrifice by thirty native virgins on the island of Cimolia.¹⁴³ The meaning behind this ritual is impossible to guess; why did the *decemviri* choose Cimolia? It may be that randomness was sometimes necessary in Sibylline recommendations to add legitimacy to the entire system of expiation, as a practice beyond human comprehension. The rituals were too serious to be completely understood. The fact that this ceremony was never repeated does not necessarily imply that it had failed; perhaps cannibalism, as an unusual prodigy, simply required an unusual expiation.

In Roman expiation, those ceremonies that were most successful, and which were not built into the Roman calendar, might be repeated. In 228 BC, as Rome faced the threat of a Gallic invasion from the north, the Sibylline Books advised a strange, “unroman”, ritual: two Gauls and two Greeks were buried alive in the Forum Boarium.¹⁴⁴ In the end, the Romans repelled the threat of the Gallic invasion, and thus the ritual must have been viewed as successful. In 216 BC, when the Romans were at a low point in their war against Hannibal, and they feared the threat of a Gallic uprising, they performed the ritual again. This may have been intended not simply to help them against the Gallic

¹⁴³ Obs. 40

¹⁴⁴ Livy 22.57.6 calls this type of ritualistic murder *minime romano sacro*.

threat, but against their enemies in general, including Hannibal.¹⁴⁵ In 114/3 BC, as the Romans prepared for war against the Gauls, the ceremony was again repeated.¹⁴⁶

The birth or discovery of a hermaphrodite was a prodigy that tended to have a peculiar ritual, which was repeated several times throughout the Republic. The ceremony involved a hymn sung in Rome by 27 maidens. The hermaphrodite prodigy was not always answered in this way. In 209 BC, the first recorded instance of this *monstrum*, an androgyne was expiated among other prodigies with sacrifice and *supplicatio*. In 186 BC, a hermaphrodite discovered in Umbria was carried from Roman soil and killed, and in 142 BC, an androgyne was thrown into the sea by the *haruspices*.¹⁴⁷ At the same time, the hymn sung by 27 maidens was sometimes advised for prodigies other than the hermaphrodite; in 104 and 99 BC, the people brought gifts to Ceres and Proserpina, and 27 maidens sang a hymn, though the prodigy lists do not mention the birth of a hermaphrodite in these years.¹⁴⁸ But the hymn by 27 maidens frequently followed the hermaphrodite prodigy.¹⁴⁹

This procession of maidens, which so often expiated the birth of a hermaphrodite, was first performed in 207 BC amid a flurry of unusual occurrences. Livy relates the

¹⁴⁵ Eckstein (1987) 337

¹⁴⁶ For 228 BC, see Cassius Dio 12 fr. 47, Plutarch *Marcellus* 3, Orosius 4.13.3; for 216 BC, see Livy 22.57.4; for 114/3 BC, see Obs. 37, Livy *Per.* 63, Orosius 5.15.20-2, Cassius Dio 26 frg. 87, Plutarch *QR* 83, Pliny *NH* 2.98 and 147. See Beard, North, and Price (1998) 81 for the link between the sacrifice of these Gauls and Greeks and the burial of Vestal Virgins accused of unchastity.

¹⁴⁷ For 209 BC, see Livy 27.11.1-6; for 186 BC, see Livy 39.22.2-5, Obs. 3; for 142 BC, see Obs. 22, Orosius 5.4.8. Disposal of hermaphrodites was a typical element of their expiation; the important fact in the cases of 186 and 142 BC is that these hermaphrodites were expiated *only* by disposal, not by the characteristic hymn.

¹⁴⁸ For 104 BC, see Obs. 43, Pliny *NH* 16.132 and 2.148, Plutarch *Marcellus* 17.4; for 99 BC, see Obs. 46. It should be noted that the sources do not always make clear that this ceremony was performed by the advice of the *decemviri*; it may in some cases have been recommended by the *haruspices*.

¹⁴⁹ The number 27 may be a specifically Roman element in these ceremonies, related to the 27 Argei of the city. See Palmer (1970) 94 on the significance of this number. A hymn by 27 boys and 27 girls, the *Carmen Saeculare*, was part of Augustus' Ludi Saeculares. It should be noted that the sources do not always make clear that this ceremony was performed by the advice of the *decemviri*; it may in some cases have been recommended by the *haruspices*.

story in great detail.¹⁵⁰ First, a *novemdialis* was held to expiate a shower of stones at Veii. After this, other prodigies were reported: lightning struck the temple of Jupiter and Grove of Marcia at Minturnae, along with the city wall and a gate at Atella; a stream of blood flowed into the temple at Minturnae; a wolf entered the gate at Capua and mauled a guard; and a shower of stones rained down in the Armilustrum. These prodigies were expiated by sacrifices, a *supplicatio* decreed by the *pontifices*, and another *novemdialis* for the rain of stones in the Armilustrum.

After these ceremonies, yet another frightening prodigy was reported: a child the size of a four-year-old was born at Frusino, but much more disturbing, Livy says, was the fact that it was a hermaphrodite. The *haruspices* ordered that the child be removed from Roman territory and drowned in the sea. The *pontifices* advised that three groups of nine girls proceed through the city singing a hymn, which was written by Livius Andronicus. As the girls were practicing this hymn in the temple of Jupiter Stator – surely because the hymn was meant to honor this god – lightning struck the temple of Juno Regina. The *haruspices* said that this prodigy referred to married women, and that the goddess should be appeased with a gift. Matrons within ten miles of the city, bringing donations for the goddess, selected 25 women as their representatives. A golden bowl was made from the women's offerings and taken to the Aventine, where the 25 women offered sacrifice to the goddess.

The *decemviri* then set a date for another sacrifice to Juno, and they arranged the order of ceremonies. Two white cows were led in procession to the temple, followed by two cypress wood statues of the goddess, the 27 maidens who sang their hymn to Juno, and the *decemviri* who wore laurel garlands and the *toga praetexta*. They processed

¹⁵⁰ See Livy 27.37.4-15.

through the city, through the Porta Carmentalis, along the Vicus Tuscus and the Velabrum, to the Forum Boarium, the Clivus Publicius, and the Temple of Juno Regina. Here, the *decemviri* sacrificed the two victims, and the statues were carried into the temple.

This same ceremony was repeated in 200 BC by order of the Sibylline Books following another hermaphrodite birth.¹⁵¹ Publius Ticinius Tegula wrote a new hymn for the occasion. Judging from the repetition of the ritual, the ceremony of 207 BC must have been deemed successful, and no wonder – Hannibal had been driven out of Italy only a few years later, and finally defeated in Africa.

Our one Republican Sibylline text preserved by Phlegon of Tralles relates to this ceremony. The text, as has already been mentioned, is actually two oracles combined. The verses mention the hymn by 27 maidens, but with significant changes. The first oracle “foretells” the birth of a hermaphrodite, and advises the following ceremonies in response: sacrifices for Demeter and Persephone, with a hymn sung by 27 maidens. Here we see Demeter and Persephone, instead of Juno, honored by the hymn, but in response to the standard hermaphrodite prodigy. The second oracle advises sacrifices to Apollo and Juno Regina, with another hymn sung by women from the foremost families. Since Livy’s description of the events of 207 BC is very detailed, we can be sure that these rituals to Ceres and Proserpina, as part of the expiation of a hermaphrodite birth, were not part of the original ceremony.¹⁵²

¹⁵¹ See Livy 31.12.5-10. Despite the fact that it was the *pontifices*, not the *decemviri*, who had first advised the hymn by 27 maidens, the *decemviri* advised it in 200 BC. Perhaps this is evidence of the flexibility of the Sibylline oracles, that they could adopt a ceremony first recommended by another priesthood.

¹⁵² See Appendix for the Phlegon oracle.

Thus we see that the ritual was modified over time, and Ceres and Proserpina came to play a role in the expiation. This may, as Bruce MacBain claims, have first happened in 133 BC, when the struggles between the tribunes and the slave rebellion in Sicily brought Ceres to the fore. In the following year, the *decemviri* conducted a major expiatory ritual to Ceres at Enna in Sicily, the home of the “oldest Ceres.” Obsequens tells us that 27 maidens sang a hymn in 133 BC, after the birth of a hermaphrodite; the ritual may have been altered at this time. In any case, the ceremony stands as a powerful example of the ability of the *decemviri* not only to reuse Sibylline oracles for specific prodigies, but to adapt them to specific circumstances.¹⁵³

FAILED EXPIATIONS

Failure, as judged by the circumstances of the Roman State, was always a possibility for the Sibylline Books.¹⁵⁴ We have already seen that certain expiatory rituals advised by them were performed only once in Roman history. In some cases, these rituals may have been considered failures and discarded. Expiatory rituals, it seems, were more than just traditional expressions; they were expected to have real effects. In times of great crisis, when the rituals turned out to be ineffective, the Romans could respond by changing their approach. This can be seen clearly in the reaction of the Romans to their repeated failures at the beginning of the Second Punic War. At this time, after years of terrible defeats like Trasimene and Cannae, the prodigy and expiation system was judged to have failed, and, as I shall show, it was changed accordingly.

¹⁵³ For the rituals of 133/132 BC, see Obs. 27a, Cicero *Verr.* 2.4.108, Val. Max. 1.1.1, Lactantius *Div. Inst.* 2.4.29, Diodorus 34/35 frg. 10.

¹⁵⁴ Failure, however, was very rare. Linderski (1995) 611: “If success is the touchstone, as it was for the Romans, Roman state religion served Rome well.”

In order to trace the changes in the prodigy and expiation system during the Second Punic War, it will be necessary to determine the nature of the system before the war began. Prior to the Second Punic War, the *decemviri* held almost exclusive charge over expiations in Rome. The sources disclose nineteen instances during this early period in which the Sibylline Books, read by the *decemviri*, were used to expiate prodigies. For this same time period, the sources cite only four instances in which the *haruspices*, Etruscan priests brought into Rome for expiations, were consulted about the prodigies of the Roman State.¹⁵⁵ The *pontifices*, on the other hand, provided expiatory advice only three times before the war. Two of these consultations dealt with the *incestum* of a Vestal Virgin, in which their involvement may be explained more by their headship over these priestesses than by their authority as priests of expiation. The third propitiatory rite which they conducted during this time was in response to a pestilence in 364 BC, but it should be noted that though Livy describes the pestilence, he does not mention the role of the *pontifices* in its expiation; we learn of their involvement from Augustine, whose separation from this period by time and circumstance diminishes the credibility of his account.¹⁵⁶

In the 5th and 4th centuries BC, therefore, expiation was almost the exclusive province of the *duumviri/decemviri* and the Sibylline Books. The *pontifices* were never really expiatory priests; even after the Second Punic War, we know of only two expiations over which they had sole charge.¹⁵⁷ The *haruspices* certainly did have a role

¹⁵⁵ Two of these, the accounts of the closing of the Lacus Curtius and the draining of the Alban Lake, are apocryphal stories whose truth is unreliable. For the closing of the Lacus Curtius, see Livy 7.6. For the draining of the Alban Lake, see Livy 5.15.

¹⁵⁶ For the *incestum* of the Vestal Virgins, see Livy 2.42.10 and Dionysius of Halicarnassus 8.89.3-5 (483 BC) and Dionysius of Halicarnassus 9.40.1-4 (472 BC). See Livy 7.2, Augustine *CD* 2.8, Orosius 3.4.1-6 for the pestilence of 364 BC.

¹⁵⁷ Livy 34.45 (194 BC), Livy 41.16 (176 BC).

in expiation – it was one of the functions for which they were most famous – but their status as Etruscan priests prevented them from being fully integrated into the Roman religious system. The intimate connection of haruspicial activity in Rome with the relations between Romans and Etruscans is evident in Livy’s account of the prodigies of 398 BC. In this year, the Senate chose not to accept a number of reported prodigies because bad blood between the Romans and Etruscans precluded the participation of the *haruspices* in Roman religion.¹⁵⁸

According to MacBain, whose study of prodigy and expiation in Rome focused mainly on the actions of the *haruspices*, these priests did not become a true part of the Roman religious system until around 278 BC, after the Etruscans had come to terms with the Romans.¹⁵⁹ We have reliable evidence from Cicero and Livy of an expiation conducted by the *haruspices* in this year in response to a number of lightning strikes.¹⁶⁰ Certainly the unstable relations between the Etruscans and the Romans before this date would have made the presence of the *haruspices* in Roman religion inconsistent. Even after this time, the Etruscan priests were not fully integrated into the Roman system, as they retained the status of a foreign priesthood and never became an official priestly *collegium* in republican Rome.¹⁶¹

¹⁵⁸ Livy 3.10. Livy’s account of the draining of the Alban Lake by the advice of the *haruspices*, though apocryphal, does provide evidence for the suspicion that the Romans held toward these Etruscan priests. The *haruspex* who advised the Romans to drain the lake was forced to do so when he was kidnapped by a Roman soldier, and his instructions were verified by Delphi before they were carried out. Dionysius of Halicarnassus 12.11-14 also stresses the agreement between the *haruspex* and Delphi.

¹⁵⁹ MacBain (1982) 46-7: “This permanent state of hostility with Etruria appears, however, to have come to an end sometime between the years 280 and 278 BC, when, as Harris has now argued convincingly, permanent peaceful relations with the Etruscan cities were sealed by the *foedera*.” See Harris (1971) 282-292.

¹⁶⁰ Cicero *de Div.* 1.16, Livy *Per.* 14.

¹⁶¹ MacBain (1982) argues correctly that had the *haruspices* been Roman citizens, Tiberius Gracchus the Elder could not have called them *Tusci ac barbari* in 163 BC. See Cicero *Nat. Deor.* 4.10, MacBain (1982) 43 n. 97.

MacBain sees the use of the *haruspices* in expiation in Rome after 278 BC as part of a Roman effort to reach out to the Etruscans. These priests would have been Etruscan aristocrats, and thus would have served as useful ambassadors for their people.¹⁶² The invitation to them to take part in the Roman religious system would have been viewed as a means of participating in an integral part of the Roman government, and thus would have been a position of honor and a grant of power to the Etruscans. According to MacBain, the consignment of this honor corresponded to the need that the Romans felt for the support of their northern neighbors at any given time. The priests' activity in Rome increased as Rome was threatened from the north; this, he claims, explains the heightened use of the *haruspices* in expiation during the Second Punic War.¹⁶³

It is certainly true that during the Second Punic War, the *haruspices* began to be consulted more frequently. Their appearance in Rome seems to have been very limited before the war. In the early part of the war, the *decemviri* and the Sibylline Books were consulted several times; for every expiation of which we know the details of its performance, it was the *decemviri* who led the rites.¹⁶⁴ In 214 BC, however, the *haruspices* were called in to respond to a prodigy. From this time onwards, the actions of the *decemviri* were curtailed, with only three additional consultations during the Second Punic War. Instead, the *haruspices* and *pontifices* began playing an increased role in expiation, usurping the position of the *decemviri*. The *pontifices*, a priesthood rarely

¹⁶² During the Second Punic War, the Romans had concerns about the loyalty of the Etruscans, and thus maintained legions (usually two at a time) in Etruria from 212-200 BC. See Harris (1971) 135.

¹⁶³ MacBain (1982) pp. 43ff.

¹⁶⁴ Livy 21.62 (218 BC), 22.1 (217 BC), 22.9-10 (217 BC), 22.36 (216 BC), 22.57 (216 BC).

involved in expiation, had sole charge of three expiations during the war from 213 BC on, while the *haruspices* took part in two expiations after 214 BC.¹⁶⁵

During the war, when the *decemviri* were consulted for expiations after 215 BC, it was always in conjunction with another expiatory source. They were involved in the institution of the *Ludi Apollinares* in 212 BC, but this was not by the advice of the Sibylline Books alone, but through the newly discovered *Carmina Marciana*. When they participated in the expiations of 207 BC, it was in cooperation with the *haruspices* and *pontifices*. When they introduced Magna Mater into the city of Rome in 204 BC, they had the backing of the Delphic Oracle. For the duration of the war after 215 BC, therefore, the *decemviri* and the Sibylline Books were not trusted to stand alone.¹⁶⁶

Thus it seems that the heightened involvement of *haruspices* in expiation during the Second Punic War may have resulted not from the threat facing Rome through Etruria, but from the need to find new methods of expiation after the repeated failures of the *decemviri* and the Sibylline Books in the early years of the war. These were the years of the Romans' most devastating defeats – Trebia, Trasimene, and Cannae. Before each loss, the Sibylline Books had been consulted, yet the enactment of their advice – often innovative in a way that implied desperation – had not prevented the Romans from suffering crushing losses.¹⁶⁷ So the Romans lost faith in the *decemviri*, and they turned to

¹⁶⁵ See Mazurek (2004) for the decreased involvement of the *decemviri* in expiation after the early years of the Second Punic War.

¹⁶⁶ For the expiation of 212 BC and the *Carmina Marciana*, see Livy 25.12, Macrobius *Sat.* 1.17.25-30, Cicero *Div.* 1.89.115, Servius *ad Aen.* 6.70.72, Dio 15 (Zon. 9.1). For the expiation of 207 BC, see Livy 27.37.4-15. For the introduction of Magna Mater to Rome, see Livy 29.10.4-15, 14.5-14; Suetonius *Tib.* 2.3; Ovid *Fasti* 4.395ff; Pliny *NH* 7.120; Lactantius *Inst. Div.* 2.7; Appian *Hann.* 56.

¹⁶⁷ As was already noted, at the beginning of the war, the *decemviri* advised a number of expiations to be performed outside the city of Rome. In addition, in 217 BC, they advised the importation of two new cults to the city, Venus Erycina and Mens (Livy 22.9), while in the following year, they advised the unusual (though not unprecedented) burial of two Gauls and two Greeks in the Forum Boarium (Livy 22.57.2-6, Livy *Per.* 22, Plutarch *Fab.* 18).

other priests for ways of propitiating the angry gods. Instead of being a means of gaining the political and military backing of the Etruscans, the incorporation of the *haruspices* into the Roman system may have been based upon a religious belief that the *haruspices* might be able to succeed where the *decemviri* had failed.

The trend of diminished decemviral involvement continued until around 193 BC, when, on the eve of war with Antiochus, the *decemviri* again began conducting *supplicationes*. This ritual had once been one of their primary means of expiation, but they had not advised it at all since 216 BC.¹⁶⁸ The resumption of this activity after a generation's time indicates that the Romans had forgotten their mistrust of the *decemviri*, whose role as Roman priests of expiation was too ingrained in Roman life to permit their failures to take away their job. But the damage was done; though they remained a priesthood of expiation, they lost their unique dominance of this role, and the *haruspices* in particular continued to play an important part in the expiation of Roman prodigies.

¹⁶⁸ Mazurek (2004) 151-2, Appendix 1.

Chapter 3

The Sibylline Books as Greek Oracles

The traditional scholarly opinion of the Sibylline Books and the *decemviri* is that they were bringers of foreign rites, particularly Greek rites.¹⁶⁹ This opinion derives in large part from Varro, who wrote, *nos dicimos XVviros Graeco ritu sacra, non Romano facere*.¹⁷⁰ Modern scholarship, however, has questioned this distinction,¹⁷¹ noting that many of the rites recommended by the Sibylline Books were Roman or Italian rituals, such as the *lustratio*, *supplicatio*, *ver sacrum*, and the *novemdialis*.¹⁷²

It may be more useful, in fact, to see the work of the decemvirs as focused not on Greek rites in particular, but on religious innovation in general, which generally took a Greek form in Rome. The entire Roman expiatory system was built around the idea of innovation. Despite the typical modern assumption that a prodigy signified some ritual

¹⁶⁹ Forsythe (2005) 140: “religious remedies divined from them [the Sibylline Books] invariably resulted in the Romans’ adopting some aspect of Greek cultic practice.” MacBain (1982) 32-3 n. 63 claims that the decemvirs were officiants of the Greek rite and supervised foreign cults in Rome. Rosenberger (1998) 54-5 claims that the *pontifices* handled early Roman cults, the *decemviri* Greek cults, and the *haruspices* the rites of other peoples.

¹⁷⁰ Varro *LL* 7.88

¹⁷¹ Scheid (1996) 25: “Despite a current opinion, far from being exclusively limited to the Greek rituals, the libri and the Xviri SF very often, we may say usually, recommended Roman rituals, especially expiatory rituals.” North (1996) 588: “When they suggested the introduction of foreign cults, as they repeatedly did, the priests may have had some continuing responsibility for them; the new cults were normally Greek and celebrated in what the Romans called ‘the Greek rite’ (Graeco ritu); but it would be going well beyond the evidence to say that the decemviri had the same duties in relation to the Greek cults as the pontifices did in relation to the Roman ones. It seems that both fetiales and decemviri kept within closely defined areas of action.” Orlin (2002) 94: “Most of the consultations of the Sibylline Books did not result in the addition of Greek religious rites to the Roman religious system.”

¹⁷² Hoffmann (1933) 22

error on the part of Roman magistrates¹⁷³, expiation rarely involved looking backward to find a mistake. In fact, of all the Sibylline expiations which we have on record, only two seem to have explained a prodigy retrospectively: In 217 BC, the Sibylline Books ordered that a vow to Mars be repeated on a larger scale; this may be an admission that it was not performed correctly the first time. In 143 BC, after the Romans were defeated by the Salassi, the Books explained that the loss could have been prevented by sacrifices at the Gallic border. But in neither case was fault made explicit.¹⁷⁴

In a way, then, the expiations advised by the Sibylline Books were always new, and always innovative, rarely looking back to correct ritual errors. Instead, the Books suggested new ceremonies that were not inscribed on the Roman calendar. These ceremonies were often repetitions of successful expiations of the past, since the rituals could be judged by their results, but each was chosen and suited for the occasion.¹⁷⁵

Yet as I shall show, throughout the third century BC, when Roman contact with the Greek world was increasing, the Greek elements of Sibylline expiations came to be emphasized more and more. Eventually, perhaps, the *decemviri* would be seen as experts not only in the Sibylline Books, but also in the *Graecus ritus*. In this chapter, I will examine the relationship of the Sibylline Books to the foreign, particularly to the Greek.

I will explore the status of the oracles as Greek texts imported into Rome. I will examine

¹⁷³ Levene (1993) 6: "The favor or anger of the gods was a result of Roman piety or impiety." Scheid (2003) 117: "A prodigy generally signified some omission or error in cult." Rosenberger (1998) 21 claims that the rupture of the *pax deorum* was usually caused by a mistake in ritual or by neglect of a deity. Takacs (2008) xxi: "Romans sought the cause for any social discord or political failing that had the potential to destabilize Rome by looking in the religious sphere; the same was true of the remedy. In short, cause and corrective were always a religious act."

¹⁷⁴ Of course, Vestal Virgins could always be blamed for troubles or prodigies, and punished for unchastity. But despite their vows, unchastity was not a ritual error, but an act of impiety.

¹⁷⁵ See Chapter 2 above for the repetition of expiatory ceremonies. Cicero *de Div.* 1.3.1 on the importance of results in divination: *Atque haec, ut ego arbitror, veteres rerum magis eventis moniti quam ratione docti probaverunt*. "I think that our ancestors who approved these practices were influenced more by actual results than swayed by reason."

the temples constructed through the advice of the Sibylline Books and will trace any developments in the types of gods introduced through the oracles. Finally, I will investigate the Greek rituals – or, more accurately, the rituals that the Romans *perceived and promoted* as Greek – recommended by the Sibylline Books.

THE ORIGIN MYTH

The legend of the introduction of the Sibylline Books to Rome is one of Rome's most charming tales, a gripping story of the confrontation of royal pride and sacred power, offering external confirmation and divine assurance of the lofty fate of Rome. The story, as told in Chapter 1, bears repeating here. According to Dionysius, a certain woman – *gynae tis* – a traveler from another land, offered to sell a set of nine books to Tarquinius Superbus, the last king of Rome. The king, unimpressed by her offer, refused to buy the books, and the woman went away. She returned a short time later, this time with only six books – she had burned three of the nine – and offered again to sell these to Tarquin at the same price as before. Tarquin was not won over by the woman's unusual business tactics; he mocked her and sent her away. But she returned for a third and final time, now with only three books. She offered to sell them for the same price as she had proposed for the original nine. Now the king's interest was piqued, and he sent for his augurs to ask their advice. The priests lamented the loss of the six books, and they advised the king to pay whatever the woman asked for the remaining three. Tarquin

bought the books, and the woman, after urging the king to guard them carefully, disappeared from sight.¹⁷⁶

The basic framework of this story is similar in our other ancient accounts, yet they differ in a number of details. For example, some versions claim that the woman brought nine books of oracles to the king and burned six, while others maintain that she had three books to begin with, and sold one to the king in the end.¹⁷⁷ The sources also disagree on which Tarquin, Priscus or Superbus, received the Books.¹⁷⁸ Anyone who attempted a reconstruction of Varro, the earliest known source for this story, looking for an authoritative account, would be sorely disappointed; the authors who claim to derive their versions from Varro differ in these details.¹⁷⁹

Even more significantly regarding the question of the origins of the Sibylline Books, the sources disagree on the identity of the woman who brought the oracles to Rome. Pliny and Zonaras simply call her the Sibyl. But since Varro listed no fewer than ten different Sibyls in the ancient world, a simple Sibylline identification leaves the provenance of the woman unknown.¹⁸⁰ Many sources, however, find the origins of the Books in Cumae, and label the woman who delivered them as either the Sibyl of Cumae

¹⁷⁶ This account comes from Dionysius of Halicarnassus 4.62. Other versions of the story can be found in Lactantius *Div. Inst.* 1.6; Servius *ad Aen.* 3.445, 6.72, and 6.336; Lydus *de Mensibus* 4.47; Isidore of Seville *Etymol.* 8.8; Zonaras 7.11; Pliny *NH* 13.88; Solin 2.16f.; and Aulus Gellius *NA* 1.19.

¹⁷⁷ Pliny and Lydus each claim that the woman had three books at the beginning and left one; Dionysius of Halicarnassus, Aulus Gellius, Lactantius, Isidore of Seville, and Servius write that she had nine books and gave three to the king. Zonaras recognizes the discrepancy and says that there were either nine or three books.

¹⁷⁸ Lactantius, Isidore of Seville, and Lydus say that the woman gave the Books to Tarquinius Priscus, while all the other versions claim that Tarquinius Superbus received them.

¹⁷⁹ While Lactantius cites nine original books, Lydus mentions three; and while Dionysius of Halicarnassus claims that the oracles were given to Tarquinius Superbus, Lactantius says that Priscus received them.

¹⁸⁰ Lactantius, Isidore of Seville, and Lydus list these Sibyls. They are the Chaldean, the Libyan, the Delphic, the Cimmerian, the Erythraean, the Samian, the Cumaeon, the Hellespontine, the Phrygian, and the Tiburtine Sibyls.

herself, or an assistant representing the Sibyl.¹⁸¹ Servius, on the other hand, claims that although Virgil accepts the tradition that the Sibylline Books came from Cumae, Varro maintains that the oracles must have been the work of the Erythraean Sibyl.¹⁸² This may well have been the dominant opinion in 76 BC, since the Romans turned first to Erythrae to replace the Sibylline Books when they were destroyed in 83 BC.¹⁸³ There is, in fact, an ancient tradition linking the two seers: the pseudo-Aristotelian *de Mirabilibus Auscultationibus*, written in the third century BC, identifies the Cumaean Sibyl with the Erythraean.¹⁸⁴ This assumes a mobile Sibyl, one who moved from Erythrae to Cumae. Yet Varro, as cited by Lactantius, lists the two Sibyls separately.

Dionysius of Halicarnassus and Aulus Gellius confuse the matter even further, since they fail to identify the woman at all. They claim only that she was a foreigner, and that she vanished from sight after she sold the Books to Tarquin. However, both Dionysius and Gellius identify the Books as Sibylline, and thus they must have known the tradition connecting the oracles to one of the Sibyls. Their refusal to name the woman's origins, like their recounting of her extraordinary disappearance, adds a mysterious and marvelous element to the story. At the same time, it implies that the story would have been familiar enough to the audience that the detail of the woman's identity would not have been necessary. The accounts of Dionysius and Gellius emphasize one important fact apparent in each of our sources: regardless of which Sibyl they came from, the Books were of foreign origin.

¹⁸¹ Tzetzes in Lycophr. Alex. 1279 identifies the woman as a servant of the Sibyl of Cumae, who had passed away during the reign of Tarquinius Superbus. Lactantius, Isidore of Seville, and Lydus identify the woman as the Sibyl of Cumae herself.

¹⁸² Servius *ad Aen.* 6.72: *incertum est cuius Sibyllae fuerint, quamquam Cumanae Vergilius dicat, Varro Erythraeae.*

¹⁸³ See Chapter 5 below. For the expedition to Erythrae, see Lact. *Div. Inst.* 1.6.14 = Fenestella *Annales* fr. 18; Tacitus *Annales* 6.12.

¹⁸⁴ See Parke (1988) 78.

Livy, who fails to report the story of the Books' introduction to Rome, nevertheless makes clear the foreign origins of an Italian Sibyl. When he mentions the ascendancy of the prophetess Carmenta in Italy in Book 1, he remarks that this was "before the Sibyl arrived in Italy."¹⁸⁵ For Livy, then, the Sibyl was not only a foreigner from outside Rome, but even from outside Italy.

It is difficult to believe that Livy did not know the legend of the origins of the Books, since Varro and Dionysius of Halicarnassus both recount the tale, and since Livy himself several times calls the Books the *Libri Sibyllini*. The Books first appear in Livy's histories in 461 BC, when they are consulted to expiate a number of prodigies: the earth shook, the sky glowed with fire, a cow spoke, and flesh rained down from the sky. But Livy does not introduce the Books as a new discovery here; rather, they are shown at this time to be already an integral part of the Roman expiation system. Livy passes over the perfect opportunity to mention the arrival of the oracles in Rome when he describes the embassy that Tarquinius Superbus sent to Delphi to ask about a prodigy. In this passage, Livy rather explicitly disregards the use of the Sibylline Books in the regal period when he states that, under Tarquinius Superbus, the last king of Rome, public prodigies were expiated by *Etrusci vates* – the *haruspices*.

Haec agenti portentum terribile visum: anguis ex columna lignea elapsus cum terrorem fugamque in regia fecisset, ipsius regis non tam subito pavore perculit pectus quam anxii inplevit curis. Itaque cum ad publica prodigia Etrusci tantum vates adhiberentur, hoc velut domestico exterritus visu Delphos ad maxime inclitum in terris oraculum mittere statuit.

During these activities [the building projects of Tarquin] a terrible portent was seen: a snake slid out of a wooden column. This caused terror and commotion in the Regia, but the heart of the king himself was not so much struck with fear as filled with anxious forebodings. Therefore although

¹⁸⁵ Livy 1.7: *ante Sibyllae in Italiam adventum*; see Parke (1988) 79. Perhaps Livy, like Lycophron and Servius, believed that the Sibyl of Cumae was originally from Erythrae, and had migrated thence to Italy.

only Etruscan seers were summoned for public prodigies, Tarquin, terrified by this seemingly personal prodigy, decided to consult Delphi, the most renowned oracle in the world.¹⁸⁶

Given Livy's general interest in the origins of Roman religion, and his more particular attentiveness to the Roman system of prodigy and expiation, it is remarkable that he would fail to narrate the story of the Sibylline Books' introduction to Rome. While he describes the institution of the *pontifices*, *augures*, *flamines*, *fetiales*, and *salii*, he fails to recount the foundation of the *duumviri sacris faciundis*, one of the three major priestly colleges in Rome. And though the Roman religious response to prodigies, centered on the consultation of the *duumviri/decemviri* and the Sibylline Books, is the best-documented aspect of Roman religion, Livy omits the story of how the oracles arrived in Rome.¹⁸⁷

One may argue that it is the supernatural elements of the story that exclude it from Livy's narrative. He does tend to avoid the supernatural. For example, in the story of Numa and Egeria, Livy does not even admit the possibility that Numa was truly in communion with a goddess.¹⁸⁸ Still, the supernatural is by no means absent from Livy's text. One tale that Livy does include – the story of the augur Attus Navius – is very similar to the Sibyl story in structure and in theme. According to Livy's account, Tarquinius Priscus, wanting to expand his cavalry, planned to add new centuries to the Ramnes, Titienses, and Luceres. The augur Attus Navius threatened to impede the king's wishes, advising him that this expansion could not be carried out without favorable auspices. Angered by his intrusion, Tarquin decided to test the augur. He asked Attus

¹⁸⁶ Livy 1.56.4

¹⁸⁷ Livy mentions the *duumviri/decemviri* or the Sibylline Books 36 times in his extant narrative.

¹⁸⁸ Livy 1.19: *Qui cum descendere ad animos sine aliquo commento miraculi non posset, simulat sibi cum dea Egeria congressus nocturnos esse; eius se monitu quae acceptissima dis essent sacra instituire, sacerdotes suos cuique deorum praeficere.*

Navius to tell him through augury whether the action that the king considered in his mind was possible. When Attus replied that it was, Tarquin ordered him to perform the deed: to cut a whetstone in half with a razor. Miraculously and without hesitation the augur sliced the stone in two.¹⁸⁹

In this story, Attus Navius plays a role very similar to that of the Sibyl, trumping kingly power with divine authority and divine knowledge.¹⁹⁰ The stories are so similar, in fact, that for Livy recounting one may have precluded the need to tell the other. Nevertheless, this does not explain why Livy would have omitted the foundation story of one of Rome's most important priesthoods, the *duumviri sacris faciundis*, from his narrative. A stronger explanation may lie in the association of the Sibylline Books with the foreign, and Livy's inclination to avoid the inclusion of Greek elements in his account of the foundation of Rome.

He seems to have avoided associations between Roman and Greek cult in the earliest books of his narrative. When he tells the story of Romulus' installation of the cult of Hercules, Livy explicitly states that this was the only foreign cult which Romulus introduced to the city, and justifies this by Romulus' respect for Hercules' deification after his accomplishment of virtuous deeds.

Haec tum sacra Romulus una ex omnibus peregrina suscepit, iam tum immortalitatis virtute partae, ad quam eum sua fata ducebant, fautor.

Of all foreign rites, these were the only ones that Romulus adopted, who was even then an admirer of the immortality achieved by virtue to which his own destiny was leading him.¹⁹¹

Livy also explicitly denies any association between Numa, considered the founder of Roman religion, and Pythagoras, though it was apparently a common ancient opinion that

¹⁸⁹ Livy 1.36

¹⁹⁰ See Beard (1989) for myths of priesthood and power in Rome.

¹⁹¹ Livy 1.7.15

Pythagoras was a teacher of Numa.¹⁹² In addition, he omits the stories of the vow and dedication of the temple of Ceres in 496 and 493 respectively. Though an indigenous Italian cult, the worship of Ceres had been strongly connected with the rites of Demeter long before Livy's time. At some point during the Republic, Greek priestesses of Ceres were introduced to Rome from Magna Graecia. And according to Pliny, the Romans employed two Greek artists, Damophilus and Gorgasus, to decorate the goddess' temple.¹⁹³

In Livy's first book, prodigy and expiation seem to be an almost entirely Italian affair. He mentions the role of the *pontifex maximus* in determining the validity of a prodigy – a role that he never acknowledges again in his narrative.¹⁹⁴ And as noted earlier, he claims that the Etruscan *haruspices* were consulted for prodigies under Tarquin.¹⁹⁵ In fact, the only significant Roman prodigy of Livy's first book constitutes a major Italian event. After the Romans had taken control of Mount Alba, a rain of stones was reported on the mountain. When a Roman delegation arrived to survey the situation, they saw stones falling from the sky and heard a voice directing the Albans to resume their ancestral religious rites. The first *novemdialis*, a nine-day ceremony to Jupiter, was performed and the Albans' ancestral worship of the gods renewed. Thus the Romans played a part in continuing the ancient Italic rituals to Jupiter Latiaris.¹⁹⁶

¹⁹² Livy 1.18: *Auctorem doctrinae eius, quia non exstat alius, falso Samium Pythagoram edunt. . . . Suopte igitur ingenio temperatum animum virtutibus fuisse opinor magis instructumque non tam peregrinis artibus quam disciplina tetrica ac tristi veterum Sabinorum, quo genere nullum quondam incorruptius fuit.*

¹⁹³ Pliny NH 35.154

¹⁹⁴ Livy 1.20

¹⁹⁵ Livy does, however, say that Tarquin sent to Delphi to consult the Greek oracle there. Nevertheless, this is an isolated incident, and he states very clearly that the generally accepted practice in the event of prodigies was to consult the Etruscan *haruspices*. This consultation, however, concerned not a State prodigy but a private one. Perhaps Livy's presentation of the importance of the *haruspices* in expiation at the time of Superbus derives from the Etruscan origin of the Tarquins.

¹⁹⁶ Livy 1.31

Livy's failure to acknowledge Greek elements in early Roman cult and his desire to demonstrate the Italian foundation of early Roman religion may be particularly strong with the Sibylline Books, since he viewed the prodigy and expiation system as a powerful symbol of the piety and reverence of the great Romans of the Republic. A well-known passage shows the importance of the system for Livy as a distinctive feature of Roman history:

Non sum nescius ab eadem neglegentia qua nihil deos portendere volgo nunc credant neque nuntiari admodum ulla prodigia in publicum neque in annales referri. Ceterum et mihi vetustas res scribenti nescio quo pacto antiquus fit animus, et quaedam religio tenet quae illi prudentissimi viri publice suscipienda censuerint, ea pro indignis habere quae in meos annales referam.

I am not unaware that because of this same negligence that leads men to believe that the gods portend nothing to the people, no prodigies are ever announced in public nor recorded in our histories. Yet not only does my own mind become in some way old-fashioned as I write about these ancient matters, but also a certain reverence keeps me from considering unworthy for me to write in my history things which those very wise men judged should be undertaken for the common good.¹⁹⁷

This statement has often been used as a proof of Livy's general religious skepticism, particularly his disbelief in prodigies – an excuse for his treatment of the ridiculous. But I believe that a focus on Livy's own beliefs misses the mark. This is not a statement about Livy – his personal testimony to his own sanity – but a statement about the condition of the *res publica*. Livy claims that in the past, when people were better, they were attentive to prodigies, yet in his own day prodigies were something to be scorned. His emphasis is on discontinuity.

A Greek origin for such a significant aspect of Roman state religion did not fit with Livy's conception of early Roman history. Hence this startling omission. Yet all of

¹⁹⁷ Livy 43.13.1-2

our accounts – even Livy – agree on two central aspects of the Sibylline oracles: the foreign origins of the Books, and their great antiquity. Livy, who neglects the legend of the Books’ origins, makes clear the foreign provenance of the Sibyl herself, and cites the use of the Books as early as 461 BC.

We are left to wonder, then, when the Sibylline Books actually became “Sibylline.” The Greek tradition of the Sibyl was very ancient; Heraclitus described her raving prophecies.¹⁹⁸ Aristophanes also mentioned the Sibyl.¹⁹⁹ But we cannot say exactly when the Sibylline tradition entered Rome.²⁰⁰ Certainly, the Sibyl was familiar to the Romans by the late Republic, when Cicero and Varro could discuss her nature and origins. Rome’s oracular texts must have been associated with the Sibyl at least by 76 BC, when the Romans travelled to famous Sibylline sites to assemble a new collection of oracles. Pliny claims that statues of three Sibyls were among the oldest statues in Rome, but his testimony must be taken with a grain of salt.²⁰¹ Roman tradition, as we have seen, maintains that the Books arrived in the city even before the Republic began. It is quite possible that the Romans did possess oracular texts at this time, maybe even texts in Greek. The association of these oracles with the Sibyl may find a parallel in the development of the Trojan legend in Rome.²⁰² According to Erich Gruen, at the end of the fourth century BC, as a result of their expansion in Italy and increased contacts with Hellenic Greeks, the Romans became interested in defining their relations to the

¹⁹⁸ Heraclitus as quoted in Plutarch *Mor.* 397 A-B. Heraclitus fr. 75 Markovich = 22 B 92 D.-K. = fr. 245 Kirk-Raven-Schofield.

¹⁹⁹ Aristophanes *Pax* 1095, 1116

²⁰⁰ See Lightfoot (2007) 3ff. for early references to the Sibyl.

²⁰¹ Pliny *NH* 34.6: *Equidem et Sibyllae iuxta rostra esse non miror tres sint licet: una quam Sextus Pacuius Taurus aed. pl. restituit; duae quas M. Messalla. Primas putarem has et Atti Navi, positas aetate Tarquinii Prisci, ni regum antecedentium essent in Capitolio.*

²⁰² See Gruen (1992) 6-51 for the development of the Trojan legend in Rome.

Greeks.²⁰³ The association of the texts with the Sibyl may be part of the same movement. I will show below how the Sibylline origins of the texts became better articulated in the third century BC.

NEW TEMPLES

The foreign nature of the Sibylline Books – their identity as a collection of Greek oracles – has frequently been linked to their ability to introduce new gods into Rome, and this tendency of the Books to advise the construction of new temples has often been emphasized. According to E. Gruen, “The Sibylline Books, themselves an alien religious force embraced by Roman officialdom, provided guidance in the adoption of gods and rites from abroad.”²⁰⁴ It is true that the Sibylline Books were an important means of introducing new cults to Rome, yet the introduction of new gods by Sibylline rite is sometimes exaggerated.²⁰⁵ Sibylline Books advised the construction of at most only nine known temples in Rome: Ceres, Liber, and Libera; Apollo; Aesculapius; Hercules Custos; Flora; Venus Erycina; Mens; Magna Mater; and Venus Verticordia. As I will show, the involvement of the oracles in many of these foundations is questionable, so that the number of Sibylline temples in Rome may actually have been much fewer. Thus of the 70 state temples dedicated in Rome between 509 and 55 BC, only a small minority were of Sibylline origin.²⁰⁶ And while the oracles were consulted on 54 known occasions

²⁰³ Gruen (1992) 50: “The matter of articulating its origins took on importance for Rome in the late fourth century. The aftermath of the Latin War and expanded contacts with Hellenic Italy provided the impetus. Political and cultural motives combined to develop a narrative that would bring mutual esteem to Romans and Latins and establish a pedigree that connected Rome to the Hellenic World.”

²⁰⁴ Gruen (1990) 39.

²⁰⁵ Takacs (2008) 65: “The reported Sibylline instructions could be horrific (bury a Greek and a Gaul alive to avert a foreign invasion) but most often they prompted the introduction of a foreign god and the building of a new temple.”

²⁰⁶ See Orlin (1997) Appendix 1 for a list of temple dedications in Rome between 509 and 55 BC.

between the inception of the Republic in 509 BC and the Books' destruction in 83, fewer than 20% of these consultations actually resulted in the construction of a new temple.

Far from being a typical means of expiation, the foundation of a temple through the Sibylline oracles seems to have been a true emergency measure, reserved for the direst of circumstances. The emphasis of modern scholarship on the innovative nature of Roman religion – with change being an integral and fundamental part of the religious system – tends to obscure the fact that the admission of new gods into the city through the Sibylline Books was a very rare and momentous gesture. For example, Livy writes that in 436 BC, the Romans consulted the Sibylline Books to find a remedy for a pestilence that was devastating the population. Three years later, in 433 BC, they again turned to the Books to avert a pestilence, and began constructing a temple to Apollo.²⁰⁷ Thus it appears that only after years of desperation, in the clutches of a terrible plague, did the Romans resort to the foundation of a new temple. The same seems to be true for Apollo's son Aesculapius, whose temple was vowed by Sibylline advice in 293 BC after the apparent failure of expiatory measures to relieve a pestilence two years earlier.²⁰⁸ Mens and Venus Erycina, likewise, were introduced in the Second Punic War only after the defeat at Trasimene marked the failure of numerous expiatory ceremonies to restore the gods' favor to the Romans.²⁰⁹ Toward the end of the war, Magna Mater was introduced to Rome to ensure final victory.²¹⁰ In each of these instances, the Sibylline

²⁰⁷ For 436 BC, see Livy 4.21.5, Orosius 2.13.8. For 433 BC, see Livy 4.25.3.

²⁰⁸ For 295 BC, see Livy 10.31.8. For the introduction of Aesculapius, see Livy 10.47 and *Per.* 11; Plutarch *QR* 94; Val. Max. 1.8.2; Aug. *CD* 3.17; Orosius 3.22.5; *de Vir. Ill.* 22.1; Ovid *Metam.* 15.622ff.

²⁰⁹ For Venus Erycina and Mens, see Livy 22.9-10.

²¹⁰ For Magna Mater's introduction, see Livy 29.10.4-5, 29.14.5-14; Suet. *Tib.* 2.3; Ovid *Fasti* 4.395ff.; Pliny *NH* 7.120; Lact. *Inst. Div.* 2.7; App. *Hann.* 56.

oracles recommended that new temples be built in Rome only at times of direst need, or during watershed moments.

Thus the dedication of temples was only a small part of the range of expiatory ceremonies recommended by the Sibylline Books. Only a small number of temples were built in Rome through the Sibylline Books, and they were usually advised only in exceptional circumstances, often for new or foreign gods. Not all of the deities introduced to Rome through the Sibylline Books were Greek, and not all Greek cults came to Rome through the Sibylline Books.²¹¹ But many of the Sibylline cults represented important additions to Roman religion. The monumental Ceres, Liber, and Libera temple would become the headquarters of the plebeian movement. Other Sibylline temples were the homes of expressly foreign deities, gods who stand out in the list of Republican temple dedications – Aesculapius from Epidauros, Venus from Mt. Eryx, Magna Mater from Pergamum.

Besides the few temples advised by the Sibylline Books, all of the state temples built in Rome during the Republic were vowed by individual magistrates, often a general on campaign.²¹² Thus the Sibylline Books constituted one of the only means by which State temples might be built in Rome, and certainly the most creative. Individuals usually vowed temples to characteristically Roman or Italian gods, such as Quirinus or Vediovis, or abstract deities, such as Honos or Virtus.²¹³ Despite the rising interest in all things Greek among the elites of the 3rd and 2nd centuries, their temple dedications

²¹¹ Castor and Pollux, for example, were brought to Rome through the decision of the dictator Postumius, not the advice of the Sibyl. It was vowed in 499 BC and dedicated in 484. See Livy 2.20.11-12.

²¹² Orlin (1997) 35

²¹³ These may have been perceived as Greek cults. See Clark (2007) 31ff.

remained fairly unremarkable.²¹⁴ A magistrate's vow would have been limited both by his desire to present himself as an adherent of the *mos maiorum* in line with the traditional gods and virtues of the city, and the pressure of his peers not to stand out too far from the crowd.²¹⁵

With the Sibylline Books, though, these pressures were not a concern. The Books were interpreted by ten priests, under the authorization of the entire Senate. This diffusion of power meant that no single individual received the glory for the success of the advised expiations. The Books themselves were the authority behind these dedications, with the Senate bearing responsibility for enacting their advice. This diffusion of power permitted a range of innovation not available to the individual magistrate. There was thus a very practical, political reason for the innovative nature of Sibylline temple constructions as compared to magisterial ones: the glory of the strange and unusual dedications accrued to the elites as a body rather than as individuals, and the power to introduce innovative or foreign cults was left in the hands of the Senate.

But it was not simply their deferral of power that made the Sibylline Books useful to the Roman state. Each of the new deities introduced by the oracles responded to a particular and timely need. And each arose from a specific context, reflecting the expansion of Rome's horizons as the city grew into a Mediterranean power, and the reformulation of the Romans' self-definition in light of their changing place in the world. For the remainder of this section, I will examine each alleged Sibylline temple

²¹⁴ Rawson (1989) 441: "Scipio and the other great generals often made dedications at Greek shrines, but Greek deities are not predominant among the gods of all kinds, traditional and less traditional, to whom they set up temples in Rome as a result of vows made on campaign."

²¹⁵ Marcellus was stopped when he attempted to found a single temple to two deities, Honor and Virtus. Themistocles offers an interesting Greek parallel for public concern for an individual's temple dedication. Plutarch claims that his haughtiness in establishing a temple to Artemis Aristoboule was a major reason for his fall from power. See Garland (1992) 79.

foundation. I will investigate the origins of these cults and the reasons for their introduction. I hope through this study to trace any trends or developments in the introduction of new deities by the Sibylline Books over time, and to reach a better understanding of the role of the oracles in Roman religious innovations.

According to Dionysius of Halicarnassus, the first temple introduced to Rome by the Sibylline Books was the temple to Ceres, Liber, and Libera, vowed in 496 BC and dedicated in 493.²¹⁶ The temple became the center of the plebeian movement, and saw a number of Greek rituals added to its cult in the 3rd and 2nd centuries BC. With its many significant accretions over time, the nature of the original cult is difficult to isolate. Even its construction through the Sibylline Books is uncertain, since our only source for this information – Dionysius of Halicarnassus – offers an account filled with dubious details.²¹⁷ According to Dionysius, in 496 BC a drought led to scarcity of provisions for the Roman army, and compelled the dictator Postumius to order the consultation of the Sibylline Books. Such an action would have been highly irregular, since only the Senate could request the inspection of the oracles.²¹⁸ According to the duumvirs, the Books recommended that Ceres, Liber, and Libera be propitiated. As a result, Postumius vowed a temple to the Triad on the condition of a renewed abundance in the city. This vow raises another question: did the oracles actually recommend the construction of a temple, or did they just advise propitiation, and Postumius himself decided that that meant building a temple? The question is impossible to answer, but Roman tradition, at least,

²¹⁶ Dionysius of Halicarnassus 6.94

²¹⁷ Livy 2.22 writes of the years 498-6 BC: “There are so many chronological uncertainties in the history of these years, with different authorities giving different lists of magistrates, that the great antiquity of the events and of the sources does not permit one to make out which consuls followed which or what events happened in what year.” (transl. Luce)

²¹⁸ Even the dictator Fabius Maximus, in the dark days after Trasimene, had to ask the Senate to have the Sibylline Books read. See Livy 22.9.

connects Ceres with the Sibylline Books. In the middle Republic, the Books advised a number of expiatory ceremonies to the goddess.²¹⁹

The origins of the Ceres, Liber, and Libera cult are impossible to identify, yet most scholars agree that the cult derived from the worship of Demeter, Iacchus, and Kore in southern Italy or Cumae.²²⁰ Later on, the Romans themselves must have believed that the cult had Greek roots, since they began in the 3rd century to worship Ceres through Greek rites, and even imported Greek priestesses from southern Italy to serve her cult in Rome.²²¹ Arnobius dates the introduction of Ceres' Greek cult to 'just before' the arrival of Magna Mater in 204 BC.²²² Yet despite their making the goddess progressively more Greek, no ancient source ever specifies the true origins of the Roman goddess.²²³ For later Romans, it was enough to see her as Greek; no further identification was necessary.

Similar difficulties obscure the origins of the Apollo cult in Rome. Livy, our only source for the construction of Apollo's first Roman temple, gives an ambiguous account of the vow to build the shrine:

Pestilentia eo anno aliarum rerum otium praebuit. Aedis Apollini pro valetudine populi vota est. Multa duumviri ex libris placandae deum irae avertendaeque a populo pestis causa fecere.

²¹⁹ Dumezil (1970-1) 448 suggests that the Ceres, Liber, and Libera temple was not necessarily introduced by the Sibylline Books, but that the association was an anachronism based on later Sibylline ceremonies to Ceres. Certainly Ceres played a part in Sibylline rituals later on, but any speculation on this count threatens to draw one into a circular argument: Were the Sibylline Books interested in Ceres because they founded her cult, or were they said to have founded her cult because they advised these rituals?

²²⁰ See Feeney (1998) 26; Beard, North, and Price (1998) 65. For the cult among the Greeks of southern Italy, see Momigliano (1967) 310-1, Richard (1978) 503-12.

²²¹ See Spaeth (1996) 8-13, MacBain (1982) 48-9, Scheid (1996) 23 on the late date of Greek additions to Ceres' cult. Pomeroy (1975) 216: "But in the second half of the third century BC, Greek accretions were adopted with the endorsement of the state. The earliest mention of the enactment of these rites occurs in the description of the events following the disastrous battle at Cannae, when it was questionable whether the annual rites of Ceres could be celebrated, for those polluted by death could not participate, and every Roman matron had been bereaved."

²²² Arnobius *Against the Gentiles* 2.78

²²³ In 133 BC, when a Sibylline oracle advised that the Romans propitiate the 'oldest Ceres,' they found her in Enna, Sicily. See Cicero *Verr.* 2.4.108. This does not mean, however, that the Romans believed that their own Ceres cult came from Sicily.

A pestilence in that year provided a rest from other concerns. A temple was vowed to Apollo for the health of the populace. The *duumviri sacris faciundis* did many things advised by the Books to placate the anger of the gods and to avert the plague from the people.²²⁴

In this passage, Livy tells us that the Sibylline oracles were consulted as a result of the plague of 433 BC, but he does not explicitly connect this consultation with the vowing of Apollo's temple. In fact, he reports the vow before he mentions the Books at all. Some scholars have suggested that Livy is intentionally distinguishing the temple from the expiations advised by the Books, while others maintain that the vow was meant to be included with the many expiatory acts of the duumvirs.²²⁵ Though it is impossible to be certain, the fact that Livy mentions the work of the duumvirs at all may indicate that he intends all of the ceremonies to be considered together, especially since the vague comment concerning their many expiatory acts is hardly worth recording. At the same time, he offers no alternative explanation for the vow which, if it was not made by the Sibylline Books, must have been spoken by a magistrate.

Given the association between Apollo and the Sibylline Books in Livy's own work, and in his own world, it is quite possible that the author assumed that the introduction of Apollo's temple through the Sibylline oracles would be taken for granted by the reader. In Book 10 of Livy's history, Decius identifies the *decemviri* as the *carminum Sibyllae ac fatorum populi huius interpretes, antistites eosdem Apollinaris sacri caerimoniarumque aliarum*.²²⁶ Thus he links the priests intimately with Apollo and his rites. The *decemviri* and the Sibylline Books certainly had a close connection with the cult of Apollo. The Senate consulted them as experts in 212 BC when the *Carmina*

²²⁴ Livy 4.25, translation Luce.

²²⁵ Dumezil (1970-1) 442 and Orlin (1997) 98 assert that the temple was not advised by the Sibylline oracles, while Gagé (1955) 24 and Feeney (1998) 26 suggest that it was.

²²⁶ Livy 10.8.2

Marciana advised rituals to Apollo.²²⁷ Obsequens, epitomizing Livy, may offer a significant glimpse of decemviral activity when he depicts the priests sacrificing at the temple of Apollo in 98 BC, though he mentions no prodigy that compelled these rites.²²⁸ The priests may, in fact, have had a special role in Apolline rituals. Under Augustus, this relationship was emphasized by the relocation of the Sibylline Books from the Capitoline Temple of Jupiter to the Palatine home of Apollo.²²⁹

Though it is likely that the Sibylline Books did play a role in the construction of Apollo's temple, it is impossible again to discover the true provenance of the god. Furthermore, the Romans already had some sort of sacred area dedicated to Apollo: the Apollinar in the Flaminian Fields, where the Senate had met after a victory over the Sabines in 449 BC, and where Apollo's temple was built in 433.²³⁰ Thus we cannot determine how new or foreign the god would have seemed to the Romans, or how much of an innovation the temple would have been. As in the case of Ceres, it may be significant that no ancient source ever states the precise origin of this Apollo cult. Perhaps by the time the Romans vowed the temple the god was pervasive enough in Italy that his exact beginnings were unknowable, or perhaps the eventual intrusion of Rome into a larger Greek world erased the memory of the Roman Apollo's obscure Italian origins.

By the time the Romans welcomed Apollo's son, however, a deity's origins had come to be of utmost importance. By 293 BC when Aesculapius' temple was vowed –

²²⁷ Livy 25.12

²²⁸ Obsequens 47: *Apud aedem Apollinis decemviris immolantibus caput iocineris non fuit, sacrificantibus anguis ad aram inventus.*

²²⁹ See below Ch. 6.

²³⁰ Livy 3.63: *Itaque inde consules, ne criminationi locus esset, in prata Flaminia, ubi nunc aedes Apollinis est – iam tum Apollinare apellebant – avocavere senatum.*

almost 140 years after the dedication of his father's temple, the last Sibylline shrine – Roman interests in the Greek world had expanded from Magna Graecia to Greece.²³¹ The stories of the god's arrival emphasize his long journey from Epidauros, the cult center of Aesculapius. It was from here that Athens, Corinth, and other Greek cities had received the god, and it was to this city that Rome turned for relief from a plague. It may have been through Epidauros' promptings that Rome welcomed the cult. Garland claims that "Epidauros took the initiative in diffusing the cult of Asklepios throughout the Mediterranean."²³² Rome's involvement with Epidauros, considered the true center of Aesculapius' cult, demonstrates a knowledge of Greek religion and a desire to participate in that religion by receiving the cult from its source. The Senate commissioned an unusually large embassy of ten men to sail to Epidauros to bring back the god, a display of Roman power and a sign of the importance of the mission. According to Ovid, the god, in the form of a snake, willingly accompanied the Romans to his new home, and chose the location of his temple by disembarking at the Tiber Island.

Eric Orlin sees the importation of Aesculapius as an attempt to reach out to the Greeks of southern Italy, and provides as evidence the different Roman reactions to plague in 295 and 293 BC. In 295 BC, the Romans turned to the Sibylline Books for a remedy to a pestilence. Since Livy does not list the expiations that the Books advised, they were probably unexceptional ceremonies of sacrifice and prayer. Two years later, with the pestilence still raging, the Romans consulted the Books again. This time the oracles advised that Aesculapius be taken into the city. Orlin sees this delay in the introduction of the god as a result of the evolution of Rome's position in Italy over the

²³¹ See Scheid (1996) 29, Rawson (1989) 428 for the Romans' growing interest in Greece.

²³² Garland (1992) 117. Garland (1992) 122 suggests that secondary cults of Aesculapius sent money back to Epidauros.

course of these two years. During this time, he claims, their victory over the Samnites had been assured, and the Romans began to turn their attention to the Greeks of southern Italy. According to Orlin, “The adoption of Aesculapius by the Romans would have been a signal that the Romans sought to enter the world of Greek culture rather than to impose their own Italic customs on southern Italy.”²³³

Yet the delay in Aesculapius’ introduction has an obvious and closely related parallel in Roman religion: Aesculapius’ father Apollo. As with Apollo in 433 BC, the new god Aesculapius was only introduced as an extreme response to an escalating problem, a last-ditch effort to rid the city of the plague that had been raging for years. Certainly the Romans remembered this precedent. Though the arrival of Aesculapius may have been noted by Magna Graecia, this hardly justified his introduction.²³⁴ By the 3rd century BC, the Romans were becoming more conscious of their own place in the world of Greek civilization. If Aesculapius was meant to be a symbol of Rome’s acceptance of Greek culture, this was a message intended not only for Magna Graecia, but also for Rome itself.

Up to this point, all of the deities introduced by the Sibylline Books were either viewed as Greek gods at the moment of their arrival, or came to be considered Greek later. The next deity introduced by the oracles, however, was a typically Italian goddess. Around the time that the First Punic War ended, the Romans consulted the Sibylline Books concerning a prolonged drought. According to Pliny and Velleius Paterculus, the Books advised that annual games be instituted for Flora, an Italian goddess of vegetation.

²³³ Orlin (1997) 107. See also Scheid (1985) 97-8: “the cult of Aesculapius was able to play the role of federator and integrator for the cities of Magna Graecia.”

²³⁴ There is no evidence, in fact, that the Greeks in southern Italy were even familiar with the Aesculapius cult. See Orlin (1997) 107 n. 113.

These authors mention nothing about a temple, but Ovid claims that the celebration of games by the aediles L. and M. Publicius was accompanied by the construction of a shrine for the goddess.²³⁵

Though the connection between the Sibylline Books and the temple is uncertain, the oracles' interest in the games to Flora proves at least that they were involved in much more than simply importing Greek rituals. Flora was an Italian deity with a cult long established in Rome. Legend held that Titus Tatius had built an altar to her in the city. The fact that the goddess had her own priest in Rome, the Flamen Floralis, marked hers as one of the oldest cults in the city.²³⁶ The Romans called on her during the drought not because she was foreign, but because they believed that this ancient goddess offered the best solution to their problems.

Another deity, Hercules Custos, may have received a temple through the Sibylline Books during the second half of the 3rd century BC, but the evidence for this Sibylline consultation is again slim: only a few lines of Ovid's *Fasti*, a notoriously unreliable source.²³⁷ Ovid writes that the temple's inscription named Sulla. It is possible that Sulla restored the temple, but the date of the original dedication cannot be determined.²³⁸ Hercules was an old deity in Rome, a Greek god whose cult was attributed to Evander. But with no sure grasp of the circumstances in which Hercules Custos arrived, we cannot determine the needs that the new shrine addressed.

²³⁵ See Orlin (1997) 94 for the third century dating of this temple.

²³⁶ Orlin (1997) 101

²³⁷ Ovid *Fasti* 6.209f.: *Altera pars Circi Custode sub Hercule tuta est,/quod deus Euboico carmine munus habet./Muneris est tempus qui Nonas Lucifer ante est;/si titulum quaeris, Sulla probavit opus.* The Sibyl's song was called Euboean because Cumae was considered a Euboean colony.

²³⁸ Because Hercules was worshipped in the supplicatio of 218 BC, some scholars date this temple to the 3rd century. This is, however, impossible to prove.

The Second Punic War was a period of tremendous religious innovation in Rome, including the introductions of three new deities. The first two, Mens and Venus Erycina, received temples following the horrible Roman defeat at Trasimene in 217 BC, when the poor planning of the consul C. Flaminius led to the deaths of 15,000 Roman soldiers. After this loss, the dictator Q. Fabius Maximus urged the Senate to permit the consultation of the Sibylline Books. This was an unusual move, since the Books had already been examined once in that year, but Rome's situation was desperate. The Senate permitted the *decemviri* to inspect the oracles. Among the rituals that they advised were the dedications of temples to two goddesses: Venus Erycina and Mens.

Mens is the abstract deity of good counsel; she has no known Greek or Italian parallels.²³⁹ As Anna Clark has shown, the "origin" of an abstract deity is a complicated matter, but the Romans may very well have perceived Mens as a Greek goddess.²⁴⁰ In Rome after the debacle of Trasimene, this deity's role was obvious: she decried the poor generalship of Flaminius, and brought hope for greater foresight in the war against Hannibal. Her temple would stand as a testimony to Fabius Maximus' own battle plan, to forego rashness and engage the enemy with patience and prudence.²⁴¹

Like Mens, Venus Erycina was perfectly suited to the needs of Rome in the early years of the role. But her role was to be found not in her nature, but in her previous relations with Rome. During the First Punic War, the Romans under the consul Pullus had occupied the town of Eryx in Sicily and the temple of Venus there. Besieged by

²³⁹ Athena Pronoia may be a likely candidate for a Greek parallel.

²⁴⁰ Clark (2007) 31ff.

²⁴¹ See Clark (2007) 66-7 for the introduction of Mens to Rome. Clark sees Mens as part of "Fabius' response to Flaminius' military and 'religious' policy." She also suggests that Mens may have been the Roman equivalent of Odysseus' Metis, and thus have had some sort of Greek roots. But this conjecture may derive from the desperate search for Trojan origins of all religious innovations in the Second Punic War, motivated in large part by a desire to explain the strange goddess Magna Mater. See Brizzi (1994) for the Trojan reading of Mens. See also Leigh (2004) 36-7 on the Mens cult in Rome.

Hamilcar's forces, the Romans never lost possession of the temple. In the end they were able to use their navy to cut off supplies from the Carthaginians at Eryx and secure a Roman victory in the war. Thus Venus Erycina stood as a protectress of the Romans during the First Punic War, and she was a logical source of aid when they faced the Carthaginians again.²⁴² Like Aesculapius, this was a deity whose origins really mattered, not because Eryx was the true home of Venus, but because this Venus was the one who had helped the Romans before. The Romans were not simply bringing in a foreign goddess; they were welcoming a friend.

The third deity imported during the Second Punic War is perhaps the most unusual member of the Republican pantheon, and the deity who baffles scholars most. According to Livy, in 205 BC, the Senate ordered the inspection of the Sibylline Books because of frequent showers of stone. This was a strange pretense for consulting the Books, since a rain of stones was typically expiated by a *novemdialis*, a nine-day ceremony to Jupiter, which was generally initiated without inspecting the oracles. Perhaps the frequency of these showers, and the critical timing in the war against Hannibal, motivated the emergency measure of consulting the Sibylline Books.

According to Livy, the *decemviri* returned to the Senate with this oracle:

Quandoque hostis alienigena terrae Italiae bellum intulisset eum pelli
Italia vincique posse si mater Idaea a Pessinunte Romam aduecta foret.

Whenever a foreign enemy brings war to the Italian land he may be driven from Italy and conquered if the Idaean Mother will be brought from Pessinus to Rome.²⁴³

²⁴² See Polybius 1.55.7ff. for the importance of Eryx during the First Hannibalic War.

²⁴³ Livy 29.10.5

With each of the other deities that we have examined, the reason for their introduction has been clear. Each one addressed a particular problem. But what did Magna Mater – a mother goddess from Asia Minor – have to do with driving Hannibal from Italy?

A number of explanations could be proposed. Perhaps the Romans wanted a Trojan goddess as a symbol of their divine fate and a promise of their ultimate success. Perhaps she was intended to solidify and emphasize the Romans' ties with Attalus, the king who delivered the goddess, and one of Rome's greatest allies against Hannibal.²⁴⁴ Perhaps Magna Mater was meant to counter the power of Astarte, the powerful Carthaginian goddess. Or perhaps the Romans hoped that the Great Mother would bring protection and restoration to the Italian land.²⁴⁵

It is difficult to identify a solid explanation for Magna Mater's introduction into Rome. But the greatest challenge is reconciling the goddess' flamboyantly ecstatic worship with Roman religious practices. Her cult seemed to have two distinct levels: Roman worship, with the urban praetor conducting sacrifices at the goddess' Palatine temple and leading games in the Roman style; and Eastern worship, with castrated priests imported from Asia Minor, parading through the city in colorful clothes, accompanied by

²⁴⁴ Gruen claims that the importation of this oriental deity "belongs in a growing series of thrusts by the Roman political and religious elite to expand and exploit connections with the cultural world of the Greek East." Although Gruen (1990) 6-7 claims that the goddess arrived at a time when Roman victory was imminent, the Romans would not have been so sure of this themselves. The war had dragged on for many years, with Roman morale going up and down as major battles were won or lost. Mago's recent arrival in Liguria and capture of Genoa might have been enough to convince the Romans that the tide could change again (Burton (1996) 37) and to motivate them to seek the help of Magna Mater as a counter to the mother deity of Carthage (Graillet (1912) 32).

²⁴⁵ Pliny *NH* 18.61 tells us that the agricultural produce of 204 BC was greater than it had been in the ten previous years.

raucous music, begging alms from the Roman people.²⁴⁶ The Romans were not allowed to take part in these aspects of Magna Mater's cult.

This religious schizophrenia has driven many scholars to conclude that the foreign elements of the goddess' cult were unwelcome in Rome. The Galli, Magna Mater's emasculated servants, were only tolerated in the city, either because the Romans were unaware when they received the goddess of the frenetic character of her native cult, or because they had resigned themselves to accept the bad elements of her worship along with the good.²⁴⁷ Some have even suggested that the subsequent lapse in the construction of new temples through the Sibylline Books – it would be 90 years before the oracles advised another temple – was a result of the Romans' disappointment with Magna Mater's cult.²⁴⁸

But the idea that Rome welcomed an unknown goddess is difficult to believe. A great deal of thought and planning went into Magna Mater's reception. Following the practice of a Greek polis, Rome consulted Delphi before admitting this new deity. The Romans sent an embassy of five men on five quinqueremes to receive her in Asia Minor,

²⁴⁶ Cicero Leges 16.40 epitomizes and explains the Roman stigma against begging: *Stipem sustulimus nisi eam, quam ad paucos dies propriam Idaeae Matris excepimus; implet enim superstitione animos et exhaurit domos.* (I have forbidden the collection of alms, except that collection for the Idaean Mother which lasts only a few days; for such customs fill people's minds with superstition and rob their homes.)

²⁴⁷ The idea that the Romans imported the goddess despite the foreign aspects of her cult can be found in Bremmer (1987) 111 and Showerman (1901) 260. See Roller (1999) 285: "The Romans wanted the Magna Mater to come, adopted her cult enthusiastically, and installed it in a place of honor in the heart of the city. Their desire both to import the Mother Goddess and to establish her as a Roman deity was powerful enough to overrule any difficulties they may have had with her origins and her rites." The idea that the Romans were ignorant of Magna Mater's true nature can be found in the following sources: Scullard 98-9, Thomas 1504, Cumont 51, Gruen 6, and North 8. This theory introduces a comical element into the story, as one imagines the shockwaves of surprise that must have rippled through the city after the Idaean Mother arrived. Vermaseren (1977) 96 describes this moment of revelation: "The Romans had brought their ancestral (i.e., Trojan) Goddess to the new country and provided her with proper accommodation, only then to discover how widely their own attitude differed from the Asian mentality."

²⁴⁸ Though it took thirteen years for the Romans to complete Magna Mater's temple, this should not be seen as a sign of their disapproval of the cult. The length of time taken to build the temple is surely a result of the devastation caused by the war. See Goldberg (1998) for the use of the monumental steps of Magna Mater's temple as seating for theatrical shows.

and the elites lined up to greet her in Rome and welcomed her arrival with elaborate feasts. Our sources disagree on Magna Mater's exact origins, whether Pergamum, the capital of Attalus' kingdom, or Pessinus, the site of the goddess' most important shrine in the later Republic. According to Gruen, Pergamum was Magna Mater's true home, but Pessinus was suggested in the 2nd century BC by the growing importance of the temple there.²⁴⁹ The discrepancy of the sources brings out an important point: Just as they had done with Aesculapius, the Romans wished to attribute Magna Mater to the most authoritative source.

If we accept that the Romans were aware of the foreign aspects of Magna Mater's cult, we must believe that they desired these foreign rites.²⁵⁰ In 205 BC, Rome was at a critical juncture in its fight against Hannibal. The victory at the Metaurus had given the Romans real hope of defeating the Carthaginians, but they were faced with a decision as to how this could be accomplished. Scipio Africanus wanted to take the war to Africa, while Fabius Maximus believed that it was best to fight on Italian soil. The difficulty of the choice underscores the fact that the Romans were still not sure of victory: for thirteen years they had been battling Hannibal in Italy, with few great successes and many terrible losses. The Romans needed great power to secure victory; they found it in Magna Mater and her exotic eastern cult. This extraordinary goddess marked an extraordinary endeavor: finally expelling Hannibal from Italy. The foreign elements of her cult may

²⁴⁹ Gruen (1990) 16-19

²⁵⁰ Venus Erycina is an example of a deity whose cult was altered when it was imported into Rome to suit Roman standards. Ritual prostitution, a key feature of Venus' worship in Eryx, was not brought inside the bounds of the Pomerium. Schilling (1954): "Le rite du nouveau culte est rigoureusement conforme aux usages romains. Les Romains ne se sont pas contentés 'd'oublier' les coutumes siciliennes: il va sans dire qu'ils n'avaient que faire des anagoria et des katagoria des colombes que faisaient le vol annuel entre la Sicile et l'Afrique; aberrante était également pour la religion romaine la pratique de la prostitution sacrée. Ils ont fait davantage: ils ont appliqué à la déesse les règles du culte romain, n'hésitant pas à l'honorer selon le rite particulier aux Vinalia d'avril, l'effusion du vin."

have satisfied the public's exotic tastes, but the goddess' reception also made a statement about the Roman Senate: the Senate had a vast array of power under its control.

Despite prolific temple building in Rome in the early 2nd century, the Sibylline Books did not advise a new temple until 114 BC.²⁵¹ Some scholars have seen this 90-year gap as a sign that Magna Mater was more than the Romans could handle, and that the unanticipated strangeness of her cult made the Romans suspicious of introducing new deities through the Sibylline Books. However, the particular circumstances of the 2nd century BC offer a more likely explanation. In the first place, most known temples constructed during this period had been vowed by victorious generals. And while a victory achieved was a terrific reason to thank a god, it was hardly an excuse to consult the Sibylline oracles. In other words, for the most part times were too good to warrant the construction of temples through the Sibylline Books.²⁵² Yet the 2nd century was not without hardship. During these years, Italian concerns motivated innovative expiatory innovations. For example, in 181 and 180 BC, when a plague raged through Italy, the Sibylline Books ordered unprecedented ritual performances throughout Italy. In the aftermath of the Bacchanalian conspiracy, the need to unify Italy under Roman control took precedence over any desire to import a new deity.²⁵³

But in 114 BC, the long drought of Sibylline temple building was broken when the desecration of the most sacred rites threatened the ruin of Rome. In this year, the Roman Senate received news of a terrible prodigy. A young girl, the daughter of the

²⁵¹ Hoffmann (1934) 31

²⁵² BNP 88-9: temples of 2nd BC less adventurous. According to Garland 99, the same curb on innovations occurred in Athens after the Persian War: "For the 50-year interval between the end of the Persian Wars and the eve of the Peloponnesian War there is no record of any god of consequence achieving official recognition in Athens. . . . after the violent upheavals on both the human and divine planes caused by the experience of the Persian Wars, an era of conservatism and retrenchment was perhaps inevitable."

²⁵³ See Chapter 4 below.

Roman knight Publius Helvius, was struck by lightning while riding a horse in the Stellate Plain. The blast killed the girl, but even worse, it left her body in a disgraceful position, with her dress open, and her tongue protruding from her mouth. The Senate, accepting the prodigy as relevant to the Roman State, consulted the Etruscan *haruspices* about it. The *haruspices* interpreted it as a sign of impending disgrace upon the Vestal Virgins and the Roman equestrian class.

The prodigy and its interpretation created considerable agitation in Rome. Three Vestal Virgins were put on trial for unchastity, a capital crime for the priestesses. The *pontifices*, who were responsible for the Vestal Virgins, convicted one – Aemilia – for the crime, but the people were not satisfied. Spurred by the prophecy of the *haruspices* and fear of the gods, they demanded that the other two Vestals be retried. They and their lovers – including several Roman knights – were convicted and sentenced to death.²⁵⁴

In the midst of this disaster, the Senate ordered the consultation of the Sibylline Books. The oracles recommended that a temple be built to Venus Verticordia, the Changer of Hearts. This goddess was already present in Rome in the form of a statue, set up by the advice of the Sibylline Books, probably in the 3rd century BC.²⁵⁵ Thus like Apollo, Verticordia already had a place in Rome even before her temple was built. Yet this Changer of Hearts, the protectress of the chastity of the Vestal Virgins, had no Greek parallel.

In conclusion, the Sibylline Books introduced nine new temples to the city of Rome. Not all of these were to Greek gods; Flora and Venus Verticordia were decidedly

²⁵⁴ See Obs. 37; Livy *Per.* 63; Orosius 5.15.20-2; Dio 26 frg. 87; Plutarch *QR* 83; Pliny *NH* 2.98, 2.147.

²⁵⁵ See Val. Max. 8.15.12, Pliny *NH* 7.120 for the statue of Venus Verticordia in Rome. It is generally assumed that this was set up between 292 and 219 BC, in the missing second decade of Livy's history, since Livy does not tell the story himself.

Roman. And each of these deities was brought in as the perfect candidate to address a particular problem. But throughout the third century BC, we notice more and more an emphasis on the foreign origins of some of these deities, as the Romans stress the place of origin of Aesculapius, Venus Erycina, and Magna Mater. At the same time, they add Greek rites to some of the cults already introduced by the Books, providing Ceres with Greek priestesses in the 3rd century BC and adding the *ieiunium Cereris* to her cult in 191 BC, and instituting the Ludi Apollinares to Apollo in 212 BC.

GREEK RITES

The *Lectisternium*

There is sharp disagreement among scholars concerning the level of Greek influence that came to Rome through the Sibylline Books in the 4th century BC. Hoffmann maintains that until 338 BC, Greek elements were predominant in Sibylline recommendations, while Altheim claims that the *decemviri* had little contact with Greek religion in the 4th century BC.²⁵⁶ Given the small amount of evidence available for this period, the judgment rests largely on our classification of the *lectisternium* as Roman or Greek. During the *lectisternium*, the statues of gods were placed on couches and presented with a ritual feast. Goddesses were also feasted, but at some point, they were placed on chairs rather than couches, and thus honored through *sellisternia*.²⁵⁷

²⁵⁶ See Hoffmann (1934) 21 and Altheim (1936) 148 for these opposing views.

²⁵⁷ Taylor (1935) 124-5 suggests that this distinction existed from the beginning, with gods on couches and goddesses on chairs. The Greeks followed this practice, and Taylor avers that the Romans received it from them. Yet Livy presents the deities at the *lectisternium* as being in male-female pairs and sharing a couch.

The first lectisternium was performed in 399 BC, when the Sibylline Books were consulted about a plague in the city.²⁵⁸ Six deities were paired up on three couches: Apollo and Latona, Diana and Hercules, and Mercury and Neptune.²⁵⁹ These deities each had obvious Greek parallels, and they were all gods who were worshipped outside the *pomerium*. Thus the ceremony may have been intended as one of incorporation, bringing in the marginal gods outside the *pomerium* through a communal meal.²⁶⁰ The ritual, too, had a Greek antecedent: the *theoxenia*, in which gods were placed on couches and set before a full table. In the famous *theoxenia* of Delphi, Apollo headlined a list of deities, as in Rome's first lectisternium.

Yet the lectisternium of 399 BC also had a Roman precedent: the *epulum Iovis*, in which the very Roman god Jupiter Optimus Maximus was feasted on the Capitoline. While Latte claims that the *lectisternium* was one of the earliest forms of religious innovation in Rome, Orlin argues that it was not so radical as sometimes assumed.²⁶¹ Nevertheless, the fact that Livy, who gives little information regarding the religious activity of the 4th century, mentions and numbers four of the five *lectisternia* of this period indicates that the ceremony was something exceptional and that the Romans took special notice of it.²⁶²

²⁵⁸ Taylor (1935) 123 n. 7 agrees with Altheim (1931) II.28 in contesting Wissowa's view that the *lectisternium* performed in 399 BC was the first held in Rome. However, Livy numbers his *lectisternia*, and places this one first. Thus however innovative this ceremony really was, Roman tradition held it to be a first.

²⁵⁹ Livy 5.13. According to Livy, this first *lectisternium* also included utopian celebrations among the Roman population: people opened their doors to strangers, and those in bondage were set free.

²⁶⁰ See Nouilhan (1989) for the communal nature of the *lectisternium*.

²⁶¹ Latte (1960) 242. Latte couches this in old-fashioned terms, claiming that the fear of the people caused the elites to introduce innovations such as the lectisternium. For the opposing view, see Orlin (1997) 94.

²⁶² The second *lectisternium* is not mentioned, but the third took place in 364 BC, and was undertaken to expiate a plague. Livy does not say whether the Sibylline Books advised this rite, though Augustine CD 2.8 claims that it was recommended by the *pontifices*. The fourth *lectisternium* was held in 347 BC, also as a result of a plague, after a consultation of the Sibylline Books. The fifth occurred in 326 BC. Livy does not mention the reason behind this performance or the source of the recommendation (whether Sibylline or

Due perhaps to the loss of Livy's 2nd decade, the first *lectisternium* on record for the 3rd century was in 218 BC, the first year of the Hannibalic War. In this year, the Sibylline Books advised a *lectisternium* at Caere to an unnamed deity, and to Iuventas in Rome.²⁶³ In the following year, the Romans performed *lectisternia* to Juno Regina and Saturn.²⁶⁴ In each of these cases, the ceremony was very different from the first *lectisternium* of 399 BC, since the ritual was performed to one deity rather than to several. Later in 217, however, following the terrible defeat at Trasimene, the Sibylline Books advocated a return to the original format, on a much grander scale. For three days, twelve gods were feasted on six couches: Jupiter and Juno, Neptune and Minerva, Mars and Venus, Apollo and Diana, Vulcan and Vesta, and Mercury and Ceres. These were the twelve Olympian gods, chosen and paired according to Greek conceptions.²⁶⁵

Though Magna Mater was greeted by a *lectisternium* in 204 BC, the ceremony was never conducted again on such a large scale in the Republic.²⁶⁶ Yet the *lectisternium* of 217 BC represents an important shift, as an ancient ritual that may have had Greek roots added more Greek elements in the third century. The development of the ritual reflects the growth of Roman knowledge and appreciation of Greek religion: the

not). He does, however, write that it was held to the same gods as before, presumably those of the rite of 399 BC, who were perhaps honored in each of these five ceremonies. For the *lectisternium* of 399 BC, see Livy 5.13.4-8, Dionysius of Halicarnassus 12.11-14, Plutarch *Cam.* 4, Cicero *de Div.* 1.100 and 2.69; for the *lectisternium* of 364 BC, see Livy 7.2.1-7, Augustine *CD* 2.8, Orosius 3.4.1-6; for that of 348 BC, see Livy 7.27.1; and for that of 326 BC see Livy 8.25.1.

²⁶³ See Livy 21.62 for these rites. It was probably Fortuna who was worshipped at Caere; she was honored in other Sibylline ceremonies during the Second Punic War.

²⁶⁴ Livy 22.1

²⁶⁵ Rawson (1989) 426-7. See SIG 589 for a *lectisternium* to the 12 great gods at Magnesia.

²⁶⁶ This may be because the ritual of 217 BC was perceived as having failed, since the Romans were crushed at Cannae shortly thereafter.

lectisternium, with its obvious parallel in the Greek *theoxenia*, became more Greek during the Second Punic War.²⁶⁷

The Chorus

For another expiatory ritual performed during the Second Punic War, we have much clearer evidence that the Romans really perceived it as Greek. In 207 BC, a hermaphrodite was born in Frusino. According to Livy, the *haruspices* proclaimed that the child should be thrown into the sea, and the *pontifices* advised that in expiation of the prodigy 27 maidens should process through the city of Rome singing a hymn.²⁶⁸ While they were practicing the song in the temple of Jupiter Stator, lightning struck the temple of Juno Regina on the Aventine.²⁶⁹ As a result, the ritual was redirected to Juno. The decemvirs arranged the order of the ceremonies. The sacrificial victims led the parade, followed by two cypress-wood statues of Juno, then the twenty-seven maidens, and finally the decemvirs who wore laurel garlands and the toga praetexta. The girls proceeded through the city with dance and song, and at the end of the performance the decemvirs sacrificed the victims and offered the statues to Juno.

While this was the first known chorus of its type in Rome, the chorus of young women – the *partheneion* – was an ancient practice in Greece.²⁷⁰ But it was repeated after this date on several occasions in Rome, usually by the advice of the Sibylline

²⁶⁷ Wissowa (1912) 356 sees the lectisternium of 217 BC as a watershed moment in the history of Roman religion, as the distinction between *di indigetes* and *di novensiles* was blurred.

²⁶⁸ The number 27 may be a distinctive Roman touch to the ritual, based on the number of Argei in the city. See Palmer (1970) 94. In the Ludi Saeculares 17 BC Augustus offered 27 cakes to Ilithyiae, and 27 boys and 27 girls sang the *Carmen Saeculare*.

²⁶⁹ Since the girls were practicing in Jupiter's temple, it is likely that the ceremony was originally intended to honor him.

²⁷⁰ Rawson (1989) 429. See also Boyce (1937) 164 who maintains that the ritual chorus was known in the Greek south.

Books.²⁷¹ Phlegon's oracle, the only Republican fragment of the Sibylline Books still extant, advises this ritual in response to the birth of a hermaphrodite.²⁷² The oracle clearly reveals the Greek origins of the ceremony as it was perceived in Rome, since it orders the maidens to conduct the rite in the Greek way. This chorus, like the *lectisternium* of 217, was a ritual performed during the Second Punic War that showed obvious Greek influence, an influence that was pointed out by the Sibylline oracles themselves.

Wreaths

Another typically Greek religious practice was part of the expiatory ceremonies of 207 BC: the wearing of wreaths.²⁷³ Wreaths were an ancient element of Roman religion; according to Pliny, Romulus introduced the first crown into Rome, giving the Arval Brethren a wreath of corn and white fillet.²⁷⁴ Livy tells us that in 293 BC, those awarded wreaths for brave acts in battle were allowed to wear them at the *ludi Romani*, and palm branches were given to the victors, a custom *translato e Graeco more*.²⁷⁵ But it was in the Second Punic War that the wearing of wreaths in religious ceremony became more frequent. In 216 BC, Fabius Pictor was sent on a mission to Delphi, to ask Apollo what rites the Romans should perform to appease the gods. Following Apollo's prescriptions,

²⁷¹ This may have been first advised by the *pontifices*, but the ritual was taken up by the *decemviri*. Other choruses took place in 200 BC (Livy 31.12.5-10), 133 BC (Obs. 27a), 125 BC (Phlegon), 119 BC (Obs. 34), 117 BC (Obs. 36), 104 BC (Obs. 43), 99 BC (Obs. 46), 97 BC (Obs. 48), 92 BC (Obs. 53). Obsequens often does not indicate what priesthood recommended the chorus, but it may have been the decemvirs in every case. No other priesthood is mentioned as certainly recommending the rite.

²⁷² See above Ch. 2.

²⁷³ Orlin (1997) 96 n. 70: wearing garlands for supplication seems to be Greek. See Lake (1937) 248-9, Wissowa (1912) 424.

²⁷⁴ Pliny *NH* 18.6

²⁷⁵ Livy 10.47: *Eodem anno coronati primum ob res bello bene gestas ludos Romanos spectarunt palmaeque tum primum translato e Graeco more victoribus datae*. See Dumezil (1970-1) 443

Pictor returned to Rome wearing a laurel wreath, which he deposited on the altar of Apollo in Rome. Thus the wearing of the wreath was associated with Delphi, and was marked out as a typically Greek practice.

After Pictor's return, garlands appeared in several expiatory rituals advised by the decemvirs. In 212 BC, the people wore garlands as they watched the Ludi Apollinares.²⁷⁶ In 207 BC, the decemvirs wore wreaths as they followed the chorus to Juno's temple. In 193, 191, 180, and 169 BC, the decemvirs advised the people to wear wreaths as they participated in supplications and observed sacrifices. In this way, typically Roman rituals of supplication and sacrifice came to be performed with Greek flair.²⁷⁷

Graecus Ritus

Varro defines the *quindecimviri sacris faciundis* in this way: nos dicimos *XV viros Graeco ritu sacra, non Romano facere*.²⁷⁸ According to John Scheid, the sacrifice *Graeco ritu* was really very similar to the Roman ceremony; the primary distinction was that during a ceremony performed by the Roman rite, a priest covered his head with his toga, while the Greek format required the priest's head to be uncovered, or wreathed with a garland.²⁷⁹

[The *Graecus ritus*] did not define the content of a divine service, but only the general custom, the rule followed in celebrating this service. Ritus is not equivalent to *sacra*, *caerimoniae*, or *religiones*, but to *mos*, the way of doing something, the *tropos* or the *nomos*. . . . In short, the *ritus* was the special posture and prescription which gave all public celebrations a

²⁷⁶ Livy 25.12

²⁷⁷ Cassius Dio 47.49 tells us that anyone who performed a priestly function like a *lustratio* wore a crown. This does not, however, seem to have been an ancient Roman practice.

²⁷⁸ Varro *LL* 7.88. See also Rosenberger (1998) 51, Bloch (1963) 111.

²⁷⁹ As Scheid points out, little has been written about the *Graecus ritus*: "Despite the huge book of Jean Gage, whose subtitle declares that it aims to set out the history of the *ritus Graecus*, only a few sentences of Joachim Marquardt and Kurt Latte pay any attention to the phenomenon itself. . ." See Latte (1960) 242ff., Marquardt (1878) 1.54 for *Graecus ritus*.

special, recognizable tonality – I would compare it to the musical modes: you had the ritus of the Romans, the ritus of the Greeks, the ritus of the barbarians, and so on.²⁸⁰

The differences in the Roman and the Greek rite may seem unsubstantial, but they would have been immediately perceived by a Roman observer. As Feeney points out, a simple glance at the priest or magistrate would communicate the form of the ritual in an instant.²⁸¹

We have little evidence for the performance of sacrifices by the Greek rite.²⁸² Only certain gods had rituals conducted in this manner: Hercules, Saturn, Apollo, and Ceres. Significantly, this list does not include all of the deities with Greek connections who were worshipped in Rome; neither Aesculapius, Magna Mater, Bacchus, Hecate, Nemesis, the Castores, or Bona Dea was offered sacrifices by the Greek rite.²⁸³ What was special about the four cults performed in the Greek manner? Each one of them was an older Roman cult that had been revised in the late 4th or 3rd centuries BC. In 312 BC, the control of the Hercules cult had been transferred from the Gens Potitia to the Roman state.²⁸⁴ Later, perhaps, the Sibylline Books introduced a new temple to Hercules Custos.²⁸⁵ In the 3rd century, Greek priestesses were brought in from Magna Graecia to serve Ceres in Rome, and in the early 2nd century, the Greek custom of fasting in honor of Ceres was introduced to Rome. During the Second Punic War, annual games to Apollo, the Ludi Apollinares, were instituted, and the Saturnalia became a yearly festival.

²⁸⁰ Scheid (1996) 18.

²⁸¹ Feeney (1998) 27

²⁸² Scheid (1996) 19-20

²⁸³ See Scheid (1996) 20-22.

²⁸⁴ Beard, North, and Price (1998) 66

²⁸⁵ Scheid (1996) 23 follows Wissowa and Bayet in concluding that the Hellenization of the Hercules cult in Rome occurred in the 3rd century BC. Some seemingly Greek elements of the cult may go back to early contact between Italians and Greeks, but they came to Rome through the Italians and were considered Roman before 3rd cent.

Because he was the god of dissolution, sacrificing with head uncovered may have been a traditional practice in Saturn's cult, but the rites of the Saturnalia were conceived as a Greek ceremony.²⁸⁶

Just as they had added garlands to the *supplicatio* to make a Roman ceremony more Greek, so in the 3rd century the Roman elites were reinterpreting the act of sacrifice by uncovering their heads. As Scheid points out, this was a very Roman form of Greekness:

So the consultation of the Sibylline Books has to be taken as a Roman way of divination, which was progressively used to stress the Greek background of the Roman city, and to produce a certain number of moderate innovations. . . . It produced a mixed ritual, which was largely Roman but could be and later was presented as Greek. The rituals of the Ludi Saeculares show this clearly.²⁸⁷

Conclusion

It is impossible to tell at what point the Romans first considered the Sibylline Books as the agent of Greek innovation all along. But certainly in the 3rd century, the Romans were using the Books to insert Greek elements into their cult. A passage of Demosthenes is particularly relevant here. Demosthenes wrote that the famous (Greek) oracles of Dodona and Delphi advised petitioners to establish choruses, offer sacrifices, and wear garlands.²⁸⁸ These are exactly the Greek elements that the Romans inserted into their own expiatory rituals in the third century. This is not to say that the Romans took their cue from Demosthenes. Instead, the rituals reflect a true Roman knowledge of the

²⁸⁶ See Scheid (1996) 24 for Saturn as the god of dissolution. Cato Orat. Frg. 77 Malcovati shows that the Saturnalia was seen as a Greek ceremony. This is the earliest mention of the *Graecus ritus* in Latin literature.

²⁸⁷ Scheid (1996) 26. See Ch. 6 on the Ludi Saeculares.

²⁸⁸ Demosthenes 21.51, Garland (1992) 20

behavior of Greek oracles, and a desire to ensure that their own Greek oracles, the Sibylline Books, were behaving as Greek oracles should by advising appropriate responses.

Yet we cannot be certain that these Greek practices were actually *introduced* to Rome by the Sibylline Books. For example, the wearing of wreaths in religious rituals took place in Rome at least as early as the *ludi Romani* of 293 BC, and the Sibylline Books are not mentioned as having any part in this celebration. Furthermore, it was Delphi that advised the first known expiatory ritual involving a wreath, as Fabius Pictor returned from the oracle wearing a garland in 216 BC. In addition, the first known expiatory chorus was advised, according to Livy, not by the *decemviri*, but by the *pontifices*; the *decemviri* modified this ritual in 207 BC, and used the chorus in repeated expiations after this date.²⁸⁹ Likewise, the origins of the *Graecus ritus* are impossible to pinpoint; sacrificing with head uncovered may have been a very early element of certain cults in Rome. However, regardless of the origins of these foreign rites in Rome, they came to be seen as the distinct province of the *decemviri* and the Sibylline Books.

²⁸⁹ A hymn may also have been part of the Ludi Saeculares of 249 BC, though our source for this is very unreliable, the Pseudo-Acro Scholia on Horace *CS* 8: *Hoc [autem] accidit consulibus P. Claudio Pulchro L. Iunio Pulchro* (249 B. C.). *Cum Roma pestilentia laboraret, ex libris Sibyllinis iussum est, ut Diti Patri ad Terentum stipes mitteretur. Hoc etiam idem libri iusserunt, ut nobilium liberi in Capitolio hoc carmen decantarent.* This account, derived from the Augustan author Verrius Flaccus, may represent an anachronism, combining the early rituals of the Ludi Tarentini at the Tarentum with later Augustan rites which included a hymn sung on the Capitoline and the Palatine. See Beard, North, and Price (1998) 70-1, Taylor (1934) 104. See Ch. 6 below for Augustus' Ludi Saeculares.

Chapter 4

Practical Matters: The Sibylline Books in Roman Society and Politics Before 83 BC

In comparison to the other major priesthoods, the *decemviri* had minimal direct involvement in Roman politics.²⁹⁰ Augurs had the power to delay public action or to declare elections invalid.²⁹¹ Pontiffs had charge over burial law, adoptions, and other legal issues affecting the people, and they also advised the Senate on religious matters.²⁹² In addition, the pontiffs recorded all law, both human and divine, and until 304 BC maintained exclusive control over the religious formulae required to initiate legal actions.²⁹³ The *decemviri*, on the other hand, had no obvious connection with laws or elections. They were not, like the augurs, arbiters of the religious propriety of political proceedings. With a few notable exceptions, their expiatory prescriptions had no direct influence on political or military questions at Rome; the Sibylline Books advised ritual, not political, action.²⁹⁴

This does not mean, however, that the Sibylline Books played no part in Roman politics and society. The oracles' influence may not always have been direct, but it was there. On the most basic level, politics were inextricably tied up with Roman prodigy

²⁹⁰ Oakley (1997) 4.84: "Yet these priests [the *decemviri*] did not have the importance of the pontiffs and augurs, who wielded far more power than is apparent from the few references to them in Livy."

²⁹¹ For the *augures*, see Warde Fowler (1911) 292ff., Wissowa (1912) 523ff., Dumezil (1970/1) 594ff., Catalano (1960, 1978), and Linderski (1986) 2145ff.

²⁹² For the *pontifices*, see Wissowa (1912) 501ff., Rohde (1936), De Sanctis (1907-64) 4.2.353ff., Bleicken (1957) 345ff., Latte (1960) 195ff., and Scheid (1985) 36ff.

²⁹³ North in Walbank (1970) 586; see Livy 9.46.5 for pontifical control over these religious formulae.

²⁹⁴ See below.

and expiation, for the system was driven entirely by State concerns.²⁹⁵ To the Romans, prodigies were signs of the gods' ill-favor, messages which, if left unexpiated, threatened the crushing manifestations of divine wrath. Plague, sedition, defeat – the expressions of the gods' anger were real and destructive. Thus prodigy and expiation constituted a religious system with a political goal: to maintain the well-being of the Roman State. In this chapter, I will investigate the role of the Sibylline Books in Roman politics and society in the period before 83 BC, when they were destroyed in the Capitoline fire. I will show that the oracles played an important part in legitimating the power of the Roman elite, uniting the community, and defining Romanness.

DECISION-MAKING

Most Sibylline expiations, as they are recorded in our sources, appear to have played little direct part in the decision-making of practical politics. While Greek oracles often offered responses on very down-to-earth matters, such as “should we fight the Persians?” or “whom should I marry?” the Sibylline Books tended to avoid the pragmatic questions of Roman politics.²⁹⁶ Yet this avoidance of political matters was not complete: the sources record three instances before the destruction of the Sibylline Books in 83 BC in which the consultation of the oracles bore clear implications on very practical concerns. In this section, I will discuss each of these three cases.

²⁹⁵ Linderski (1995) 610-611: “Roman state religion was not interested in individual salvation; its only concern was the *salus publica*, the security of the Roman state, or, in Roman terms, the preservation of the *pax deorum*, the peace between the gods and the state. The goal of the cult was to keep the gods pleased and well-disposed toward Rome.”

²⁹⁶ The significance of oracles to decision-making was not limited to the Greeks. See Evans-Pritchard (1937) for the role of the poison oracle in making decisions among the Azande.

In 189 BC, the consul Gnaeus Manlius Vulso was waging war against the Galatians in Asia Minor. This was a second-choice war for him, and one that the Senate had never authorized. Perhaps it had been his hope to bring down Antiochus III in Asia, but the previous consul, Lucius Cornelius Scipio, the brother of Africanus, had beaten him to the punch earlier that year. Scipio defeated Antiochus' army at Magnesia, leaving Vulso to fight whatever enemies he could find. He defeated the Galatians, who had provided contingents to Antiochus in his war against the Romans, in two major battles: at Mt. Olympus in Mysia, and at Ancyra.

Ten commissioners accompanied Vulso. They were assigned the task of concluding the treaty with Antiochus, which was finally agreed upon at Apamea in 188 BC. When Vulso's term was over, he returned to Rome seeking a triumph for his success against the Galatians, but the majority of the ten commissioners, especially Lucius Furius Purpurio and Lucius Aemilius Paulus, objected. They claimed that he had declared war without the approval of the Senate or the Roman people, and that such brashness should not be rewarded. He even had been willing, they said, to disobey the Sibylline Books themselves:

Cupientem transire Taurum aegre omnium legatorum precibus, ne carminibus Sibyllae praedictam superantibus terminos fatalis cladem experiri vellet, retentum, admoesse tamen exercitum et prope <in> ipsis iugis ad divortia aquarum castra posuisse.

Manlius, who wanted to cross the Taurus range, was barely held back by the entreaties of all his legates from testing the prophecy in the Sibyl's verses that foretold disaster for those who crossed the fated boundaries. Yet he still moved his army up to the very ridges of the mountains and placed the camp at the watershed.²⁹⁷

²⁹⁷ Livy 38.45

According to the sources, the Taurus Mountains had been Rome's conceptual boundary in Asia even before Vulso arrived there. Before the Battle of Magnesia, at which the Scipios defeated Antiochus III, they had proposed this as the limit to Antiochus' power, but he had rejected their terms. Later, when the treaty was finally settled, the Taurus range was the agreed-upon boundary. Yet this boundary, according to Vulso's enemies, was not simply agreed upon by men; it had been established by the gods through the Sibyl's verses.

Based upon the short notice in Livy, placed in the mouths of Vulso's detractors, it is impossible to tell what the exact contents of the Sibylline oracle might have been. The oracle may not have mentioned the Taurus Mountains at all, but instead given an obscurely worded prophecy regarding the boundaries of empire, which the *decemviri* interpreted as applying to this mountain range. At the same time, the exact date at which the verses were produced from the Books is completely unknown. For despite the citation of the oracle by Vulso's enemies, it is unlikely to have been an immediate response to any alleged ambition of Vulso. If this were the case, we would be forced to accept the following chain of events: Vulso arrived in his province and suddenly grew too bold, so that a messenger was sent back to Rome to warn the Senate that he might cross the Taurus range and continue hostilities with Antiochus; then the Senate had the *decemviri* produce an oracle that would prevent this, and another messenger was sent back to Asia to hold the eager Vulso back. Time alone would make such a scenario impossible.

Thus the oracle could not have been an emergency response to Vulso's ambition. It is possible, however, that the verses were produced before his departure from Rome in

order to stifle whatever great plans he might have had. Vulso's enemies, of whom he seems to have had several, may even have been behind it. He had lost the consular election two times, and only became consul on his third try; and the extended debate over his triumph, which he eventually achieved, certainly confirms great opposition against him.²⁹⁸

On the other hand, this oracle may well have been produced years earlier, even before Vulso's election, and only later turned against him by his enemies. Livy records Sibylline consultations in 191 and 190 BC, but not, significantly, in 189. Perhaps the Taurus oracle was discovered during one of these earlier consultations. In this case, it may have helped to settle any questions about the proposed spheres of power of the Romans and Antiochus. Keeping in mind that Antiochus was a Greek monarch, the production of this Sibylline oracle, written in Greek, may have been intended to impress upon the king the significance of the Taurus boundary. But it is impossible to know any of this with certainty, since the words, date, and intention of the oracle are now completely lost.

The second Sibylline oracle of interest here – verses which were produced almost half a century later – did not concern the distant boundaries of foreign wars, but the domestic matter of the city's water supply. Unfortunately, however, the details of this second oracle are just as cloudy. According to Frontinus, the events surrounding the oracle began in 144 BC, when the praetor Quintus Marcius Rex was given oversight of Rome's water supply:

Ser. Sulpicio Galba Lucio Aurelio Cotta consulibus cum Appiae
Anionisque ductus vetustate quassati privatorum etiam fraudibus
interciperentur, datum est a senatu negotium Marc<i>o, qui tum praetor

²⁹⁸ See Grainger (1995) 24-5 for the political enemies of Vulso.

inter cives ius dicebat, eorum ductuum reficiendorum ac vindicandorum, et quoniam incrementum urbis exigere videbatur ampliorem modum aquae, eidem mandatum a senatu est, ut curaret, quatinus alias aquas quas posset in urbem perduceret. <Marcius pri>ores ductus res<tuit et> tertiam illis uberiores <aquam per>duxit, cui ab auctore Marciae nomen est.

In the consulship of Servius Sulpicius Galba and Lucius Aurelius Cotta, when the Aqua Appia and the Anio Vetus were falling apart with age and had been diverted by the theft of individuals, the Senate commissioned Marcius, who at that time served as urban praetor, to restore and reclaim these aqueducts, and since the increased population of the city seemed to demand a greater supply of water, the senate commanded him to see to it that he brought other aqueducts to the city as far as he was able. Marcius first restored the aqueducts and then brought in a third aqueduct carrying more water than these, which was named the Aqua Marcia after the man who supervised its construction.²⁹⁹

Marcius' task, the repair of old aqueducts and the construction of a new one, was enormous. The construction of a new aqueduct was usually reserved for the censors. But it seems that the Senate could not wait two more years (when new censors would be elected) to begin the project; because of the growth of the city's population, the water supply demanded immediate attention.

In fulfilling his commission, Marcius made plans to build a new aqueduct, bringing water from the Anio River Valley to Rome. But the task was far too big to be completed in only one year; in 143 BC, the Senate prorogued his term so that he could continue his work.³⁰⁰ In this year, however, when the *decemviri* were consulting the Sibylline Books for another reason (presumably for a prodigy rather than the practical question of aqueduct building), they discovered an oracle therein that advised against bringing the Anio to the Capitol.

²⁹⁹ Frontinus *de Aq.* 1.7.1-3

³⁰⁰ The prorogation of the urban praetor was unprecedented. See Stuart (1945) 243, Mommsen (1876) 1.637.

Legimus apud Fenestellam, in haec opera Marcio decretum sestertium milies octingenties, et quoniam ad consummandum negotium non sufficiebat spatium praeturae in annum alterum est prorogatum, eo tempore decemviri, dum aliis ex causis libros Sibillinos inspiciunt, invenisse dicuntur, non esse <fas> aquam Marciam <* – *> seu potius Anionem – de hoc enim constantius traditur – in Capitolium perduci; deque ea re in senatu M. Lepido pro collegio (MSS: collega) verba faciente actum Appio Claudio Q. Caecilio consulibus, ea<n>dem post annum tertium a Lucio Lentulo retractam C. Laelio Q. Servilio consulibus, sed utroque tempore vicisse gratiam Marcii Regis; atque ita in Capitolium esse aquam perductam.

We read in Fenestella that 180 million sesterces were assigned to Marcus for these projects. And since the term of one praetorship was not sufficient to complete the business, he was prorogued for another year. At that time the *decemviri*, while consulting the Sibylline Books for other reasons, are said to have found that it was not fitting that the Aqua Marcia, or rather the Anio (for tradition more regularly holds it thus), to be brought to the Capitol. On behalf of the decemviral college, Marcus Lepidus presented this matter, which was debated in the Senate, in the consulship of Appius Claudius and Quintus Caecilius. Three years later, in the consulship of Gaius Laelius and Quintus Servilius, Lucius Lentulus brought up the matter again. But on both occasions they were defeated thanks to Marcus Rex; and thus the water was led to the Capitol.³⁰¹

The *decemviri*, after discovering an oracle in the Sibylline Books that they deemed relevant to the issue, opposed bringing the Aqua Marcia, whose source was in the Anio River Valley, to the Capitol.³⁰² Marcus Lepidus, and probably Lucius Lentulus, were decemvirs who presented the college's case in the Senate. However, each time that they brought up the issue, in 143 and 140 BC, their religious arguments against the aqueduct were rejected, and the construction of the aqueduct continued. Marcus Rex was successful in the end, and the Aqua Marcia, one of Rome's greatest aqueducts, was completed to the Capitol.

³⁰¹ Frontinus *de Aq.* 1.7.4-5

³⁰² The aqueduct originated in springs, not technically the Anio River, but these were the springs that fed the river. See Rodgers (1982) 177: "they [the *decemviri*] may have argued that the new aqueduct which brought water from the Anio valley could fairly enough be called 'Anio water'." For the sources of the Aqua Marcia see Ashby (1935) 95-6.

The story of Marcius' aqueduct is unique in that it concerns the only known decemviral recommendation that was not accepted by the Senate. A summary of Livy's Book 54 (the book is unfortunately lost) puts Marcius' aqueduct in direct opposition to the Sibylline Books: *Aqua Marcia in Capitolium contra Sibyllae carmina perducta*. ("The Aqua Marcia was led to the Capitol in opposition to the Sibylline oracles.")³⁰³ But can we really believe that Marcius and the Senate overtly transgressed the Sibyl's injunction? Perhaps there was some ambiguity in the prophecy that permitted flexibility, allowing the Senate to claim that the oracle concerned another issue or another time. Here we come to the same impasse that we encountered in the Taurus verses, since we know neither the words of the oracle, nor the arguments used for and against it.

We can only speculate, therefore, about the intentions behind the oracle: Why would the *decemviri* wish to stop the construction of the Aqua Marcia? The most obvious answer is that they intended to suppress the glory to be accrued by Marcius Rex, whether because he had made enemies within the college, or because they feared his growing power. Marcius himself never rose beyond the position of praetor, but this does not mean that he was not a very powerful man; he may, in fact, have died before he had the chance to become consul. Perhaps they feared his growing popularity among the people, who would benefit from the new aqueduct.

A second reason for decemviral concern may be found in the events of 179 BC, when the construction of another proposed aqueduct was actually stopped. In this year, the censors Marcus Aemilius Lepidus and Marcus Fulvius had been granted contracts for building a new aqueduct. But Marcus Licinius Crassus, who refused to allow the structure passage through his lands, quashed their plans, and the project was abandoned.

³⁰³ Livy ep. Oxy. 54

Perhaps similar circumstances prevailed in 143 BC, when a *decemvir* or a man with friends in the college objected to the construction of an aqueduct on his land.³⁰⁴

On the other hand, it may have been the decemviral college as a whole that took issue with Marcius' aqueduct, since the Capitoline Hill was the site of a number of sacred properties, including decemviral lands. Orosius tells us that during the Social War

loca publica quae in circuitu Capitolii pontificibus auguribus decemviris et flaminibus in possessionem tradita erant, cogente inopia vendita sunt et sufficiens pecuniae modus, qui ad tempus inopiae subsidio esset, acceptus est.

public places around the Capitolium which had been handed over into the possession of the pontiffs, augurs, and decemvirs, were sold because of the pressure of poverty, and a sufficient amount of money, which at that time was a help against poverty, was received.³⁰⁵

The oracle of 143 BC may have been intended to protect holy lands from the encroachment of the aqueduct, and from the construction of new homes on the Capitol after the aqueduct made it a reasonable place to live. In this case, the oracle may have been grounded in religious rather than political concerns.³⁰⁶

The final oracle to be discussed here was obviously political, and seems to be of a different tenor than the two already discussed. This oracle was produced in 87 BC, when Cornelius Cinna and Gnaeus Octavius were consuls in Rome, and when the Romans were attending to the settlement of the Social War. In this year, Cinna had backed a bill proposing that the new Italian citizens be distributed among the old voting tribes, so that they would not be relegated to voting last. This proposal was essential in securing the

³⁰⁴ Stuart (1945) 244 claims that Marcius actually just completed the aqueduct that Lepidus and Fulvius had already begun. But Gwyn Morgan (1978) argues against this, I think rightly.

³⁰⁵ Orosius 5.18.27. See Gwyn Morgan (1978) 49 for the application of this passage to the concerns over the construction of Marcius' oracles.

³⁰⁶ See Gwyn Morgan (1978) 51ff. for other political concerns that may have caused the decemvirs to object to the aqueduct.

return of Marius, Cinna's ally. Octavius, however, a supporter of optimate policies, opposed the bill, and a physical confrontation between the two sides ensued in the forum. Appian tells us that Cinna, being driven from the city, called upon the support of slaves and offered them their freedom. But the slaves did not help him. Because he left the city in danger, and he offered freedom to the slaves, the Senate deposed Cinna from office.³⁰⁷

The story of the oracle of this year comes to us from Granius Licinianus, a second century AD author of a compendium of Roman history who had a particular interest in prodigies.³⁰⁸ The text is very fragmented; the following is based on the edition of M. Flemisch (1904):

*** ipsum facere nisi quod illa suasissent, placuit, id quod numquam alias ac pro collegio, quid in libris fatalibus scriptum esset, palam recitare. Constabat notari carmine Cinna sexque tribunis patria pulsus tranquillum otium et securitatem futuram.

The Senate wanted to do nothing contrary to what the oracles advised, and decided to do something that had never been done before on behalf of the college: to recite publicly what was written in the Sibylline Books. It was agreed that it was recorded in the verses that after Cinna and the six tribunes were expelled from the fatherland, there would be tranquil ease and security.³⁰⁹

This oracle thus legitimated the expulsion of Cinna and the tribunes from Rome, an action that was no doubt illegal because it arose in a conflict over the passage of a bill. But Granius Licinianus does not tell us whether the verses were produced before or after Cinna was deposed, and thus whether it served to authorize or excuse the Octavius' actions. In either case, the oracle, which was published contrary to practice, must have been intended to quell the objections of Cinna's supporters, of whom there were no doubt

³⁰⁷ For the events of the period, see Appian *BC* 1.64-5, Livy *Per.* 79, Velleius. 2.20.3.

³⁰⁸ Licinianus often used Livy as a source, so this account may ultimately derive from Livy. Obsequens, however, does not mention this story.

³⁰⁹ Granius Licinianus in Flemisch (1904), book 35 p. 15.

many in the city. At the same time, it may have helped to bring some resolution to a volatile situation, showing that Sibyl had predicted the troubles of 87, and that Octavius and the Senate had dealt with them in the proper way.

This third oracle was produced in a time of tremendous turmoil and upheaval, when new people were being incorporated into the Roman citizenry, and ambitious men – Cinna, Marius, and Sulla – were vying for power. It is no wonder that an oracle would be produced in this context as a last-ditch effort to provide support to the ruling body. But what about the other two examples that we have discussed? These oracles were brought forth in times of relative stability in Rome. In these cases, the Sibylline Books were applied to much less inflammatory matters: to establish the boundary of the Taurus Mountains, and to resist the construction of an aqueduct to the Capitoline. And in both of these instances, we know of the Sibyl's advice only through its being disobeyed, or nearly disobeyed: Vulso's detractors said that he could barely be held back from crossing the Taurus Mountains, while Marcius Rex managed to complete his aqueduct contrary to the recommendations of the *decemviri*. Furthermore, the Taurus oracle is not included in any prodigy list of Livy, but instead only mentioned when it was nearly broken. Is all this evidence that the Sibyl's advice was often richer than our sources imply, and that the practical, non-ritual injunctions of the Books have been suppressed?

This could be. However, I have shown that in each of the three cases above, exceptional circumstances prevailed. The Taurus verses may have been a nod to the Greek oracular tradition, familiar to Antiochus, and an attempt to legitimate the boundary in these terms. The oracle of 143 BC may have served religious purposes, protecting holy land, perhaps even the holdings of the *decemviri*. And the verses of 87 BC were

wrought in the extreme conditions of the Social War and the deposition of Cinna.

Furthermore, it is difficult to imagine that ancient sources would have ignored stories of the practical advice of the Sibyl. After all, these writers seem drawn to the intersection of religion and politics.

More significant, perhaps, than being rare, the practical and political utterances of the Books were, it seems, never sought after. Frontinus writes that the *decemviri* discovered the aqueduct oracle while they were consulting the Books for another reason – *dum aliis ex causis libros Sibillinos inspiciunt*. The Books, it seems, were never intended to answer questions of practical or political force. The political utterances of the Books could only be an accidental by-product of the prodigy and expiation system, not its true aim.³¹⁰ Thus instead of assuming that these cases are representative of a much broader phenomenon, it seems better to understand them as exceptions that prove the rule, and to assume that the rarity of the practical application of Sibylline oracles – three instances in more than fifty consultations before 83 BC, and one of them ignored – accurately represents the reality of the Books.

COMMUNITY VALUES

We have seen, therefore, that the Sibylline oracles rarely played a direct role in Roman politics, solving difficult questions and supporting different factions. Yet they nevertheless played an important part in Roman society. In this section, I will examine the role of the Sibylline Books in bringing together the entire Roman community. The reporting and expiation of prodigies concerned the entire community of citizens in Rome.

³¹⁰ This same idea appears again in the late Republic: Despite Cicero's pressure to consult the Books in 55 BC for a punishment for Gabinius, the Books were not examined until 54 BC, after a prodigy had occurred. See Ch. 5 below.

Books and community interacted through the reporting of prodigies – that is, by informing Roman magistrates of their occurrence – and through their expiation. A synopsis of the stages of prodigy reporting and expiation reveals just how many hands were involved in the process:

1. Witnesses (preferably several, for added credibility) report a prodigy to a consul or praetor.³¹¹
2. The magistrate delivers the report to the Senate.
3. The Senate approves or rejects the prodigy, based on its credibility and its applicability to the Roman state.³¹² If the prodigy is accepted, the Senate may either orchestrate expiatory ceremonies by its own authority, or refer the problem to one of the priesthoods knowledgeable in expiation. Until the Second Punic War, this was virtually always the *decemviri*.
4. If the Senate requests their advice, the *decemviri* consult the Sibylline Books to determine the appropriate response to the prodigy, then submit their findings to the Senate.
5. The Senate judges the appropriateness of the priests' response and arranges the advised rituals through a *senatus consultum*.³¹³ The Senate decides

³¹¹ See Livy 5.15.1. According to Livy, in 398 BC, the Senate rejected several prodigies because there were too few witnesses, and because the Romans were on bad terms with the Etruscans, so that the *haruspices* would not have been available to offer expiatory advice.

³¹² Livy 43.13 tells us that two prodigies were rejected in 169 BC, one because it took place in a private spot (and thus, presumably, seemed to apply to a single family), and one because it took place on non-Roman land. See below.

³¹³ As far as we know, the Senate heeded decemviral recommendations in every case but one: the advice of 143 BC not to build the Aqua Marcia to the Capitoline. See below.

whether to publish the oracle itself, or simply to provide the basic expiatory instructions.³¹⁴

6. The expiatory ceremony is carried out, often through the collaboration of people, priests, and magistrates.

Public prodigies were the concern of the Roman State, as the involvement of the Senate in accepting or rejecting prodigies makes clear. Yet the issue extended far beyond the central authority, reaching in theory to the lowest levels of Roman society. Prodigies were not sought officially by Roman magistrates or priests, like the auspices that opened an assembly. Instead, they were reported at random by the Roman people. A chicken that talked was not a sacred chicken; it was the property of a Roman citizen, or someone under the authority of the Roman State.³¹⁵ In most cases, the identity of the primary reporter of the prodigy is not given, implying that he was not important enough to be remembered or named.³¹⁶ In theory, any person of any class could report a prodigy as the owner of a talking chicken, or a cow that jumped from a building. Looking for prodigies required the attention of the entire *populus*, and offered a means of integrating all the people into the system and providing them with a role in restoring the *pax deorum*.

The story of Titus Latinius exemplifies this communal involvement in the reporting of signs and prodigies. According to Livy, in 491 BC Jupiter appeared in a dream to Latinius, a plebeian of apparently low social status. The god told Latinius that there had been a ritual error in the performance of the *Ludi Maximi* that year, and that the

³¹⁴ In 173 BC, the *decemviri* had the instructions for an expiatory sacrifice published in writing. See Livy 42.2.3-7.

³¹⁵ Once Roman power expanded throughout Italy, non-citizens could also report prodigies. See below.

³¹⁶ One notable exception to this rule occurred in 192 BC, when the cow belonging to a consul spoke words of warning to Rome; see Livy 35.21. Another took place in 199 BC, when the *propraetor* Q. Minucius reported that a five-legged colt had been born in Bruttium, and three chickens with three feet each; see Livy 32.1.

games had to be repeated. Latinius, reluctant to approach the consuls because of his low station, kept his dream to himself. But while he delayed reporting his vision, his son died, and Latinius himself fell very ill. Knowing his silence to be the cause of his calamities, he called a family council, and heeded his kinsmen's advice to report the dream to the consuls. Immediately, Latinius' illness was cured, and the Senate ordered the games to be performed again.³¹⁷

This story may not reflect historical reality, but it does express an ideal: that even poor or ignoble men could receive and report signs to the magistrates. In reality, consuls would presumably have been difficult to reach for those of low status, and reports from lowborn people would have lacked credibility. But the ideal implicit in the system of prodigy reporting was that it was the privilege and responsibility of the entire community. Prodigies were completely random; they could be observed at any time, by any person. And they could cover a wide range of events – from lightning striking a major temple, to the deformed birth of a humble domestic animal on a small family farm.

The communal nature of prodigies is further exemplified by the frequent participation of the people in expiation. Since the fate of the entire Roman populace rested on the restoration of the *pax deorum*, expiatory rituals often involved large portions of – or even, in theory, all – the population.³¹⁸ The most common expiation advised by the *decemviri* was the *supplicatio*, a period of prayer of variable lengths of time performed by the people at public shrines. The first *supplicatio* to be held on

³¹⁷ For the dream of Titus Latinius, see Livy 2.36.

³¹⁸ Bendlin (2000) 125-6: "Here, the state's exceptional encroachment upon its own citizens and upon the Italians can be explained by a certain proportionality in religious thinking: since these rituals responded to portents addressing the entire *populus Romanus*, the Roman senate resorted to increasing the number of possible participants – the more people involved, the more successful the procuration would be." See also Diels (1890) 85, Gwyn Morgan (1990).

Sibylline advice was performed in 436 BC, and the *decemviri* ordered the ceremony repeated 20 times between 217 and 167 BC. Thus many expiations advised by the *decemviri* included a *supplicatio*. Other rituals, too, required communal participation: the performance of games, the introduction of new gods, the celebration of the *novemdialis*, and the dedication of a *ver sacrum* all called for the efforts and attention of the people.³¹⁹ Even sacrifice, an act ostensibly involving only a magistrate, included the people, as it was performed before the eyes of a Roman crowd, often in very public places.³²⁰

Many Roman expiatory rituals required the participation of one particular group within the community.³²¹ Women, for example, played important roles in Sibylline expiations from the third century BC onwards.³²² They were frequently singled out in the worship of female deities like Ceres and Juno. In 217 BC, in response to a number of dire prodigies, Roman matrons collected money to offer to Juno Regina on the Aventine. At the same time, freedwomen organized a collection for an offering to Feronia.³²³ After

³¹⁹ A *ver sacrum* was the dedication of all the produce of the spring in any given year. The “sacred spring” was vowed in 217 BC, during the Second Punic War. The people had to agree to this vow, since it obliged them to offer their own livestock for sacrifice. See Livy 22.9-10 for the vow. See Livy 33.44 for the fulfillment of the vow, and 34.44 for the repetition of this ceremony in the following year. See Bendlin (2000) 125 for rituals involving the entire Roman community.

³²⁰ In 167 BC, for example, the *decemviri* sacrificed 50 goats in the Roman Forum. See Livy 45.16.5-6, Obsequens 11.

³²¹ See Boyce (1938) FN 16 for the idea that the Sibylline Books often advised expiations that “tended to break down the aristocratic monopoly of state privileges.” Boyce gives two examples: “The right of wearing the *toga praetexta*, for instance, was granted to sons of freedmen after freedwomen and sons of freedmen had taken part in some ritual during the Second Punic War (M. Laelius in Macrobius *Sat.* 1.6.13-14); on the *praetexta* as a sacred garment and a garment for children, see W. Warde Fowler, *Class. Rev.* X (1896) 317-319. Playwrights and actors were granted the privilege described as *consistere ac dona ponere* in the temple of Minerva on the Aventine as a result of the success of the expiatory hymn written by Livius Andronicus for the rites of 207 (Festus, 446 Lindsay, 333 Müller, s.v. *scribas*).” This is further evidence for the unifying character of the system of prodigy and expiation.

³²² Beard, North, and Price (1998) 71: “But the presence of separate groups of women in festivals, normal practice in Greek civic festivals, seems not to have been the normal Roman way at any date. It is only in this period that we begin to find such processions and the fact that the Sibylline Books were so prominently connected with the innovation strongly supports the idea that it was Greek influence that lay behind the change.”

³²³ Livy 22.1.8-20. Little is known of the goddess Feronia. According to Servius ad Aen. 8.564, slaves were set free in her shrine near Tarracina. The participation of freedwomen in the rites of 217 BC must be

the discovery of a hermaphrodite in 207 BC, the *pontifices* advised an expiatory ceremony involving a procession of 27 maidens, who sang a hymn and marched through the city; the ceremony would be repeated by the *decemviri* in later years.³²⁴ These girls, like the women who collected offerings in 217 BC, were not serving in any official priestly capacity; but nevertheless they approached the gods as representatives of the entire community.

One of the most important rituals involving communal participation was the *lectisternium*, in which the images of specific gods and goddesses were taken out on couches, paraded through the city, and symbolically feasted. The first *lectisternium* was performed in 399 BC in response to a plague. The ceremony lasted eight days and honored six deities: Apollo and Latona, Hercules and Diana, and Mercury and Neptune. Livy tells us that in addition to the public ceremony involving the gods, the people also opened up their homes to others, *notos ignotosque*, and dined together. According to Livy, during this ceremony prisoners were freed from bondage, and personal enmities were set aside.³²⁵

This ritual was a quintessential act of community, bringing the Romans together with the gods in the act of sharing food. Nouilhan points out that many aspects of the ceremony would have been especially pleasing to the plebeians, as the city became for a short time a world of equals, and those put in prison for their debts were freed. According to Nouilhan, the deities honored were in some ways plebeian, too, for their cult sites were all located outside the *pomerium* in the area of the Aventine Hill. It was a

connected to Feronia's role in freeing slaves. The freedwomen were thus singled out as the most appropriate worshippers of the goddess.

³²⁴ See Livy 27.37.4-15 and below for the ceremonies of 207 BC.

³²⁵ For the *lectisternium* of 399 BC, see Livy 5.13.4-8, Dionysius of Halicarnassus 12 fr. 9, Augustine *CD* 3.17. Dionysius of Halicarnassus names his source as Piso.

ceremony of integration – bringing in the marginal gods and the marginal people – that facilitated a valuable release of tension in Rome.³²⁶

According to Livy, however, just as this *lectisternium* was bringing the people together, the Senate's interpretation of the prodigies was pushing them apart. The Senate considered the plague of 399 BC a punishment from the gods for the election of plebeian consular tribunes, and they convinced the people to vote only for patricians in the following election.³²⁷ It must be stressed that this was not an official interpretation of the Sibylline Books – the Books themselves had not attributed such a political meaning to the prodigies – but the Senate's assessment of events. At the same time, since it is such an early story, the details are questionable; this interpretation may in fact have never been made. However, it is noteworthy that Livy, at least, considered such an interpretation possible. Here we see the flip-side to the importance of community in the Roman prodigy and expiation system: while the unification of the people could win the gods' favor, their transgression of political or social boundaries could rob them of divine support.

Even women, as integral components of the Roman community, could be blamed for the anger of the gods. Prompted by a prodigy in the 3rd century BC, the Senate erected a statue to Venus Verticordia, the “Changer of Hearts,” in the hopes that she could bring chastity to Roman matrons.³²⁸ Likewise, in 295 BC after a number of prodigies were reported (plague, lightning strikes, and rains of earth), fines were exacted from married women who had been accused of adultery and used to build a temple of

³²⁶ See Nouilhan (1989) 27-29.

³²⁷ See Livy 5.14 for the Senate's interpretation of these prodigies.

³²⁸ The exact date of this prodigy is not known, but it is usually assumed to have occurred sometime between 292 and 219 BC, in the interval of Livy's lost second decade. See Val. Max. 8.15.12, Pliny *NH* 7.120.

Venus near the Circus.³²⁹ Just as expiation ceremonies might involve many different groups within the Roman community, or all of the city acting in unison, so prodigies might be attributed to the fault of members of the community who had deviated from their socially established roles, such as plebeians who aimed for more power or women who betrayed their husbands. The gods, it seems, delighted in the unity of the Romans, and were angered by divisions in the city.

The *pax deorum*, therefore, was dependent upon the right behavior of the entire Roman community, and it was often only through communal actions that the *pax* could be restored. Much more than the *haruspices*, their principal competitors in expiation, the *decemviri* advised these communal rituals. In the process of restoring the right relations with the gods, these communal ceremonies also helped to restore the right relations among the people, and to confirm their faith in the gods' favor. In times of crisis, during which Livy and Cicero claim that prodigy reports increased, the performance of expiations may have given the people an outlet of action through which they could gain a sense of control.³³⁰

But in addition to the citizens' participation, there was another side to these rituals: the decision of the Senate that such rituals should be performed. Andreas Bendlin has rightly pointed out that we have no way of knowing how many people actually participated in the rituals of expiation.³³¹ Yet, the fact that the Senate and only the Senate could order the ritual at all – the fact that they claimed the right of drawing the people into religious action – was a powerful statement in itself. In the next section, I will show

³²⁹ Livy 10.31.8

³³⁰ See Cicero *de Div.* 2.58, Livy 21.62 for the relationship between prodigies and crisis.

³³¹ Bendlin (2000) 126f. I wonder, would the Senate have even wanted the entire city population flocking to the temples together?

another way in which the expiatory rituals of the Sibylline Books confirmed the *status quo* of Roman power, by bringing the elites to the forefront of religious ceremonies.

CONFIRMING AND DEFINING POWER

I have already shown how the secrecy surrounding the Sibylline Books helped to define senatorial power, as this body maintained absolute control over the consultation and publication of the Sibyl's oracles. But there was another way, more conspicuous and flexible, through which the Sibylline Books helped to locate power: participation in the rituals that they advised. Magistrates, priests, senators, and members of elite families often played special roles in Sibylline expiations, and they were thus marked out in a very public way as occupying a unique position between Rome and her gods.³³²

Livy describes three different instances in the historical period in which the Sibylline Books advised the consuls to perform sacrifices.³³³ These occurred in 208 BC, 191 BC, and 169 BC.³³⁴ However, the number of Sibylline expiations performed by the consuls was probably much higher, since Livy is often vague about the details of sacrifice, and Obsequens even more so.³³⁵ The participation of the consuls in expiation helped to define their position not only as heads of state, but also as mediators between

³³² Bendlin (2000) 127 sees the limitation of rituals to the elites as a sign that the Senate found it difficult to incite the action of the entire *populus* in all expiatory ceremonies: "The fact that civic control would often be limited to the Roman elite betrays either a lack of interest in systematically imposing elite expectations on the urban population at large or the realization that such imposition would be otiose." This is probably true. But ceremonies involving only the elites also gave them the opportunity to employ and display their closer relationship with the gods, which was always an important factor in legitimating elite power.

³³³ A consul was also involved in the rituals of 504 BC, but given the early date I do not include this as historical. See Plutarch *Public.* 21.1.

³³⁴ For the ceremonies of 208 BC, see Livy. 27.23; for 191 BC, see Livy 36.37; for 169 BC, see Livy 43.13. Additional ceremonies in 169 BC involved all of the magistrates, not just the consuls.

³³⁵ See, for example, Livy 40.45 for the very cursory synopsis of the expiations of 179 BC: *ob ea decemviri iussi adire libros edidere, quibus diis et quot hostiis sacrificaretur*. ("Because of these prodigies the *decemviri* were ordered to go to the Books, and they declared to what gods and with what victims sacrifice should be made.") The Senate also advised expiatory sacrifices by the consuls.

Rome and the gods. Their participation in expiation meant that the rituals did not, as many scholars have claimed, defer blame for potential defeat from the consuls to the gods; it was the consuls, after all, who were responsible for ensuring the gods' favor. Instead, unsuccessful consuls could be accused both of poor military strategy and of impiety. Take, for example, the consul Gaius Flaminius. In Livy's account, there were two reasons for his terrible defeat at Trasimene: his poor planning, as he led his army through a pass without reconnoitering and fell into a trap; and his impiety, as he left Rome under cover of night without performing the rituals expected of the consul at the beginning of the year. Both of the reasons behind his defeat – poor planning and impiety – were rooted in basic character flaws, rashness and pride. As has already been shown, expiatory rituals often delayed the consuls' departure for their provinces. In their willingness to put off their embarkation, the consuls placed themselves under the authority of the gods and of the Senate, and showed themselves to be only a small piece of a greater structure of power.³³⁶ Flaminius did not wish to submit himself to this delay, as he feared that his enemies in the Senate might hold him back still longer.³³⁷ He hurried to his province, where he rushed after Hannibal, to seek glory in battle.

Thus the participation of the consuls in expiatory rituals did not necessarily serve to remove from them the responsibility for their success or failure in battle. Indeed, it only gave them another front – the religious one – on which to work to ensure their victory. Blame was not deferred from the general to the gods; it was instead attributed to both military and religious errors. This gives us a fascinating insight into the Roman mindset, which regarded military victory as so uncertain that it required the best efforts of

³³⁶ For this reason, the senators claimed that *non cum senatu modo sed iam cum dis immortalibus C. Flaminium bellum gerere* (Livy 21.63).

³³⁷ Livy 21.63

the generals and the gods, yet at the same time so secure that defeat could be considered a prodigy in itself. Flaminius' loss at Trasimene was interpreted in this way.

Other groups, too, played roles in Sibylline expiations. After Flaminius' defeat, the Senate worked as a body in the expiatory rituals of 217 BC, as they conducted the Saturnalia in December.³³⁸ This was the only recorded time in which the Senate played a special role in a Sibylline expiation; it may be no coincidence that it took place after this terrible defeat. In this context, the festival served as an important way for the Senate publicly to reaffirm its authority after Trasimene.

Two other Sibylline consultations in the Second Punic War made distinct political statements. The first of these important consultations was that of 217 BC, following the defeat of Trasimene. As we have already seen, the Roman State seemed desperate to verify its authority after Flaminius' crushing defeat. Livy tells us that in 217 BC, when Fabius Maximus was elected dictator, his first official act was to convene the Senate and request the consultation of the Sibylline Books. Among other expiations, the Sibylline Books advised that a temple be built to Venus Erycina – the Romans' savior in the First Punic War – and that the man with *maximum imperium* should vow it.³³⁹ This man was, of course, Fabius Maximus himself. This special designation of an individual to perform ceremonies – not just the consul, but the man with *maximum imperium* – served as a support for Fabius' role as dictator and his plans of fighting a slow war of attrition against Hannibal.

³³⁸ For the expiatory ceremonies of 217 BC, see Livy 22.1.8-20, Plutarch *Fab.* 2, Macrobius *Sat.* 1.6, Orosius 4.15, and Valerius Maximus 1.6.5.

³³⁹ See Livy 21.9 for the consultation, Livy 21.10 for the advice that the temple be vowed by the man with the greatest *imperium*.

In 204 BC, another Sibylline expiation provided an opportunity for a military plan to find religious support. At this time, Rome was still embroiled in the war against Hannibal, but the circumstances were very different: Rome's victory was much more secure, and the Romans were in the process of deciding how best to defeat Hannibal, whether in Italy or in Africa. In the previous year, after frequent rains of stones, the Sibylline Books had advised that Magna Mater should be brought to Rome from Pessinous. Delegates were sent to Asia to retrieve the goddess, but they stopped by Delphi on the way. There, the Pythia advised them that Magna Mater should be received in the city by the best man of Rome – the *optimus vir*.³⁴⁰

The Senate's choice for *optimus vir* was a surprising one; it selected Publius Cornelius Scipio Nasica, a young man whom Livy describes as not yet of quaestorial age, and hence not a member of the senatorial body, as the best man of the State.³⁴¹ He was, however, a member of one of the most powerful of Rome's noble patrician families, the Corneli, and the great-nephew of the famous Publius Cornelius Scipio, who when Magna Mater arrived in 204 BC was in Sicily preparing to fight in Africa. When in the previous year the Senate had decided to fetch the goddess from Attalus, the final plan of attack against Carthage was as yet undetermined, with a debate raging over defeating Hannibal in Italy or in Africa.

The Delphic addendum to the instructions of the Sibylline Books was thus more than convenient, since it provided the Senate with the opportunity to express its unity in the final decision to go to Africa. Thus the choice of Nasica as *optimus vir*, enigmatic because of his age and political inexperience, might be considered an articulation of the

³⁴⁰ For the introduction of Magna Mater, see Livy 29.10.4-5 and 14.5-14; Suetonius *Tib.* 2.3; Ovid *Fasti* 4.395ff.; Pliny *NH* 7.120; Lactantius *Inst. Div.* 2.7; Appian *Hann.* 56.

³⁴¹ See Livy 29.14.8 for the choice of Nasica as *optimus vir*.

Senate's support of Publius Cornelius Scipio, Nasica's great-uncle.³⁴² In this role Nasica stood in opposition to Quintus Fabius Maximus, Scipio's greatest opponent in the debate over the final phase of the war. In 215 BC, Fabius, as the man with the greatest *imperium*, had dedicated the Venus Erycina temple. In designating Nasica as the *optimus vir*, a title that trumped Fabius' status as the man with *maximum imperium*, the Senate turned resolutely from its position of uncertainty regarding the conclusion of the war and instead expressed its full support for Publius Cornelius Scipio and his expedition to Africa.

Finally, Sibylline expiations often involved members of elite families, and thus put representatives of Rome's ruling class on display in very public ways. For example, Livy tells us that when Magna Mater arrived in Rome, she was greeted by the *matronae primores civitatis*.³⁴³ And though Livy does not say it, we may assume that the twenty-five women chosen to make offerings to Juno in 207 BC were members of elite families. Likewise, the twenty-seven maidens who sang hymns in expiation, and the ten boys and ten girls who assisted with the sacrifice of 190 BC, were probably children of the elites. The second part of the oracle of 125 BC as recorded by Phlegon makes this requirement explicit: "To sing a hymn, those females from the foremost families among the people . . ."³⁴⁴ The two subsequent lines are missing, so that it is impossible to tell what ritual this

³⁴² The young age of Nasica, who was at the age of marriage and fatherhood, may also have been dictated by the nature of Magna Mater's cult. She was a goddess of fertility and regeneration, and thus it was appropriate that she be welcomed by a young man considered in the prime of his life. In fact, it is very possible that Nasica had a newborn son at the time of Magna Mater's arrival, since his son Publius Cornelius Scipio Nasica Corculum was elected consul for 162 BC, and according to Broughton would likely have been born around 205 BC.

³⁴³ Livy 29.14

³⁴⁴ Phlegon oracle line 52: Ὑμνεῖν δ', αἳ κε γένει προφερέστεραι ὥσ' ἐνὶ λαοῖς. Translation Hansen (1996) 42.

refers to, but it is possible that it is referring to the hymn sung by twenty-seven maidens to Juno.

DEFINING THE ROMAN

Prodigy Reports From Outside Rome

Thus far, I have focused mostly on prodigy and expiation as it affected those in the city of Rome, involving the Senate, magistrates, priests, and citizens of Rome. Rome was the clear center of prodigy reporting and expiation; more than half of all prodigies occurred in the city, and the vast majority of expiations took place there. In comparison to the Italian towns, the overwhelmingly high number of prodigy reports from Rome itself showed the importance of the city both as the center of the Roman State, and as the object of divine interests. Yet a focus on Rome alone leaves more than three hundred prodigies, reported from other areas in Italy, Sicily, and the Mediterranean, unexplored. In the remainder of this chapter, I will investigate the implications of the reporting of prodigies from areas outside Rome, and will examine the significance of the performance of expiatory ceremonies outside the city.

In his study of Roman prodigy and expiation, Bruce MacBain argued that the practice of prodigy reporting functioned as a line of communication between Italian towns and Rome, with politically colored messages concealed beneath a sacred veneer. The decision of the Senate to expiate a prodigy was based upon the perception of that prodigy as relevant to the Roman State as a whole. The submission of a prodigy to Rome, and the Senate's acceptance or rejection of the prodigy, therefore constituted very political acts. On a more concrete level, prodigy reporting constituted a pretense for

interaction between representatives of Italian towns, who delivered the reports, and the magistrates of Rome, who received them. The ambassadors who reported prodigies to Rome were probably powerful men in their own towns, who would be esteemed reliable witnesses by the Roman Senate and would be held worthy of an audience with a consul or praetor.³⁴⁵ Such embassies, often travelling for many days to reach Rome, probably had additional business to conduct, delivering not only prodigy reports, but also overtly political news and requests on behalf of their cities.³⁴⁶

Altogether, our sources record the reports of 306 prodigies from Italy to Rome. This practice of prodigy reporting from Italian towns to Rome is not simply an aberration generated as a response to crisis. It is, from 218 BC at least, the rule. Livy takes it for granted and does not see the need to give any specific explanations for it. So much so, that we have to assume that the system had, by then, a fairly long history behind it.³⁴⁷ With the loss of Livy's second decade and the unreliability of the first, the origins of this

³⁴⁵ Unfortunately, the sources provide little concrete information about who reported prodigies. Livy 32.1 records one instance in which the messenger is identified as a Roman magistrate. In 199 BC, the propraetor Q. Minucius wrote that a five-legged colt had been born in Bruttium, and three chickens with three feet each (Livy 32.1). The fact that the messenger is identified at all here probably marks this as an unusual case, so that it can be assumed that it was normal for townsmen, and not Roman magistrates, to report Italian prodigies to Rome.

³⁴⁶ Foreign embassies to Rome occasionally behaved in this way, delivering their political communications to the Senate, but also performing religious acts while in the city of Rome. One example of such an embassy occurred in 191 BC, when the Senate permitted envoys sent by Philip of Macedon to sacrifice on the Capitol and present a golden gift to Jupiter (Livy 36.35). The system could also work the other way, as Roman commanders occasionally sacrificed in foreign lands. The consul Acilius performed a sacrifice to Hercules on Mt. Oeta in 191 BC (Livy 36.30), and the consul L. Scipio sacrificed to Minerva at the citadel of Ilium in 190 BC (Livy 37.37).

³⁴⁷ There is some evidence from sources other than Livy that the reporting of prodigies from Italian towns to Rome was already occurring in the third century BC before the Second Punic War. See Orosius 4.4 for reports from outside Rome in 269 BC. See also Dio 12 (Zon. 8.20), Orosius 4.13, Plutarch Marc. 4, Pliny *NH* 2.99, for reports from 223 BC.

innovation in prodigy reporting, both temporal and circumstantial, are impossible to pinpoint.³⁴⁸ But it certainly was connected to the expansion of Roman power in Italy.³⁴⁹

The towns that reported most of the prodigies were in the vicinity of Rome – Latium, southern Etruria, Campania, and Sabineland. These towns could claim a close bond with Rome, generated not only by short distances, but also by a shared past.³⁵⁰ These peoples figured in Rome's legends and religion in prominent ways: The Sabines were her mothers, the Etruscans her kings, the Latins her brothers in common religious rites. Campania, a land of wealth and civilization, could claim the residence of a Sibyl, perhaps even the one to whom Rome owed her sacred books of expiation, and thus also her position of preeminence in Italy. Long before the Second Punic War, this "heartland" of prodigy reporting was composed almost entirely of Roman towns, possessing Roman citizenship and Roman juridical status.³⁵¹ The reporting of prodigies from Italian towns

³⁴⁸ See Levene (1993) on the first decade of Livy. The first recorded prodigy report from another town to Rome takes place in 269 BC, but there is no reason to believe that this was the first instance. See Orosius 4.4 for this prodigy report.

³⁴⁹ Nevertheless, we should not believe that Rome was involved in all Italian expiation. Even from those Italian cities that reported the highest number of prodigies, relatively few were reported compared to those occurring in the city of Rome itself. Lanuvium, for example, the city second to Rome in the number of prodigies, reported only fifteen during the period from 218 to 90 BC. These occurred in the following years: 218, 215, 214, 204, 200, 198, 193, 181, 174, 173, 167, 166, 147, 99, and 91 BC. Note the preponderance of reports during the Second Punic War and the years immediately following. Even if accounting for the possibility that several of the prodigies reported from this town were not mentioned by the historians, the reports are still very few and far from annual. It is quite possible, given the large number of prodigies known to have occurred in the city of Rome itself, that many of the prodigies taking place in Italian towns were never in fact reported to Rome, but were instead expiated by local magistrates or priests. Some special motivation, such as the recurrence of a specific type of prodigy previously sent to Rome, or a perceived relevance to Rome based upon a particular political or social situation, might have motivated the reporting of prodigies to Rome.

³⁵⁰ As Rosenberger (2005) 238ff. points out, the towns that reported most prodigies were also linked to Rome by Roman roads. Most of the Italian prodigy reports came from towns less than 50 km from Rome, running northwest to southeast on Roman roads.

³⁵¹ As Rosenberger (2005) 248 points out, Rome tended to draw prodigies from the same areas of Italy from which she drew Senators. It was, therefore, the "most Roman" areas of Italy that reported the most prodigies.

to Rome was primarily a means for Roman cities to express and cement their connection to the Roman center.³⁵²

Yet not all of the reporting cities, either in the “heartland” or outside it, were Roman municipalities. Many were Latin colonies or federate allies, subordinated to Rome through treaties and troop quotas, but technically not part of Roman territory. About 21% of prodigy reports came from towns that were not included in the *ager Romanus*, 16% were from peregrine locales.³⁵³ This issue – the juridical status of reporting towns – is crucial to understanding the role that prodigy reporting served in Roman-Italian relations. If the system were open only to prodigies occurring on Roman land, Rome’s authority in expiation would be tied solely to legal grounds. But if the Senate also accepted non-Roman prodigies, there must have been more flexible, and thus more significant, criteria for a prodigy’s validity.

Mommsen believed that all prodigies expiated by Rome took place on *ager Romanus*.³⁵⁴ Since their treaties with Rome often forced the allies to cede land, bits of Roman territory would have been spread all across Italy. In a couple of cases our sources

³⁵² Though most prodigies reported to Rome came from Italian towns, a number of reporting places were excluded from this group by one or both criteria, being, in fact, neither Italian, nor towns. Sicily and the Lipari Islands reported eight prodigies between 214 and 90 BC, while the small Greek island of Cephallenia reported two, one in 163 BC and one in 140 BC. Other prodigies occurring outside the Italian peninsula took place in Roman army camps, in Gaul (218 and 102 BC), Sicily (217 BC), Sardinia (217 BC), and Macedonia (199 BC). For prodigy reports from Sicily and the Lipari Islands between 214 and 90 BC, see Livy 24.10.10 (214 BC); Livy 39.56.5 and Orosius 4.20.30 (183 BC); Livy 41.13.3 (177 BC); Obsequens 23 (140 BC); Obsequens 26 (135 BC); Obsequens 29, Orosius 5.10.11, Strabo 6.2.11, and Pliny *NH* 2.203 (126 BC); Obsequens 32 (122 BC); Pliny *NH* 2.238 (90 BC). For prodigy reports from Cephallenia, see Obsequens 14 (163 BC); Obsequens 23 (140 BC). For prodigy reports from the army, see Livy 21.62 (Gaul, 218 BC); Obsequens 44 (Gaul, 102 BC); Livy 22.1.8 (Sicily, 217 BC); Livy 22.1.8 (Sardinia, 217 BC); Livy 31.1.12 (Macedonia, 199 BC).

³⁵³ Rosenberger (2005) 239-40.

³⁵⁴ Mommsen (1912)

state explicitly that prodigies had taken place on *ager publicus* or *ager Romanus*.³⁵⁵

Furthermore, in the case of the birth of a hermaphrodite, they emphasize the necessity of removing the *monstrum* from Roman land.³⁵⁶ Mommsen pointed out the importance of the juridical status of Roman land in these cases.

MacBain, however, disagreed with Mommsen, claiming that the number of prodigies reported from non-Roman places was simply too high to be drawn entirely from patches of *ager Romanus*. He concluded that prodigy reports were not based on a clear-cut classification of Roman land. The story of Fregellae, a Latin colony in Latium, is central to this issue. Livy's prodigy list of 169 BC, which includes details that flesh out the bare bones of his typical prodigy list, inadvertently brings this town into the debate. He begins this account with his most famous lines on prodigy reporting, a diatribe against the diminished respect toward prodigies in his own time.³⁵⁷ But the information most valuable to us comes a bit later: he mentions two prodigies that were *non suscepta*, not accepted by the Roman Senate as warranting expiation by Rome, and provides the reasons.³⁵⁸ The first, the sprouting of a palm tree in the home of Titus

³⁵⁵ Livy 31.12: A mule was born with five feet on *ager publicus* in Lucania (200 BC). Obsequens 34: A hermaphrodite was found on *ager Romanus* and carried to the sea (*androgynus in agro Romano annorum octo inventus et in mare deportatus*, 119 BC).

³⁵⁶ Livy 27.37: *Haruspices* declared that a hermaphrodite born at Frusino should be removed from Roman land and drowned in the sea (*extorrem agro Romano, procul terrae contactu, alto mergendum*; 207 BC). Livy 39.22: The *haruspices* ordered a hermaphrodite removed from *ager Romanus* in Umbria and killed (*id prodigium abominantes arceri Romano agro necarique quam primum iusserunt*, 186 BC).

³⁵⁷ Livy 43.13: *Non sum nescius ab eadem neclegentia, quia nihil deos portendere uulgo nunc credant, neque nuntiari admodum ulla prodigia in publicum neque in annales referri. Ceterum et mihi uetustas res scribenti nescio quo pacto anticus fit animus, et quaedam religio tenet, quae illi prudentissimi uiri publice suscipienda censuerint, ea pro indignis habere, quae in meos annales referam.*

³⁵⁸ Livy gives this sort of information in only one other instance, the prodigy list of 398 BC (Livy 5.15.1): *Prodigia interim multa nuntiari, quorum pleraque et quia singuli auctores erant parum credita spretaque, et quia, hostibus Etruscis, per quos ea procurarent haruspices non erant.* Here, Livy claims that many prodigies were disregarded by the Senate for two reasons: 1. Only individuals could testify to their occurrence; and 2. The Romans were at war with the Etruscans and therefore could not rely on the aid of the *haruspices* in expiating certain prodigies.

Marcius Figulus, was rejected because it had occurred *in privato loco*.³⁵⁹ The second also took place *in privato loco*: In the home of Lucius Atreus, a spear intended for his son's military service blazed for two hours without being burned.³⁶⁰ Unlike the previous prodigy, however, it was not the private nature of this event that caused the Senate to reject it. Instead, it was the status of the city in which it occurred – Fregellae – as non-Roman land, a *locus peregrinus*, that made the prodigy irrelevant to Rome.

At first sight, this passage appears to be a clear statement of the inadmissability of prodigy reports from *loci peregrini*. Yet the story of Fregellae is not so straightforward. The town, located to the southeast of Rome along the Via Latina, was founded as a Latin colony in 328 BC. During the Second Punic War, the Fregellans were recognized for distinctive service to Rome.³⁶¹ In this time of favor, the Fregellans reported two prodigies, both of which were *accepted* by the Senate.³⁶² One, lightning strikes to the walls and gates of the city in 211 BC, quite obviously could *not* have occurred on Roman land. As Rawson remarks, “surely no one will claim that the public buildings and city walls of a Latin or federate community were on Roman *ager publicus*?”³⁶³ Thus despite the status of Fregellae as non-Roman, the town had successfully reported prodigies to Rome during the Second Punic War.

³⁵⁹ In effect, the Senate determined that the palm tree, a common omen of victory and success, bore implications not for the Roman State, but for the individual in whose home it had sprung up. This Marcius Figulus, perhaps to be identified with the praetor of this same year (Livy 44.13), may have recognized the implications of this prodigy on his own reputation, and simply sought senatorial backing for this self-aggrandizing propaganda. Whatever his intentions, the Senate did not support him.

³⁶⁰ This also may be seen as a self-aggrandizing prodigy, like the sprouting of the palm tree in Figulus' home. Like the story of the flame over Servius Tullius' head, this may have been taken as a mark of honor for the family of Lucius Atreus, and a distinct presage of the military distinction of his son.

³⁶¹ Livy 27.10

³⁶² In 211 BC, Fregellae reported that its wall and gates had been struck by lightning (Livy 26.23). In 206 BC, her citizens reported seeing daylight at night (Livy 28.11).

³⁶³ Rawson (1971) 162

But while the Fregellans were honored by the Romans in the war against Hannibal, in 177 BC, they were singled out for a different reason: They were indicted by embassies from the Samnites and Paeligni for receiving their citizens and thus contributing to the depopulation that made the levy difficult for these people to bear.³⁶⁴ Apparently, Fregellan citizens were migrating to Rome, and citizens of other towns were coming to take their place in Fregellae. This problem continued at least until 173 BC, when Latins still remaining in Rome were ordered to leave the city and return to their own towns.³⁶⁵

The rejection of a prodigy from Fregellae, which had previously submitted two prodigies that were accepted, must be seen in the light of these occurrences. After all, if the rule against reports from non-Roman towns were so clear-cut, Fregellae would not have submitted a prodigy, and the Roman magistrate – the consul or urban praetor – to whom it was reported would certainly not have presented it to the Senate. Instead, the acceptance or rejection of the prodigy was a matter of senatorial choice, not of a strict rule. Uncertainty was crucial to the system. By refusing to accept this prodigy, and by claiming as the reason the status of Fregellae as *locus peregrinus*, the Roman Senate was emphatically singling out Fregellae as non-Roman. The events reveal a tension that lingered for decades, culminating in Fregellae's rebellion against Rome in 125 BC. In the conflict, Rome crushed Fregellae, and the town finally became wholly Roman; the issue that had existed between the two cities before was violently expunged.

It seems, therefore, that the Senate may as a general rule have refused prodigy reports from *loci peregrini*. But as time carried Rome's influence far beyond her own

³⁶⁴ Livy 41.8.6-8

³⁶⁵ Livy 42.10. See MacBain (1982) 28f. for the expulsion of Latins from Rome in 173 BC.

borders, and as Rome's ascendancy blurred the division between *ager Romanus* and *ager peregrinus*, the Senate became more willing to make exceptions. Granted this flexibility, the system would have developed a deeper meaning, not simply reinforcing a legal status defined by the placement of boundary stones, but expressing and strengthening a connection between Rome and Italian towns that relied on religious and political cooperation.³⁶⁶ The fact that it was "against the rule" is what made the Roman acceptance of such a prodigy a truly significant gesture. Thus prodigy and expiation comprised a means by which non-Roman Italian towns might claim and be granted some level of Romanitas.³⁶⁷

This is not to say that every single prodigy report conveyed a political message. Most would have been a matter of "business as usual", with Roman towns reporting prodigies to Rome because this was standard practice. But certain prodigies – those from unusual places, reported in trying circumstances – could carry a deeper meaning. The prodigy reports of the Second Punic War offer a helpful illustration of the use of prodigies as a means of communication between Italy and Rome. During the war, when Hannibal threatened to turn Rome's Italian neighbors against her, the reporting and expiation of prodigies was an important tie between Rome and the Italians. The escalation of crisis during this time is reflected in the large number of prodigy reports. For the 27-year period of the Second Punic War and its aftermath, from 218 to 192 BC,

³⁶⁶ MacBain (1982) 28: "If, as I wish to argue, the gradual acceptance of non-Roman prodigies by the Roman Senate constituted a political act whose purpose was to assert the religious unity of Italy and Rome's central place in that unity by her undertaking – indeed insisting upon – the duty to expiate Italian prodigies, and thus to heal the *pax deorum* on behalf of all, thereby intentionally blurring the religious distinction between Roman and non-Roman land, then, by the same token, the rejection of a peregrine prodigy might, in different circumstances, suggest itself as a means of signalling that the town in question was indeed foreign and beyond the pale."

³⁶⁷ Flexibility, rather than strict adherence to a set of rules, was a key feature of Roman government, and thus should not be a surprising element of the Roman prodigy and expiation system.

our sources record a total of 116 prodigies from outside the city of Rome; in the 84 years before 108 BC, only 110 such prodigies are documented. The difference is too striking to be due to source problems alone: In three times as many years, fewer prodigies were reported.³⁶⁸

Furthermore, the origins of these reports are worth comparing. In the period of the Second Punic War and its aftermath, Latin colonies (which were, by definition, non-Roman) reported twelve prodigies to Rome. In the 84 years after 192 BC, they reported only two. A dramatic change may likewise be noted in the reports of federate allies, which were also non-Roman towns. Excluding Praeneste, whose exceptional status is evident in a number of ways, not least the offer of Roman citizenship to Praenestine soldiers,³⁶⁹ these allied reports decrease from nine to three in the periods in question.

A comparison of these two periods provides an interesting insight into Roman and Italian religious responses to crisis. Two major tendencies are obvious during the Second Punic War: 1. Italian towns reported, and the Roman Senate accepted, a significantly higher number of prodigies than was typical, and 2. The area from which prodigies might be drawn was extended to include not only Roman territory, but also non-Roman Italian sites, such as Latin colonies and federate allies. In other words, Rome showed itself willing to “break the rules” – for surely Livy is right in claiming that prodigies were not generally to be accepted from peregrine towns – in permitting the non-Roman Italians to

³⁶⁸ We have no reason to doubt Livy’s veracity in his recording of these prodigies. As Levene (1993) points out, prodigies may function as a useful tool in a narrative to build suspense and represent collective fear. However, it would be absurd to doubt the truth of these reports simply because they may perform a narrative function for Livy. In fact, increased reporting during a time of deep crisis is only to be expected. It would make little sense to doubt Livy on the basis of his recording exactly what logic would accept.

³⁶⁹ Livy 23.19.2

be a part of her religious system; in turn, the Italians showed themselves willing to accept Roman religious authority in the expiation of their prodigies.³⁷⁰

During the Second Punic War, Italian towns – even non-Roman towns – reported prodigies to Rome not simply as a means of currying Roman favor, but because they perceived themselves as being tightly drawn into the Roman sphere of influence. They thus considered the expiation of prodigies in their territory, distant heavenly threats corresponding to the more present Hannibalic one that they faced, worthy of the attention of the Roman Senate. The Roman Senate, on the other hand, accepted these prodigies as warranting their concern because they saw the welfare of these Italian towns – fighting alongside Rome in a struggle against the same dangers, and facing the same fate upon defeat – as being intensely relevant to the well-being of the Roman State. The reporting of prodigies by Italian cities to Rome, with Rome having full power over the expiatory ceremonies performed in response, represented political exigencies on a religious level. In this way, religion and politics were tied together not through intentional manipulation, but through the explicit goal of prodigy and expiation: the maintenance of the Roman State.

Expiations Outside Rome

There was another line in this communication system: expiation. While prodigies were reported separately, with each one delivered to the praetor and examined by the Senate on its own merits, the various prodigies of each year were often collected and

³⁷⁰ This is a general trend for the period of the war. It is noteworthy that this increased reporting does not seem to coincide with more specific threats during the war; prodigy reports do not correspond to the areas most in danger at any given moment. For example, prodigy reporting did not follow Hasdrubal's march. See Rosenberger (2005) 244.

expiated together.³⁷¹ Normally, the expiation was performed in the city of Rome itself, so that the citizens of those towns reporting the prodigies would not have witnessed their expiation. The tradition of expiating in the city of Rome may have been undergirded by practical reasons, since the consuls and *decemviri*, who were themselves often magistrates or senators, may not have been willing or able to spend weeks or months out of the year traveling to expiate prodigies. But at the heart of this system was the belief that these prodigies were relevant to the Roman State as a whole, not simply to the Italian cities in which they occurred, and thus should be expiated in the place where all the Roman gods gathered. Though few would have seen the ceremonies, many would have understood their significance: Rome, with her special place in the expiation of prodigies, was established as the religious and political center of Italy.

In those few instances when expiation did take place outside the city, Rome was able, through the striking force of the unusual, to proclaim powerful statements of unity and authority to the Italians. The first Sibylline expiation not focused solely on Rome occurred in 344 BC, when a shower of stones and darkness fell as a temple was being dedicated to Juno Moneta. The *duumviri* consulted the Sibylline Books, which advised the Roman tribes and neighboring peoples (*finitimos populos*) to offer supplication. This ceremony, performed only a few years before the Latin League was dissolved and Roman power was established, expressed a changing political reality on a religious level.

I have already discussed the intensification of prodigy reports from Italian towns to Rome during the Second Punic War. The strong religious ties between Rome and Italy in the Second Punic War were evident not only in the reporting of prodigies, but also in

³⁷¹ An exception to this rule was the prodigy of a rain of stones, which usually was expiated by its own peculiar ceremony, the *novemdialis*. Other exceptions occurred, but this general rule holds firm.

their expiation, as Rome chose several times during the war to perform expiatory ceremonies outside the city of Rome itself. Most of these ceremonies were conducted by the advice of the Sibylline Books. Unlike the reporting of prodigies to Rome, these expiations occurred at the initiative of the Roman Senate and entailed the acquiescence or approval of the Italians, rather than the reverse. The performance of expiations outside Rome was never common, but it happened a number of times during the Second Punic War, particularly in the early years when Rome's ultimate success was most in doubt.³⁷² In 218 BC, after reports of several prodigies including the settling of a crow on the couch of Juno's temple in Lanuvium, and the shrinking of the oracular lots in Caere, the Sibylline Books advised three expiatory ceremonies to be performed outside Rome: a gift of gold was brought to Juno at Lanuvium, a *lectisternium* was held at Caere, and prayers were offered to Fortune on Mt. Algidus. In the following year, sacrifices were made to Juno Sospita at Lanuvium, again by the advice of the Sibylline Books, and the *decemviri* offered sacrifices in the forum at Ardea. Several years later, in 210 BC, the *pontifices* were also involved in a ritual outside the city of Rome, when they advised a day of prayer in the Grove of Feronia in Capena after four statues there had sweated blood.

Each of these places – Lanuvium, Caere, Mt. Algidus, and Capena – was an important Italian cultic center. By leading ceremonies at these sites, Rome emphatically placed herself at the head of an Italian religious network. From this position, she canvassed not only the support of the Italian gods, venerable and powerful deities, but

³⁷² In 218 BC, the *decemviri* performed rites at Lanuvium, Caere, and Mt. Algidus (Livy 21.62). The next year, they sacrificed at Lanuvium and Ardea (Livy 22.1). In 210 BC, the *pontifices* advised prayer at the Grove of Feronia in Capena (Livy 27.4). In 177 BC, a day of prayer was held at Crustumium (Livy 41.13), while in 172 the *decemviri* advised sacrifices at the Promontory of Minerva in Campania (Livy 42.20). In 143 BC, the *decemviri* offered sacrifices in Gallic territory (Obsequens 21), and in 133 BC they performed expiatory ceremonies at Enna in Sicily (Cicero *In Ver.* 2.4.108). Finally, in 108 BC, the *decemviri* directed 30 boys and 30 girls in sacrifices on Cimoslos Island (Obsequens 40).

also of the Italian peoples, brothers of the Romans in ancient religious rites. Hannibal had no claims to such power, nor to any allegiance.

Ardea, with its temple to Aphrodite, was also the site of a significant Italian cult, but the expiatory ceremonies performed there seem to have had nothing to do with the goddess of love. Though no prodigy had occurred at Ardea in 217 BC, the *decemviri* traveled to this Latin colony to perform sacrifices there. Yet these sacrifices were conducted not at the temple of Aphrodite, but in the forum of the city. Thus the choice of Ardea may be tied not to its important position in Italian cult, but to another attribute peculiar to Ardea: its claim of kinship with Saguntum.³⁷³ Only a year before, the Romans had forsaken this Spanish ally to Hannibal, and in this anticlimactic and inglorious way, they had ushered in the war with Carthage. In 217 BC, when the *decemviri* performed their rites at Ardea, Rome was preparing to expel the Carthaginians from Saguntum.³⁷⁴ An expiation performed at the site of Saguntum's sister city might serve not only to elicit the gods' favor for this military venture, but also to convey to the Italians Rome's intention to recover the ally that she had lost, and, by extension, her commitment to protect the allies that she still possessed.

After the Second Punic War, when Hannibal returned to Africa, the external force that had tied the Italians closer to Rome was removed. As the Romans entered war after war, the Italians continued to fight under their leadership, but no longer against an imminent pan-Italic threat. The Italians themselves saw little cause for these wars, and even fewer rewards. Pulling in allied resources, Rome pushed the allies further away, deepening the divide between Romans and non-Romans in Italy. Tensions between

³⁷³ Silius Italicus *Pun.* 1.658-61, 665-69, MacBain (1982) 37.

³⁷⁴ Polybius 3.97.6, Livy 22.22, MacBain (1982) 37.

Rome and her Italian allies increased, eventually culminating in the Social War, and the final unification of Italy under Rome.³⁷⁵

This growing tension between Rome and her Italian allies found a dramatic expression in the extraordinary expiation rituals of 181 BC. In this year, a number of terrible prodigies occurred: blood rained down into the precinct of Vulcan and Concord, the sacred spears shook in Rome, the image of Juno Sospita at Lanuvium cried, and a pestilence raged through the country and villages. To respond to these prodigies, the Senate called on the *decemviri*, who recommended a broad set of expiatory responses: the sacrifice of *hostiae maiores*, a *supplicatio* at all the couches of the gods, and three days of *supplicatio* and festival *per totam Italiam*.³⁷⁶

As has already been noted, Roman expiation was usually located in the city of Rome itself, or, if a ceremony occurred outside the city, at a specific Italian cultic site. The expiation of 181 BC is the only known instance of expiatory rituals being ordered for all of Italy. This may have been related to the pervasiveness of the plague, which affected all of Italy and therefore demanded ritual action throughout the peninsula. But it may also have concerned another Italian problem that had come into focus a few years before, when Rome began the prosecution of the Bacchanals in 186 BC. Bacchants were still being pursued in 181 BC. Seeing the Bacchic cult as a threat to national security, Rome extended her arm over all of Italy and sought to crush any cells of potential

³⁷⁵ Lomas (2004) 206: “ In most respects, allies were, in theory, self-determining independent states, although during the 2nd century BC Rome began to interfere increasingly in their internal affairs and to consolidate the growing differences in status between Roman citizens and Italians.”

³⁷⁶ Livy 40.19

dissension.³⁷⁷ Yet the move was an awkward one: how could Rome hope to enforce her control throughout the entire peninsula?

As with the ceremony performed at Ardea during the Second Punic War, the correspondence between the expiatory ritual of 181 BC and a specific threat to the political order seems to indicate political motivations behind the expiation. Several factors may have contributed to the decemviral decision to require expiatory ceremonies throughout Italy. First, this was a means by which Rome might flex its muscles, to demonstrate in the midst of the Bacchanalian conspiracy – a religious crisis concerning the right extent of Rome's power in Italy – Roman control over religion throughout the peninsula. Second, it was a means of drawing all of Italy into the central Roman religious system, in opposition to the decentralized Bacchic cult that was viewed as a threat against the State. Yet despite these practical results, the expiation was not necessarily a calculated political move. It may have been a response to the impieties wrought by the Bacchants, a means of purifying all of Italy from Bacchic corruption. Perhaps it was this impiety that had angered the gods in the first place.

A final expiatory ceremony may be given as an example of the use of the Sibylline Books in cementing ties between Rome and her empire. In 133 BC, the Senate found itself dealing with another set of crises threatening internal cohesion, occurring both within Rome, and outside. The Romans were embroiled in a conflict, embarrassingly long-lasting, with rebellious slaves in Sicily. In 136 BC, a group of slaves led by the charismatic Syrian Eunus had taken control of the city of Enna, and the revolt had spread from there. The rag-tag band of slaves was still offering resistance to

³⁷⁷ See North (1979) on the Roman view that the Bacchic cult was a threat to the Roman State. For the Bacchanalian conspiracy, see Beard, North, and Price (1998) 91-6 for a synopsis and bibliography.

the Roman army three years later, in 133 BC. At the same time, another conflict was raging in the city of Rome itself, with the threat to the established order coming not from foreign slaves, but from the Roman elites themselves. Tiberius Gracchus' proposed agrarian reform had sparked sharp division among the Roman elites, and repeated violations of the sacrosanctity of the tribunes. Gracchus, frustrated in his goals by the opposition of his tribunician colleague Octavius, had Octavius removed from office. Afterward Gracchus, fearful of the reactions of his opponents, who saw his behavior as explicit signs of tyrannical aspirations, campaigned for an unprecedented second term as tribune. Yet he found no protection, as during the elections his enemies, led by the *pontifex maximus* Scipio Nasica, murdered Gracchus and up to three hundred of his supporters.

The contemporaneity of these events – the Sicilian slave revolt, and the death of Tiberius Gracchus – is not the only tie connecting them. In the following year, after a series of dreadful portents, none of which occurred in Sicily, the Sibylline Books advised that the *Cererem antiquissimam* should be placated. The *decemviri* decided that the oldest Ceres was located at Enna, and they traveled to Sicily to conduct expiations at Ceres' temple there.³⁷⁸ As has already been noted, the performance of expiations outside the city of Rome was an unusual, and therefore meaningful, event. The association of the rituals with the slave rebellion was obvious: The slaves had seized and defiled Enna as the capitol of their revolt, and expiatory rites were needed to restore the area to Roman

³⁷⁸ Cicero *In Ver.* 2.4.108: *Itaque apud patres nostros atroci ac difficili rei publicae tempore, cum Tiberio Graccho occiso magnorum periculorum metus ex ostentis portenderetur, P. Mucio L. Calpurnio consulibus aditum est ad libros Sibyllinos; ex quibus inventum est Cererem antiquissimam placari oportere. Tum ex amplissimo collegio decemvirali sacerdotes populi Romani, cum esset in urbe nostra Cereris pulcherrimum et magnificentissimum templum, tamen usque Hennam profecti sunt. Tanta enim erat auctoritas et vetustas illius religionis ut, cum illuc irent, non ad aedem Cereris sed ad ipsam Cererem proficisci viderentur.* See also Val. Max. *Mem.* 1.1.1. Cicero claims that the ceremonies were performed in 133 BC, but surely they did not take place until the following year, after Rome captured Enna from the rebel slaves.

control. At the same time, the presence of the *decemviri*, elite Roman priests, in Sicily would reassure the Sicilian land-owners, who must have been disturbed over Romans' dilatory response to the slave rebellions.³⁷⁹

Nevertheless, the connection between Enna and Tiberius Gracchus, or between the slave rebellion and the conflict in Rome, is less apparent. It is quite possible that in the Roman mind – where the birth of a hermaphrodite posed a danger to the state, and the fall of an honorary column portended the death of Roman magistrates – the rebellion and the murder of Gracchus were somehow related. In fact, the Romans may have viewed both disasters as prodigies in their own right, with expiation required to restore right relations with the gods. In this case, the connection between these catastrophes may be seen not in the location of the expiatory sacrifices, but in their recipient: the goddess Ceres. The slaves through their revolt had disrupted the important work of Ceres in Sicily – agriculture – and had overthrown the established order of many of the large Sicilian estates. In claiming Enna as his headquarters, Eunos, the charismatic adherent of Oriental cults, defiled the sacred temple of Ceres, and forced a bloody battle for the recapture of the town.

Ceres' involvement in the struggles concerning Gracchus was more complex, but it centered upon her function as guardian of the balance of the Roman State. She not only sustained the sacrosanctity of the tribunes, but also protected the people against the threat of tyranny. In these roles, she was the designated recipient of the dedications of property of those who had either violated the tribunate or made bids for sole power. According to his accusers, Gracchus had balefully undertaken both crimes, arranging the removal of

³⁷⁹ For the Romans' slow response to the slave revolt, see Finley (1986) 143.

his colleague Octavius from office, and garnering popular support through his agrarian reforms as a means of clearing a path for a throne.

B. S. Spaeth identifies the provocation for the sacrifices at Enna with these acts of Tiberius Gracchus, and thus sees the performance of the expiatory ceremonies as a means for the *optimates* – the victors in the struggle with Tiberius – to declare the justification of his murder. She charges the *decemviri*, who she claims simply advised the expiation most expressive of the views of the dominant senatorial faction, with blatant political manipulation of the words of the Sibylline Books. Enna, she asserts, was the chosen site for the ritual precisely because the message was so inflammatory; had the ceremonies been performed in Rome, they may have sparked riots among the plebs.³⁸⁰

Tiberius Gracchus, however, was not the only one who had violated the sacrosanctity of the tribunate. His murderers had done the same, in an even more striking and egregious manner. Gracchus in his death had already paid the price for his crimes, and there was no profit in kicking a corpse. In 132 BC, the Senate was in the process of making amends for the offenses of both sides. Though doggedly prosecuting Gracchus' supporters, they allowed his land commission to continue, and sent Nasica off to Asia.³⁸¹ The ceremonies at Enna must be seen as part of the attempt to reestablish order after the conflict, clearing the slate with the gods in an effort to forge a fresh start with the people.

The expiatory rituals in Sicily were unusual, with major ceremonies being performed outside Rome. Nevertheless, they expressed some of the basic ideals of Roman expiation. The ceremony bore political implications, but these were subtler than a simple statement of ideology or of right and wrong practice. Scholars speculate about

³⁸⁰ Spaeth (1990)

³⁸¹ Plutarch *Tiberius Gracchus* 21.1f.

the meaning of these events with good reason; multiple levels of meaning can be found, none as simple as a direct assignation of blame for the troubles in Rome. In connecting events in Rome with those of more distant parts of the empire, the rituals in Sicily served both to unite and define the Roman community. These were the central social functions of the prodigy and expiation system in Rome; the Sibylline Books did not offer political advice to polarize the community, but instead helped to unify the people under the rule of the elites.

Chapter 5

A New Life for Ancient Oracles

The late Republic was a unique period in the history of Roman religion, a new era of religious self-consciousness heightened by the turmoils that racked the State. Through antiquarian research, the Romans were able to track changes in their own religious system, changes that had always occurred, perhaps, but not with such speed and frequency. Priesthoods such as the Flamen Dialis were left unfilled, and religious observances slipped from practice.³⁸² This gave the Romans a new sense of the fragility of their traditional religion. At the same time, civil wars and other traumas left the state religion, which was accountable for the safety of the commonwealth, open to questioning, while an intellectual climate of philosophical exploration enabled Roman thinkers to pursue answers in their writings. When the political consensus began to break down, factions turned to religion to settle their differences: witness the dispute between Bibulus and Caesar over the observation of omens, and the battle between Clodius and Cicero over the prodigy of the *fremitus* and the desecration of sacred land.³⁸³

This volatile political climate deeply impacted the Roman practices of prodigy reporting and expiation. In the first place, the timing of expiation may have changed. Throughout most of the Republic, important expiatory ceremonies took place at the beginning of the year, after the new consuls took office but before they left for their

³⁸² Beard (1996) 742: “A prominent feature of religion in the late Republic is the dying out of certain traditional religious practices and the apparent neglect of elements of cult once central to the religious system.”

³⁸³ For the struggle between Caesar and Bibulus see Suetonius *Div. Iul.* 20, Cicero *ad Att.* 2.16, Warde Fowler (1911) 301f, and Syme (1978) 6.193f. For the religious conflicts between Cicero and Clodius, see Cicero’s *de Haruspicum Responsis*.

provinces. After Sulla, consuls generally served their terms in Rome, no longer leaving the city for wars in distant provinces. As a result of this shift, perhaps, prodigy reporting and expiation began to occur at any time during the year.³⁸⁴ Thus the significance of expiation as a forward-looking ceremony, intended to secure the gods' blessings for an upcoming campaign, changed. In addition, after the Social War, fewer prodigies were reported from outside Rome, perhaps because dispensations of citizenship made declarations of Romanness less meaningful. Likewise, the *Lex Domitia* of 104 BC eliminated the system of cooptation of priests into the colleges and gave the people the power to elect priests, thus introducing the possibility that enemies of existing members might be admitted to the decemviral college.³⁸⁵ Finally, as I will show below, political intrigue may not have been the real cause of the Books' destruction in 83 BC, but it was no doubt an *imagined* cause, as the Books burned while Sulla marched toward Rome.

This chapter concerns the Sibylline Books as they existed in their second incarnation, when a new Sibylline collection was assembled from all across the Mediterranean after the fire of 83. I will first examine the painstaking construction of this new collection, and I will investigate each attested use of the oracles after this date (four official consultations, and two that may be termed unofficial). I will explore how

³⁸⁴ Much of this evidence derives from Cicero's *de Haruspicum Responsis*; certain clues in this speech make it obvious that the *haruspices* were consulted regarding the relevant prodigies in April, not at the beginning of the year. See *de Har. Resp.* 11.22, 28.62; Lenaghan (1969), Rawson (1971) 159. The fact that one prodigy that had occurred at about the same time as the *fremitus* had not yet been referred, but was known by Cicero and his audience, indicates that some delay in the occurrence and the reporting of a prodigy was nevertheless possible. In other words, prodigies were not considered to be so urgent that they had to be expiated immediately.

³⁸⁵ For the *Lex Domitia* of 104 BC, see Cicero *de Leg. Agr.* 2.7, *ad Brutum* 1.5; Vell. Pat. 2.12; Suet. *Nero* 2. Sulla repealed the law in 81 BC, restoring the old practice of cooptation, but there may still have been members living who had been elected by the people. See Livy *Per.* 89, Pseudo-Ascon *in Div.* p. 102 ed. Orelli, Cassius Dio 37.37 for Sulla's repeal of the *Lex Domitia*. In 63 BC, the *Lex Domitia* was restored, but with a significant modification: the priests apparently selected two candidates, and the people chose between them. (This was at least true for the augurs and probably the other priesthoods; see Cic. *Phil.* 2.2.) Antony later restored the right of *cooptatio* to the priestly colleges (Cassius Dio 44.53).

these new Books operated in the rapidly changing political landscape of the late Republic, when Italy had become fully Roman, when consuls served their terms in the city away from the distant theaters of war, and when the rise of the individual meant the surge of factional politics. One of my principal concerns will be whether the new Sibylline collection was inherently different from the first, and whether that difference was due to the changed nature of the oracles, or the volatile political circumstances surrounding their use. I will show that in the unstable climate of the late Republic, the Sibylline Books often bore a more political bent than had previously been the norm, and that the oracles were frequently made public contrary to tradition. Yet despite the oracles' use in factional politics, individuals continued to regard them as beyond reproach (at least in public). Even in this turbulent atmosphere, the Sibylline Books continued to invoke respect, and the new texts still held an important place in Rome.³⁸⁶

OUT OF THE ASHES: THE RECREATION OF THE SIBYLLINE BOOKS

Up to this point in my dissertation, I have discussed the Sibylline Books at Rome as they existed in their original manifestation: an ancient but gradually evolving collection of oracles offering expiatory advice for the prodigies officially recognized by the Roman State. As the State expanded, so did the Sibylline collection, with new oracles being added over time to meet the changing needs of Rome. This flexibility of the collection, whether publicly acknowledged or not, allowed the Books to remain an anchor of old Roman values while adapting to Rome's rapidly changing circumstances. As

³⁸⁶ I am not here arguing for the changed use of the oracles as proof of religious decline in the late Republic. Instead, I am trying to show in what ways the use of the Sibylline Books changed, and in what ways it stayed the same, when the Roman political system was in crisis.

innovation joined with tradition, the Sibylline Books stayed in time with the dance of Roman religion.

Yet while the Books managed to adapt to the long passage of time, they could not withstand the threat of another terrible destructive force: fire, which in the course of Roman history consumed so many monuments and symbols of old Rome. On July 6, 83 BC, the Capitoline Temple of Jupiter Optimus Maximus burned to the ground, and almost all of the objects inside it, including the archaic statue of Jupiter and the trophies of renowned Roman victories, were lost.³⁸⁷ As the Capitoline Temple of Jupiter burned, the flames – indiscriminate, we may say, but surely operating with a fatal intention in the minds of many Romans – reached down into the basement of the temple, into the ancient stone chest where the oracles had lain safely hidden for so many centuries, and claimed each of the inspired words of the Books as their own. Thus the long-time guardian of the *pax deorum* was lost in an instant.

The ancient sources are unclear on the physical cause of the fire. Appian claims that no one ever discovered the cause.³⁸⁸ Julius Obsequens blames a temple-keeper (*aedituus*), but the passage describing the fire is corrupt. A lacuna leaves the reader unsure whether it was because of the *fraude* or the *culpa aeditui*, or even some other word, that the temple burned.³⁸⁹ Dionysius of Halicarnassus shows that this discrepancy

³⁸⁷ For the Capitoline fire, see Appian *BC* 1.83 and 86; Cicero *Cat.* 3.4.9; Sallust *Cat.* 47.2; DH 4.62.5; Ovid *Fasti* 1.201; Pliny *NH* 33.5.16; Plut. *Publ.* 15, *Sulla* 27.6, *de Is. et Os.* 71; Tac. *Hist.* 3.72; Obs. 57; and Cass. *Chron.* 132.486M. See also Flower in Osterloh and Gardener, forthcoming.

³⁸⁸ Appian 1.83

³⁸⁹ Obsequens 57, Flower forthcoming in Osterloh and Gardner. The passage in Obsequens describing the fire begins with a lacuna: *** *aeditui Capitolium una nocte conflagravit*. In his Teubner text of Obsequens and Livy's *Periochae* of 1910, O. Rossbach maintains that the missing word is *fraude*. He bases this conclusion on Tacitus *Hist.* 3.72, which uses the word *fraude*: *Arserat et ante Capitolium civili bello, sed fraude privata*. Scaliger, on the other hand, fills the lacuna with *culpa*.

in the text of *Obsequens* is of little consequence; people apparently disagreed over whether the temple had been burned purposely or by accident.³⁹⁰

But to many Romans, the immediate cause of the fire may not have mattered. The smouldering temple indicated a problem deeper and more disturbing than the singular action of a temple keeper: the anger of the gods.³⁹¹ The gods had many reasons to be angry with the Romans. Four years earlier, the temple of Jupiter Optimus Maximus had been the scene of a horrendous event. In 87 BC, L. Cornelius Merula, the last republican Flamen Dialis, or priest of Jupiter, was convicted on false charges in a sham trial. He committed suicide in the temple of Jupiter Optimus Maximus, calling down curses against Cinna and Rome while his blood poured over the altar of the god. After his death, the office of Flamen Dialis remained empty for 75 years.³⁹²

And while they were neglecting the gods, the Romans were focusing their efforts toward an unspeakable pursuit: the murder of fellow citizens. In 83 BC, the remaining Marians faced off against Sulla's army. Sulla was marching through the peninsula toward Rome; he would take the city for the second time in November of the following year.³⁹³ The coincidence of Sulla's march and the temple's destruction forced the great general to engage with the religious implications of his actions: According to Plutarch, who used Sulla's autobiography as a source, Sulla claimed that a seer had warned him of

³⁹⁰ Dionysius of Halicarnassus 4.62.6: δέκα φυλαττόμενοι. μετὰ δὲ τὴν τρίτην ἐπὶ ταῖς ἑβδομήκοντα καὶ ἑκατὸν ὀλυμπιάσιν ἐμπρησθέντος τοῦ ναοῦ, εἴτ' ἐξ ἐπιβουλῆς, ὥς οἶονταί τινες, εἴτ' ἀπὸ ταῦτομάτου, σὺν τοῖς ἄλλοις ἀναθήμασι τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ οὗτοι διεφθάρησαν ὑπὸ τοῦ πυρός.

³⁹¹ Flower forthcoming in Osterloh and Gardner: "Within Rome's system of portents and divine signs, nothing could have been more fearful than the complete destruction of its main temple, so closely identified with the Republic itself, and its books of prophecies, so often the ultimate resort in previous times of crisis."

³⁹² For L. Cornelius Merula (cos. suff. 87 BC) see Val. Max. 9.12.5; Vell. Pat. 2.22.2; Appian *BC* 1.74. For Augustus' restoration of the office of Flamen Dialis in 11 BC, see Tacitus *Annales* 3.58; Dio 54.36; and Suetonius *Div. Aug.* 31.

³⁹³ For the age of Marius and Sulla, see Seager (1994) 165-207, Christ (2002), Linke (2005), Flower forthcoming.

the fire in advance, but he was not able to reach Rome in time to stop it. Thus Sulla did not deny the portentous nature of the temple's destruction, but instead transformed the event into an advertisement of his own special relationship to the gods. He claimed not only that the gods had given him prior knowledge of the fire, but also that the catastrophe would have been averted had he himself been present in the city.³⁹⁴

For Sulla, the destruction of the Temple of Jupiter Optimus Maximus was an opportunity for renewal, as the rebuilding of the great state temple corresponded to his rebuilding of the State itself. Sulla's one regret was that he would not live long enough to dedicate the new structure and put his own name on the front in place of the first consul's.³⁹⁵ It was Quintus Catulus, instead, who would receive this honor. For despite Sulla's keen interest in restoring the temple, the process was slow; the new temple was dedicated in 69 BC, but work continued on the building throughout the 60's BC.³⁹⁶ This delay was likely due to a lack of resources, to the diversion of attention elsewhere, and to the sheer enormity of the project.³⁹⁷

It was probably for the same reasons that the search for new Sibylline oracles did not begin under Sulla, but instead was apparently put off until 76 BC, seven years after the oracles had been destroyed. Yet despite this delay, there is some evidence that even

³⁹⁴ Plutarch *Sulla* 27.12; Flower forthcoming in Osterloh and Gardner: "Sulla represented himself as the savior of Rome and hence claims that he could have saved the Temple. Meanwhile, his superior foreknowledge and special relationship with the gods marks him out. Because he knew the Temple would burn on that day, his very knowledge is used to suggest that the situation is somehow under control and would have been worse without him."

³⁹⁵ Pliny *NH* 7.138

³⁹⁶ Suetonius *Div. Iul.* 15: *Primo praeturae die Quintum Catulum de refectione Capitoli ad disquisitionem populi uocauit rogatione promulgata, qua curationem eam in alium transferebat . . .*" ("On the first day of his praetorship (62 BC) Caesar called Quintus Catulus before the Assembly and proposed a measure about the restoration of the Capitol, that he should transfer the responsibility to someone else . . .") It seems clear, then, that work continued on the Temple at least until 62 BC. See Nock (1934) 468, but see Beard (1996) 737 n. 20 for an opposing view.

³⁹⁷ One may compare the rebuilding of the Capitoline temple to the slow reconstruction of the World Trade Center. The destruction was perhaps too devastating, the project too enormous, and the State was facing too many problems to accomplish the work quickly.

under Sulla it was expected that the Books would soon be re-collected. According to the epitome of Livy 89, Sulla increased the size of both the pontifical and the augural colleges to 15 members each. Though the epitomizer makes no mention of new enrollments in the decemviral college, we know from a letter of Caelius, which mentions the *quindecimviri*, that the college was certainly increased to 15 members by 51 BC.³⁹⁸ Given its consistency with the changes occurring in the other priestly colleges, it is likely that this change occurred under Sulla, too. The enrollment of new priests in this college, which was primarily responsible for interpreting the Sibylline Books, indicates that Sulla intended for the Books to be reconstituted.

Furthermore, instead of signalling a lack of concern for the assembly of new oracles, the delay may evince a genuine interest in completing the task properly. By 76 BC when the consul C. Curio initiated the search for Sibylline verses, a number of important state concerns had been laid to rest. Sulla's constitutional revisions were long finished, and Sertorius had been defeated in Spain. The reconstruction of the temple, too, was well underway. According to Fenestella, cited by Lactantius, the Romans waited to collect new oracles until the Capitolium was restored.³⁹⁹ As has already been mentioned, the new Temple of Jupiter Optimus Maximus was not dedicated until 69 BC. But perhaps in 76 BC the restoration of the temple had advanced far enough to justify the search for new oracles to be stored inside it. Since the Books would presumably have been returned to the basement, it makes sense that the room in which they were kept would have been finished by this date.

³⁹⁸ Cicero *ad Fam.* 8.4.1; see Parke (1988) 206-7.

³⁹⁹ Lact. *Div. Inst.* 1.6.14 = Fenestella *Annales* fr. 18; see below.

Whatever the explanation for the delay in the search for new oracles, the process demonstrated a painstaking attention to detail that can only reflect a deep interest on the part of the Romans for restoring their Sibylline collection. An embassy of three men – P. Gabinius, M. Otacilius, and L. Valerius⁴⁰⁰ – travelled to Erythrae to collect Sibylline verses.⁴⁰¹ Erythrae, far across the Mediterranean, was according to Lactantius the most celebrated of all the ancient Sibylline oracular centers.⁴⁰² There was, of course, no active Sibyl making prophecies at this time, but the purportedly ancient oracles were collected from private citizens who possessed them.

Only 1000 verses were found in Erythrae, so additional oracles were collected from other locations throughout the Mediterranean. Tacitus lists these sites as Samos, Ilium, Sicily, Africa, and Graeco-Italian colonies.⁴⁰³ Varro names all of these places as famous homes of the Sibyl except Sicily. But one tradition claimed that the Sibyl was buried at Lilybaeum in Sicily (Solinus 2.16), and the *Suda* 355 mentions a Sicilian Sibyl. This is significant, for it shows that the Romans intended their oracles to remain ‘Sibylline’, replacing the lost set only with other oracles written by renowned Sibyls.⁴⁰⁴ The magnitude of the mission was huge and would surely have required more than one trip; Tacitus does not mention whether the Senate sent an embassy to these places as well as to Erythrae. Dionysius of Halicarnassus implies that the oracles from these other cities

⁴⁰⁰ These legates were not particularly distinguished. P. Gabinius, a former praetor, was the highest-ranking of these men and may have been a *quindecimvir* himself.

⁴⁰¹ Lact. *Div. Inst.* 1.6.14 = Fenestella *Annales* fr. 18; see below.

⁴⁰² Varro names the Sibyl of Erythrae fifth in his list. Parke (1988) 109: It was the Sibyl of Erythrae who had predicted the victory of the Greeks in the Trojan War, and Erythrae was the only site at which a Sibyl received worship.

⁴⁰³ Tacitus *Annales* 6.12: *quod a maioribus quoque decretum erat post exustum sociali bello Capitolium, quaesitis Samo, Ilio, Erythris, per Africam etiam ac Siciliam et Italicas colonias carminibus Sibyllae, una seu plures fuer datoque sacerdotibus negotio quantum humana ope potuissent vera discernere.*

⁴⁰⁴ Even earlier in the Republic, a distinction seems to have been made between the Sibylline collection and other oracles. Though the Carmina Marciana and the Prophecy of Vegoia may have been stored with the Sibylline Books, they were obviously identified as separate oracles.

came to Rome in the hands of private persons, but he may only mean that the texts that the Roman legates collected had been owned by private citizens.⁴⁰⁵ The scope of the search does indicate that the Romans were starting from scratch with their collection; if a set of quindecimviral *commentarii* which recorded all of the oracles that had been used in the past had ever existed, it did not survive the fire.⁴⁰⁶

The assembly of a new set of Sibylline Books was not simply a matter of gathering oracles; after these texts were collected, the *quindecimviri* edited them to sift out the genuine prophecies. Tacitus tells us that *datoque sacerdotibus negotio quantum humana ope potuissent vera discernere*.⁴⁰⁷ This editing of the oracles may help explain Cicero's and Varro's concern over determining the validity of Sibylline verses through acrostics.⁴⁰⁸ This was probably one of the methods used by the priests in 76 BC. The entire process is reminiscent of the events of 213 and 212 BC, when the Senate decreed that the people should turn in their personal oracles, and the *decemviri* used the Sibylline Books to confirm the validity of one of the confiscated texts, the Carmina Marciana. However, the events of 76 BC differed from those of the Second Punic War in three important ways: 1) the Senate collected oracles in 76 BC not to eliminate opposition to Roman state oracles, but to reconstitute these state oracles; 2) the scope of the expedition

⁴⁰⁵ Dionysius of Halicarnassus 4.62.6: οἱ δὲ νῦν ὄντες ἐκ πολλῶν εἰσι συμφορητοὶ τόπων, οἱ μὲν ἐκ τῶν ἐν Ἰταλίᾳ πόλεων κομισθέντες, οἱ δ' ἐξ Ἑρυθρῶν τῶν ἐν Ἀσίᾳ, κατὰ δόγμα βουλῆς τριῶν ἀποσταλέντων πρεσβευτῶν ἐπὶ τὴν ἀντιγραφὴν· οἱ δ' ἐξ ἄλλων πόλεων καὶ παρ' ἀνδρῶν ἰδιωτῶν μεταγραφέντες.

⁴⁰⁶ At this time, the most important Sibyl seems to have been the Erythraean, not the Cumaean. The Romans at this time were not interested in claiming an exclusively, or even primarily, Italian origin for their oracles. A short time later, however, this would change, as Vergil gives an Italian Sibyl prominent place in his epic.

⁴⁰⁷ Tacitus *Annales* 6.12

⁴⁰⁸ See Dionysius of Halicarnassus 4.62.6, taken from Varro, and Cicero *de Div.* 2.110 for the use of acrostics in Sibylline oracles. The editing of the newly assembled texts must be what Dionysius is referring to when he mentions discovering interpolations in the text based on acrostics: ἐν οἷς εὐρίσκονταί τινες ἐμπεποιημένοι τοῖς Σιβυλλείοις, ἐλέγχονται δὲ ταῖς καλουμέναις ἀκροστιχίσι· λέγω δ' ἅ Τερέντιος Οὐάρρων ἱστόρηκεν ἐν τῇ θεολογικῇ πραγματείᾳ.

of 76 was much broader, reaching cities throughout the Mediterranean; and 3) the intention in 76 BC was to collect only oracles purported to have been composed by a Sibyl, not prophecies from any source.

But how did the priests determine which oracles were relevant to Rome, and why would anyone in such distant places as Erythrae possess such oracles in the first place? The Roman Sibylline Books were State oracles; many of the oracles, at least, could not have been used by individuals. This is obvious in the text of the Republican oracle recorded by Phlegon; the Sibyl advises a collection of coins from cities and tribes (lines 10-11), and a hymn to be sung by women of the foremost families in of the populace (line 52). Likewise, one of the recommendations from the new set of Books, issued in 56 BC, would not have applied to just any private citizen; it advised against using an army to help Ptolemy. We know of no other city that used Sibylline oracles in the same way that Rome did, but this does not mean that expiation ceremonies did not also occur in Greek cities. After all, as our prodigy lists show, Greek prodigies were not being reported to Rome. Yet most of our evidence for Sibylline oracles, excluding the Sibylline Books, shows that they were prophetic texts, offering sweeping and epic prophecies. Thus the typical Sibylline oracle might have been broad enough to be applicable to the Romans, but may not have answered their expiatory needs. Significant editing and revision would surely have been necessary.

The reconstitution of the Roman Sibylline Books was a process requiring tremendous effort. Legates travelled to Erythrae, Samos, Ilium, Sicily, Africa, and Italy to collect oracles, and the newly expanded priesthood then edited these texts down to a smaller, authentic collection. The thoroughness of the search gave added authority to the

untested oracles and helped to invalidate those private oracles that were excluded from the collection. This must have been a great concern to the Romans who assembled the new Sibylline Books. For the nature of the search – a quest to find true oracles of a specific kind in the collections of private persons – introduced a threat to the entire system, the threat that private oracles might draw an enhanced authority from the outreach of Rome. Did the Romans actually confiscate private oracles from the far reaches of their empire, or did they simply copy the texts down and bring the duplicates to Rome? Fenestella, who is quoted by Lactantius, offers a surprising answer:

Restituto Capitolio rettulisse ad senatum Gaium Curionem consulem, ut legati Erythras mitterentur, qui carmina Sibyllae conquesta Romam deportarent; itaque missos esse Publium Gabinium, Marcum Otacilium, Lucium Valerium, qui descriptos a privatis versus circa mille Romam deportarunt.

After the Capitoline was restored, Gaius Curio the consul proposed to the senate that legates should be sent to Erythrae to collect the verses of the Sibyl and bring them back to Rome; and thus Publius Gabinus, Marcus Otacilius, and Lucius Valerius were sent out, who brought back to Rome around 1000 verses that were copied from private citizens.⁴⁰⁹

Fenestella's claim that the new verses were copied down – *descriptos* – and not taken up would mean that the Roman Senate was allowing potentially competing versions of their own oracles – texts that in Roman tradition had been guarded with the utmost secrecy – to circulate, not only at the far reaches of the empire, but even, according to Tacitus, in Italy itself.⁴¹⁰ Can we really believe that Rome would allow other, unedited versions of

⁴⁰⁹ Lactantius *Div. Inst.* 1.6.14; see also Dionysius of Halicarnassus 4.62.6.

⁴¹⁰ The idea that copies of oracles might be brought back to Rome, but that the originals would remain in the possession of their owners, might find a parallel in the reception of Magna Mater in Rome in 204 BC. The Roman embassy that went to Asia Minor brought back a black stone that was said to be the goddess herself. But as Ando (2008) 42 points out, this could not have been the one and only stone of the goddess. The shrine in Pessinous continued to be a major cult center and a site of pilgrimage for at least 560 years; certainly the goddess herself had not left the shrine. It may be argued that in the same way, the Roman oracles were neither more nor less valid because the original texts were left in the possession of their first owners.

her sacred oracular texts to remain in the possession of private citizens? I think that we can. Twice in known history, through the time of Augustus, the State authorized that oracles in the possession of private citizens should be collected and destroyed. In each case, once in 213 BC during the Second Punic War and once under Augustus, the oracles were turned in to the urban praetor, and the collection did not extend beyond the city of Rome. In both cases, it was only the oracles in the city that concerned the authorities. Thus it is quite possible that those private citizens outside Rome were allowed to keep their oracles in 76 BC.⁴¹¹

Through the collection of 76 BC and the later editing of the texts, the Roman priests would thus present themselves, as in 212 BC, as the final arbiters of oracular truth. But how effective was their presentation? What authority and legitimacy could their *new* collection have, and what threat could they expect to face from privately circulated oracles?

THE NEW SIBYLLINE BOOKS

The First Oracle

The process of collecting and editing the new oracles may have taken several years to complete. And if the silence of our sources can be trusted, it may have been much longer still before the new Books were consulted for the first time.⁴¹² No mention

⁴¹¹ See Livy 25.1 and 25.12 for the collection of 213 BC, and Tacitus *Annales* 6.12 for Augustus' collection, probably in 18 BC (see Chapter 6 for the dating of the collection of oracles under Augustus).

⁴¹² It is difficult to believe that the Romans would have gone to all this trouble to assemble a new set of oracles and did not consult the Books before this date. But note the delay in the construction of the Capitoline Temple, as mentioned above. Perhaps the failure to return to the normal practice of consulting the Books is reflective of a much broader disruption in these turbulent times. On the other hand, perhaps there were consultations that the sources simply do not record, or perhaps the Romans were just waiting for the right occasion to use the Books. A delay in consultation may reflect a lack of trust in the new oracles,

of the Sibylline oracles is made until 63 BC – as much as 13 years after the collection was assembled – but even this may not represent an official consultation of the Books. According to Cicero’s Third Catilinarian Oration, delivered in 63 BC, Publius Cornelius Lentulus Sura invoked a Sibylline oracle in a speech to the Allobroges. Lentulus Sura, a disgraced former consul who had joined the conspiracy of Catiline, used the oracle to generate the confidence of the Gauls by claiming that it marked him out as fated to have supreme power in Rome.⁴¹³

Lentulum autem sibi confirmasse ex fati Sibyllinis haruspicumque responsis se esse tertium illum Cornelium, ad quem regnum huius urbis atque imperium pervenire esset necesse; Cinna ante se et Sullam fuisse. Eundemque dixisse fatalem hunc annum esse ad interitum huius urbis atque imperii, qui esset annus decimus post virginum absolutionem, post Capitoli autem incensionem vicesimus.

Lentulus moreover claimed that he had been assured by Sibylline oracles and the responses of the *haruspices* that he himself was that third Corneli, to whom it was destined that dominion over the city of Rome and supreme power should come. Cinna and Sulla had come before him. And he said that this was the fated year of the destruction of the city and the empire, since it was the tenth year after the acquittal of the Vestal Virgins, and the twentieth year after the burning of the Capitol.⁴¹⁴

According to Cicero, Lentulus Sura amassed several proofs of his own fated power: the Sibylline oracle, the responses of the *haruspices*, and the events of the previous two decades, including the acquittal of Vestal Virgins and the destruction of the Capitol. However, Cicero’s reference to the Sibylline oracles is ambiguous, since he could be referring either to a Sibylline oracle from a private collection or one from the

which had not yet stood the test of time, but we cannot jump to this conclusion too rashly. After all, for the entire period from the beginning of the Republic in 509 BC to the destruction of the Books in 83 BC, our sources record only 57 consultations – an average of about 1 consultation per 7.5 years.

⁴¹³ P. Cornelius Lentulus Sura was expelled from the Senate by the censors in 70 BC. See Plutarch *Cic.* 17.1, Cassius Dio 37.30.4. One detail about the oracle of the three Corneli may give the reader pause: in reality, the leader of the conspiracy of 63 BC was Catiline, not Lentulus Sura. This may reflect the desire of Lentulus Sura, as leader of the conspiracy in the city of Rome, to usurp Catiline’s power.

⁴¹⁴ Cicero *In Cat.* 3.9. See also Sallust *Cat.* 47.2 and Quintilian 5.11.30 for the oracle used by Lentulus Sura.

Roman Sibylline Books. His language in describing the oracles, *fatīs Sibyllinis*, is unique, occurring nowhere else in Latin literature.⁴¹⁵ Roman authors frequently called the Sibylline Books the *Libri Sibyllini*, *Libri Fatales*, or simply *Libri*, but never *fata Sibyllina*. Based on this unusual usage, it is impossible to establish whether Cicero believed Lentulus Sura's claims to have been based on a personal Sibylline oracle or an oracle from the Roman Sibylline Books.⁴¹⁶

Sallust, however, writing more than twenty years after the Catiline conspiracy, does unequivocally identify Lentulus Sura's oracle as coming from the Sibylline Books.

Eadem Galli fatentur ac Lentulum dissimulantem coarguunt praeter litteras sermonibus quos ille habere solitus erat: ex libris Sibyllinis regnum Romae tribus Corneliis portendi; Cinnae atque Sullam antea, se tertium esse cui fatum foret urbis potiri; praeterea ab incenso Capitolio illum esse vicesimum annum, quem saepe ex prodigiis haruspices respondissent bello civili cruentum fore.

The Gauls made a similar confession and denounced Lentulus, who was feigning ignorance, not only with the letters but also with the speeches that he often made: That the Sibylline Books had prophesied the rule of three Cornelii in Rome; that Cinna and Sulla had come before, and that he himself was the third who was fated to rule the city; moreover that this was the twentieth year since the burning of the Capitol, which often the *haruspices*, responding to the prodigies, had said would be a year bloodied by civil war.⁴¹⁷

Sallust writes that the prophecy came from the *Libris Sibyllinis* – the Sibylline Books.

Like Cicero, he has Lentulus Sura assert the testimony of a number of prophetic sources.

Yet Sallust attributes the prophecy concerning the three Cornelii exclusively to the

Sibylline Books, without the backing of the *haruspices*. Instead, he attributes to these

⁴¹⁵ See Parke (1988) 140. Cicero himself uses the phrase twice, in this passage and in the following one. In a couple of other cases, the words *fatum* and *Sibylla* are connected in a phrase, but nowhere else are the joined to represent one idea. In Livy 10.8.2, the *decemviri* are described as *Carminum Sibyllae ac fatorum populi huius interpretes*. Rutilius Namantianus 2.52 speaks of the time *ante Sibyllinae fata cremavit opis*.

⁴¹⁶ Likewise, the *haruspices*' confirmation of the prophecy does not prove that it was an official oracle, since *haruspices* often served individual Romans in an unofficial capacity.

⁴¹⁷ Sallust *Cat.* 47.2.

Etruscan seers the prophecy about the civil wars of the twentieth year after the Capitoline fire.

But what place did such an oracle – an oracle about one family’s supreme power in Rome – have in the Sibylline Books? Was the oracle a warning against the rising power of another Cornelius, or did it support his ascendancy? If the latter is the case, might it be compared, then, to the oracle that was rumored to be in the Sibylline Books in 44 BC, that only a king could defeat the Parthians?⁴¹⁸ Or is Sallust wrong when he states that the oracle derived from the Sibylline Books? Was it perhaps part of a personal Sibylline collection owned by the powerful Cornelius family (or even an enemy of the Corneli, who wanted to warn of their power), which Lentulus Sura made public to support his conspiracy?

Given our difficulties in pinpointing the source of the oracle, it is also impossible to say exactly when the prophecy was made known. It could have been discovered years before, and repeated when Lentulus Sura’s involvement with Catiline made it most apt. The prophecy probably dates to the period after Cinna and Sulla, each of whose rise to power made the oracle of *three* Corneli relevant (and thus after the destruction of the original Sibylline Books.) But we cannot determine with more accuracy exactly when this oracle was made public, or from what source it was drawn.

The prophecy must have been widely known, since Cicero and Sallust need only to mention it. To return to the question of the source of the oracle, it is interesting that neither Cicero nor Sallust makes any judgment concerning the veracity and origin of the Sibylline oracle itself. Cicero’s wording regarding the oracle is unusual, but he never explicitly claims that the oracle is false – an accusation that surely would have constituted

⁴¹⁸ See below.

a powerful charge against Lentulus Sura and the other supporters of Catiline. If Lentulus Sura claimed that his oracle came from the Sibylline Books, it would have been easy to test his story, yet Cicero refuses to engage in a debate over the genuineness of the oracle. Instead, Cicero identifies Lentulus Sura's wrongdoing in the use of the oracle as a tool to foment rebellion.⁴¹⁹ At the same time, Cicero does not feel inclined to elaborate on the origins of the prophecy or the circumstances in which it was made. This may, in fact, be evidence that the oracle was a genuine Sibylline oracle. Regardless, it is worth noting that we cannot be certain from what source this oracle derived. Perhaps this was an effect of the destruction of the original Sibylline collection: personal and public oracles became difficult to distinguish, and the distinction became less significant, as the new State collection was drawn from privately owned Sibylline texts.

Lentulus Sura's Corneli's oracle may have an interesting parallel; an earlier Sibylline prophecy was also used in a very political way in reference to a single individual – another Cornelius, in fact. This was the oracle of 87 BC, produced when Cinna, an opponent of Sulla and one of the consuls of that year, was illegally driven from the city by his colleague Gnaeus Octavius and deposed by the Senate.⁴²⁰ The story of the oracle, which was already discussed in Chapter 4, comes to us from Granius Licinianus.

The text bears repeating here:

⁴¹⁹ Cicero claims that after the Allobroges accused Lentulus Sura of promoting himself through the Sibylline oracle, Lentulus Sura, "mad with wickedness," finally showed some conscience, as he confessed his crime to the surprise of all those present: *Qui cum illi breviter constanterque respondissent, per quem ad eum quotiensque venissent, quaesissentque ab eo, nihilne secum esset de fatis Sibyllinis locutus, tum ille subito scelere demens, quanta conscientiae vis esset, ostendit. Nam, cum id posset infitiri, repente praeter opinionem omnium confessus est. Ita eum non modo ingenium illud et dicendi exercitatio, qua semper valuit, sed etiam propter vim sceleris manifesti atque deprehensi inpudentia, qua superabat omnis, improbitasque defecit.* (Cicero *In Cat.* 3.10) This testifies both to the power of the Sibylline oracles and the enormity of Lentulus Sura's crime.

⁴²⁰ For the expulsion of Cinna from Rome, see Livy *Per.* 79, Appian *BC* 1.8.64f. See Ch. 4 above.

*** ipsum facere nisi quod illa suasissent, placuit, id quod numquam alias ac pro collegio, quid in libris fatalibus scriptum esset, palam recitare. Constabat notari carmine Cinna sexque tribunis patria pulsus tranquillum otium et securitatem futuram.⁴²¹

The Senate wanted to do nothing contrary to what the oracles advised, and decided to do something that had never been done before on behalf of the college: to recite publicly what was written in the Sibylline Books. It was agreed that it was recorded in the verses that after Cinna and the six tribunes were expelled from the fatherland, there would be tranquil ease and security.

Two fascinating details surface in Licinianus' account of the events of 87 BC. First, the Sibylline oracle was very political in nature, supporting the banishment of Cinna and the tribunes. Second, as Licinianus makes clear, the oracle was published through a command of the Senate. According to Granius Licinianus, this had never been done before. This may be an exaggeration – we do, after all, possess a copy of the oracle of 125 BC – but publishing an oracle was certainly contrary to the Senate's customary practice. This publication reveals the extent of the breakdown of traditions in 87 BC.

Since the words of the oracle have been lost, we cannot comment on the specificity or vagueness of the Cinna prophecy to the events of the time. Furthermore, we cannot be certain from the text whether this oracle preceded or followed the expulsion of Cinna; it could have either encouraged his removal or supported it after the fact. Yet in either case, the oracle was exceptionally political, bearing an impact on very real events of the time. The publication of the oracle springs from its politicization, since the prophetic verses could only be effective as propaganda once they were made known. In 87 BC, as they had done many times before in a crisis, the Romans turned to the Sibylline Books; but this time they found very political statements therein.

⁴²¹ Granius Licinianus in Flemisch (1904), book 35 p. 15.

Thus if Lentulus Sura's Cornelia oracle were truly drawn from the Sibylline Books, it was not unique in its political implications. The oracle of 87 BC – another oracle concerning a Cornelius – was also used to signify an individual as a threat to Rome.⁴²² This politicization is not, therefore, simply a characteristic of the new Sibylline collection; it seems in fact to be due more to the troubling events of the late Republic.

Nevertheless, it is important to note that even in this atmosphere, the authenticity of the prophecy was still beyond question for Cicero. It is not just that he did not question the origins of the prophecy; perhaps he knew, as all Rome knew, that it came from the Sibylline Books. Maybe this oracle, like the Cinna oracle of 87 BC, had been published sometime before. In the next example of a late republican Sibylline oracle, we will again witness this refusal of Cicero publicly to question an oracle's validity.

The Second and Third Oracles

It is only in 56 BC – twenty years after the reconstitution of the Sibylline Books – that our sources record the first definite official consultation of the new collection. The events surrounding this consultation are particularly complex, and become a topic of political debate for the next two years in Rome. In 58 BC, the Romans incensed the Alexandrians by annexing Cyprus. As a result, the Alexandrians expelled Ptolemy XII Auletes, the king of Egypt, because of his friendly ties with Rome.⁴²³ Ptolemy travelled to Rome to petition the Romans' help in restoring him to his throne. Late in 57 BC, the Senate assigned the responsibility of restoring Ptolemy to P. Lentulus Spinther, the

⁴²² Surely this was the intended effect of the Cornelia oracle of 63 BC, to warn against the rise of a third Cornelia, rather than to support it.

⁴²³ On the annexation of Cyprus, see Badian (1965) 110-21; Shatzman (1971) 363-369; Olshausen (Diss. Erlangen-Nürnberg 1963) 45-81; E. Bloedow (Diss. Würzburg 1963) 48-54; P. M. Frazer (1972) I.125, 2.223, Karageorghis (1982).

consul of that year who had been instrumental in securing Cicero's return from exile. In 56, Lentulus was serving as proconsul of Cilicia and Cyprus, and thus was a logical choice to restore Ptolemy. However, Ptolemy himself, with the backing of many of Pompey's supporters, wanted Pompey to have this command. Though Cicero claims in a letter to Lentulus that Pompey was pleading Lentulus' cause, Pompey may have seen some opportunity to strengthen his position in the triumvirate through this commission.⁴²⁴

In the midst of the argument over the appointment, a prodigy occurred that changed the course of the debate. When lightning struck the statue of Jupiter on the Alban Mount, the Senate advised the *quindecimviri* to consult the Sibylline Books. When an appropriate oracle was discovered, C. Porcius Cato, tribune of 56 and perhaps also a *quindecimvir*, urged the *quindecimviri* to translate the oracle into Latin and to make it public before the Senate could decide on the matter. This was again a sharp divergence from the tradition that Sibylline oracles were published only rarely, and only through the approval of the Senate.⁴²⁵ According to Cassius Dio, everyone was shocked that the Sibyl's words were so relevant to the events of the time: "If the King of Egypt should come requesting aid, do not refuse him friendship, nor assist him with any great multitude; otherwise you will have both struggles and dangers."⁴²⁶ In his speech on behalf of Rabirius, Cicero adds that the Sibyl warned that Ptolemy, expelled from his kingdom, had come to Rome with cunning purpose (*dolosis consiliis*).⁴²⁷ Since the oracle was published, it is likely that these authors correctly convey the tenor of their words; Cicero may even have quoted directly from the Latin translation in his speech.

⁴²⁴ Cic. *ad Fam.* 1.1, Jan. 13, 56 BC; Parke (1988) 207.

⁴²⁵ Dio 39.15 notes the exceptionalness of Cato's action.

⁴²⁶ Cassius Dio 39.15

⁴²⁷ Cicero *Pro Rab.* 4: *pulsus interea regno Ptolomaeus dolosis consiliis, ut dixit Sibylla, sensit Postumus, Romam venit.*

The publication of this oracle, however, did not settle the matter of Ptolemy's restoration. We are informed of the subsequent debates not only through the account of Cassius Dio, but also through letters sent by Cicero to his friend Lentulus in Cilicia to update him on the situation in Rome. The senators could not agree on the best course of action. According to Cicero, Crassus proposed that a commission of three be formed to restore Ptolemy, composed of men who held military commands; Bibulus, at this time an opponent of Pompey, countered his proposal by suggesting that three men be chosen from those who did not hold commands.⁴²⁸ Hortensius, on the other hand, argued that Lentulus should perform the task without an army, while Volcarius proposed that Pompey should do it.⁴²⁹

Cicero's own reaction to the oracle, which we see in his letters to Lentulus, is complex. In his personal correspondence, Cicero states very plainly his sceptical view of the oracle:

Regis causa si qui sunt qui velint, qui pauci sunt, omnes rem ad Pompeium deferri volunt. Senatus religionis calumniam non religione sed malevolentia et illius regiae largitionis invidia comprobatur.

Those who are on the side of the king, who are few, all want to hand the matter over to Pompey. The Senate approves this pretense of religion, not for the sake of religion but because of the ill-will and hatred aroused by the king's bribery.⁴³⁰

For Cicero, the oracle represented a *calumniam religionis*, a pretense or a sham of religion, intended to hinder political action. In a subsequent letter to Lentulus, he attributes the same disbelief to the Roman people:

⁴²⁸ Cicero *ad Fam.* 1.1.3, Jan. 13, 56 BC

⁴²⁹ Cicero *ad Fam.* 1.2.1, Jan. 15, 56 BC

⁴³⁰ Cicero *ad Fam.* 1.1.1, Jan. 13, 56 BC. It is, of course, quite possible that Cicero would have expressed the contrary view of the oracle's validity, even in a private letter to his friend, had the oracle been in his favor. Ptolemy was notorious for having attempted to bribe a number of Senators to gain their support, and thus apparently earned the ire of the entire Senate.

Tamen opinio est populi Romani, a tuis invidis atque obstrectatoribus nomen inductum fictae religionis <idque susceptum ab aliis> non tam ut te impediret quam ut ne quis propter exercitus cupiditatem Alexandream vellet ire.

Nevertheless it is the opinion of the Roman people, that the pretext of false religion was introduced by your enemies and detractors, and that it was taken up by others who desired not so much to block you as to prevent anyone from going to Alexandria because he wanted an army.⁴³¹

Cicero refers to the oracle as a *nomen fictae religionis* – a pretext of false religion. We see in these letters an expression of broad scepticism about the validity of the Ptolemy oracle. Not only does Cicero vent this opinion himself, but he also attributes it to the Roman people. Thus he considers it completely plausible that the general Roman populace – all of those classes that Polybius had believed in the second century to be controlled and pacified by a pretense of religion⁴³² – would be capable of seeing through political manipulation.

But we must not forget that these correspondences are of the most private nature; their contents were so sensitive that Cicero dared not entrust them to any but the most reliable courier.⁴³³ While in his letters he questioned the veracity of the oracle and maligned the false religiosity of his fellow Senators, his public attitude to the oracle was one of unquestioning acceptance.⁴³⁴ He never seems to have impugned the validity of the oracle in public. In a letter dated January 15, 56 BC, Cicero tells Lentulus that the

⁴³¹ Cicero *ad Fam.* 1.4.2, Jan. 17 (?), 56 BC

⁴³² Polybius *Hist.* 6.56.6ff.

⁴³³ Cicero *ad Fam.* 1.7.1, late June or July, 56 BC: *Quod si rarius fiet quam te expectabis, id erit causae quod non eius generis meae litterae sunt ut eas audeam temere committere. Quotiens mihi certorum hominum potestas erit quibus recte dem, non praetermittam.* “But if I do so [write letters to you] more rarely than you would like, it is because my letters are of such a sort that I dare not entrust them to anyone rashly. Whenever I am able to find trustworthy men, to whom I can give them without worry, I will not let the opportunity go by.”

⁴³⁴ In *ad Fam.* 1.7.4 (late June or July 56 BC) as Cicero gives advice to Lentulus on how to work around the oracle, he takes a sarcastic view of the religious opposition in the Senate: *et sine multitudine reducatur, quem ad modum homines religiosi Sibyllae placere dixerunt.* “And he will be reinstated without a multitude, which is how those pious men say the Sibyl wants it done.”

religious issue had been settled, so that no opposition to the Sibylline verses could be raised.⁴³⁵ The question, instead, was how to work around them. Cicero proposed a creative way of dealing with the oracle.

. . . si res facultatem habitura videatur ut Alexandream atque Aegyptum tenere possis, esse et tuae et nostri imperi dignitatis, Ptolomaide aut aliquo propinquo loco rege collocato, te cum classe atque exercitu proficisci Alexandream ut, eam cum pace praesidiisque firmaris, Ptolomaeus redeat in regnum; ita fore ut et per te restituatur, quem ad modum senatus initio censuit, et sine multitudine reducatur, quem ad modum homines religiosi Sibyllae placere dixerunt.

. . . if it should seem possible that you would be able to take possession of Alexandria and Egypt, it will be to the honor of yourself and the empire, if you settle the king at Ptolemais or some other place nearby, and set out with a fleet and an army to Alexandria. Then, when you have established peace in the city and set troops there, Ptolemy may return to his kingdom. In this way he will be restored by you, as the Senate had decided in the beginning, but without a multitude, which is how those pious men say the Sibyl wants it done.⁴³⁶

Cicero's proposal to Lentulus appears to be a blatant attempt to abide by the letter of the oracle while ignoring its spirit. He suggested that, rather than bringing an army to Alexandria to restore Ptolemy to the throne, Lentulus should leave Ptolemy in a nearby city, subdue Alexandria with an army, then restore Ptolemy. It was really a question of intention: If Lentulus settled the city with an army first, then brought Ptolemy back to the throne, he had not transgressed the command of the oracle; if he conquered the city and restored Ptolemy by the same act, he was guilty of terrible impiety.

Cicero's proposal may seem like hypocrisy to us, a poorly disguised attempt to work around the Sibylline oracle for the benefit of his friend. It is not clear whether other Romans would have viewed the suggestion in the same way, since Lentulus – whether

⁴³⁵ Cicero *ad Fam.* 1.2.1, Jan. 15, 56 BC: *Quatenus de religione dicebat, cui quidem rei iam obsisti non poterat, Bibulo adsensum est.*

⁴³⁶ Cicero *ad Fam.* 1.7.4, late June or July, 56 BC

restrained by the religious implications, or by a sense that the time was not right for restoring Ptolemy – never carried out the plan. However, what is really significant about Cicero's proposal is his full engagement with the oracle. He does not advise Lentulus to ignore the oracle as a *calumnia religionis* or a product of *ficta religio*, but instead encourages him to act within the perceived boundaries of the oracle. No matter what Cicero might say about the oracle in private, he had to be seen to take it seriously in public.

Cicero's engagement with the Sibylline verses is fully revealed in his reaction when the Ptolemy oracle was eventually transgressed. Despite months of debate, the Senators never reached a satisfactory decision regarding Ptolemy's reinstatement, and Ptolemy left the city in despair. In the following year (55 BC), however, Pompey sent a letter to his friend Aulus Gabinius, who was then serving as proconsul in Syria, asking him to restore Ptolemy to the throne.⁴³⁷ Gabinius' success in Alexandria created a great deal of turmoil in Rome, as his enemies pressed that he be punished for transgressing the words of the Sibyl, and thus putting the entire state in peril. If Cassius Dio's account is accurate, many of those people who had doubted the oracle one year before now clamored to lynch Gabinius for ignoring it. Cicero himself led the charge, petitioning to have the Sibylline Books re-examined to search for a punishment for the oracle's violation!⁴³⁸ Having discounted the oracle's religious worth in a private correspondence,

⁴³⁷ Cassius Dio 39.55.3 charges that Gabinius' restoration of Ptolemy was motivated by bribes. But according to R. S. Williams (1985) 25-38, there may have been a more honorable reason for his action. Gabinius' restoration of Ptolemy may have been intended to counter Archelaus and curb piracy in the Mediterranean. For Gabinius' career, see Lacey (1980), Williams (1978), Fantham (1975), Matthews Sanford (1939).

⁴³⁸ Cicero's hatred of Gabinius is notorious. He disparaged him and his consular colleague L. Calpurnius Piso in nine different speeches delivered between 57 and 54 BC: *Red. Pop.*, *Red. Sen.*, *Dom.*, *Har. Resp.*, *Prov. Cons.*, *Sest.*, *Vat.*, *Pis.*, *Planc.*

he now publicly expressed outrage at its transgression, and turned to the Sibylline Books for advice.⁴³⁹

While Cicero was accusing Gabinius of violating a Sibylline oracle, the friends of Gabinius defended his assistance of the Egyptian king: they claimed that the Sibylline verses referred to a different Ptolemy, not Ptolemy Auletes.⁴⁴⁰ Like their enemies, they dared not publicly imply that the oracle was false, but they could question its application. The basic truth of the oracle had to be accepted; only its meaning could be debated.

Pompey and Crassus, allies of Gabinius, succeeded in blocking Cicero's attempts for some time. But in the following year (54 BC), after a flood of the Tiber, the Sibylline Books were consulted again.⁴⁴¹ This was the third recorded consultation of the new Sibylline Books. Nothing was found therein regarding a fitting punishment for Gabinius. This did not mean, however, that Gabinius would not pay for his crime. His prosecutors did not back down, and in the end they convicted him on other charges.⁴⁴²

In detail, this story of the Ptolemy oracle far exceeds any account of other Sibylline oracles of the Republic, and for this reason it seems exceptional. Yet if we knew the entire story surrounding some of the oracles of the previous century, we might find parallels to some of the political machinations sparked by the Ptolemy oracle.⁴⁴³ In 189 BC, the consul Gnaeus Manlius Vulso, who Livy tells us wished to do battle across

⁴³⁹ Cassius Dio 39.59. As has been noted, the oracle concerning Ptolemy had already been published. Either this oracle was published only in part, so that Cicero believed there was more on the topic in the Sibylline Books, or else he was seeking another oracle concerning the broad punishment of those who disobeyed the Sibyl's injunctions. He pressed the issue for a full year; his persistence may indicate that he had some insider's tip about what was in the Books, or a promise from one of the *quindecimviri* that lines about Gabinius' punishment would be added. Yet such a punishment was never found, so either the lines were expunged from the Books later, or else they were never added.

⁴⁴⁰ Cassius Dio 39.61

⁴⁴¹ Significantly, it was only after a prodigy that the Sibylline Books were consulted again. Perhaps this is proof of Livy's statement, that the Books were only consulted in the case of the most dire prodigies. This may have been a pretense through which Cicero's enemies delayed his requested consultation of the Books.

⁴⁴² Cassius Dio's account of Gabinius' conviction is very unclear, and probably inaccurate.

⁴⁴³ See Rosenberger (1998) 52 for these stories.

the Taurus Mountains, had been stopped from crossing this terrible boundary by a Sibylline oracle.⁴⁴⁴ Livy gives no date for this oracle; while it may have been invented in 189 BC by Manlius Vulso's enemies, the Sibylline injunction may on the other hand have long been known.⁴⁴⁵ Unlike Gabinius, Manlius Vulso obeyed the Sibyl's command.

In 143 BC, another Sibylline oracle had been produced which had real political implications. According to Frontinus, Quintus Marcius Rex, the urban praetor of 144 BC, was assigned the task of improving the city's water supply. He planned to build a new aqueduct from the Anio River to the Capitol. But in the following year, when the *decemviri* were consulting the Books for other reasons, they discovered an oracle that advised against bringing the Anio to the Capitol. Yet the construction continued. However, three years later, in 140 BC, the matter was raised again. This time, Quintus Marcius Rex was successful, and the Aqua Marcia was built to the Capitol.⁴⁴⁶ Like the issues surrounding the Ptolemy oracle, the question took a long time to settle and involved matters of real-life significance.

⁴⁴⁴ Livy 38.45.3. Significantly, Vulso's accusers take the credit for obeying the oracle away from Manlius Vulso, and give it to his subordinates.

⁴⁴⁵ Manlius Vulso certainly had many enemies. Grainger (1995) 24: "It is evident, from only a cursory reading, that Livy has accepted the interpretation of Manlius' conduct put about by his Roman enemies, which claimed that his expedition against the Galatians was near-unauthorized, that his march was aimed at gathering plunder, and that his very appointment deprived the Scipios of the praise, respect, and political authority to which they were entitled as a result of the defeat of Antiochus III at Magnesia. . . . The argument over his triumph after his return to Rome shows clearly enough that those enemies were powerful and active, and that they were quite happy to distort his work and quote his words out of context in their campaign." Also p. 25: "He had reached the consulship only at the third attempt, and then in an election distinguished by some sharp practice. His allocation to Asia was followed by the suggestion that his forces there should be reduced (38.51.10; Livy has condensed a considerable dispute, with some intrigue, into a single sentence.)"

⁴⁴⁶ Frontinus *de Aq.* 7.5: *Eo tempore decemviri, dum aliis ex causis libros Sibyllinos inspiciunt, invenisse dicuntur, non esse fas aquam Marciam seu potius Anionem (de hoc enim constantius traditur) in Capitolium perducere, deque ea re in senatu M. Lepido pro collegio verba faciente actum Appio Claudio Q. Caecilio consulibus, eandemque post annum tertium a Lucio Lentulo retractatam C. Laelio Q. Servilio consulibus, sed utroque tempore vicisse gratiam Marci Regis: atque ita in Capitolium esse aquam perductam.*

Unfortunately, Livy's account of this episode is lost, but it is mentioned in a summary: *Aqua Marcia in Capitolium contra Sibyllae carmina perducta*. ("The Aqua Marcia was led to the Capitol against the Sibylline oracles.")⁴⁴⁷ The summarizer of Livy thus paints Marcius' act as an outright transgression of the Sibylline Books. But was such a deed conceivable? It was certainly possible to accuse someone of violating the oracle, but was it plausible that a Roman would be permitted to defy the Sibylline Books so audaciously? Certainly, such an action would have undermined the authority of the Books. Perhaps, like the plan proposed by Cicero to Lentulus, or the defense offered by Gabinius' friends, Marcius had presented some pretense of working around the Sibylline oracle. But without a fuller account of the episode, our comparison can go no further.

Unusual, political oracles were, therefore, not unheard of in the second century. In the late Republic, however, these political oracles were not isolated events; they occurred with a much greater frequency. The three cases discussed here so far – the oracles concerning Cinna, the three Cornelii, and Ptolemy – already show a growing trend toward the overt political manipulation of the oracles, their publication, and their focus on increasingly powerful individuals. Finally, Cicero's and others' treatment of the oracle reveals that despite one's own personal feelings about its validity, the oracle had to be treated publicly as though it were true. This denotes a respect for the Sibylline Books that persisted in spite of their use in factional politics.

⁴⁴⁷ Livy ep. Oxy. 54

The Fourth Oracle

Our sources mention only one other definite consultation of the Sibylline Books before Julius Caesar's dictatorship. According to Pliny, this took place just before the civil war between Caesar and Pompey:

Subsedit in Cumano arbor gravi ostento paulo ante Pompeii Magni bella civilia paucis ramis eminentibus; inventum Sibyllinis libris internicionem hominum fore, tantoque eam maiorem, quanto propius ab urbe facta esset.

It was a very grave prodigy when a tree in Cumae sank into the ground, with only a few of its branches sticking out, a little before the civil war of Pompeius Magnus. It was found in the Sibylline Books that this foretold the slaughter of men, which would be greater the nearer the tree was to the city.⁴⁴⁸

Thus around 50 BC, when a tree sank into the ground at Cumae, the Sibylline Books were consulted. They warned against the slaughter of citizens, which would be more terrible the nearer the tree was to Rome. It is impossible to know the scale by which the Romans measured the greatness of the distance, but Cumae, located about 110 miles from the city, was certainly nearer than the Romans would have liked. The fulfillment of the prophecy in the subsequent civil wars is no reason to doubt the reliability of the story. The tensions leading up to the war were palpable; the prophecy may in fact have been an attempt to prevent the imminent conflict.

This prophetic interpretation of the Sibylline oracle, warning the Romans of impending dangers, was not totally unprecedented. In 228 BC, the Books warned the Romans to beware of the Gauls – not a daring warning, certainly, but a warning nonetheless.⁴⁴⁹ Yet it was normally only the *haruspices* who interpreted oracles in this way. In at least two separate years – 126 and 65 BC – *haruspices* had prophesied civil

⁴⁴⁸ Pliny *NH* 17.243

⁴⁴⁹ In 461 BC, the Sibylline Books had allegedly predicted that strangers would attack Rome, and advised the people to abstain from civil strife, but this is probably not a genuine consultation. See Ch. 2 above.

strife.⁴⁵⁰ Among other interpretations, they predicted that the Romans would be victorious in battle, that magistrates would die, that Greece would be destroyed, and that Etruria would fall.⁴⁵¹ The ancient accounts represent prophetic interpretation as a typical aspect of haruspicial responses to prodigies; Sibylline prophecies appear to be much rarer. In this respect, therefore, the Sibylline oracle of 50 BC constitutes another symptom of the transformation of the Sibylline Books in the late Republic.

The Fifth Oracle

According to our sources, the Sibylline Books were a topic of interest toward the end of Julius Caesar's dictatorship, when a rumor was circulated that a Sibylline oracle would soon be presented in the Senate. Whether the rumor was true or not, Caesar's murder made the oracle meaningless, and it was never officially reported. Suetonius, in describing the desire of Caesar's supporters to make him king, and the conspirators' fear of his rising power, tells of the alleged prophecy: *proximo autem senatu Lucium Cottam quindecimvrum sententiam dicturum, ut, quoniam fatalibus libris contineretur Parthos nisi a rege non posse uinci, Caesar rex appellaretur*. ("Moreover it was rumored that in the next senate meeting Lucius Cotta the *quindecimvir* would say that, since the Sibylline Books contained a prophecy that the Parthians could not be conquered except by a king, Caesar should be called king.")⁴⁵²

⁴⁵⁰ For the prodigies of 126 BC, see: Obs. 29, Pliny *NH* 2.203, Orosius 5.10.11, Strabo 6.2.11; for 65 BC, see Cic. *Cat.* 3.19-20, *Div.* 1.19-20; Obs. 61; Dio 37.9.2, 37.34.3-4; Arnobius 7.38.

⁴⁵¹ The *haruspices* predicted Roman victory in 172 BC (Livy 42.20.1-6); they predicted the death of magistrates in 152 BC (Obs. 18); they predicted the destruction of Greece in 130 BC (Obs. 28, Aug. *CD* 3.11, Dio 24 frg. 84.2); they predicted the fall of Etruria in 102 BC (Obs. 44).

⁴⁵² Suetonius *Divus Iulius* 79. This oracle finds an obvious comparison in the story of Marc Antony at the Lupercalia. According to Plutarch, when Antony offered Caesar a diadem, a few in the crowd applauded quietly, but when Caesar refused the crown, and the people cheered with enthusiasm. Antony repeated the

The story of the prophecy is reported in much the same way by Plutarch, Cassius Dio, and Appian. Each attributes the alleged prophecy to the Sibylline Books, but maintains that the oracle, whether publicized by Caesar's supporters or by the *quindecimvirs* themselves, was never made official.⁴⁵³ The rumor was obviously meant to play upon the people's fear of the Parthians, who had crushed M. Licinius Crassus' army at Carrhae in 53 BC and had taken the Roman standards. In 44 BC, Julius Caesar was planning a campaign against them. Lucius Aurelius Cotta, the *quindecimvir* who it was rumored planned to report the prophecy in the Senate, had been consul in 65 BC and censor in 64. He had remained neutral in the civil wars, but as Caesar's maternal uncle, he seemed a likely candidate to propose Caesar's kingship.

In the second book of his *De Divinatione*, written shortly after Caesar's murder in 44 BC, Cicero alludes to this oracle. In this passage, Cicero is presenting arguments against prophecy to his brother Quintus:

Sibyllae versus observamus, quos illa furens fudisse dicitur. Quorum interpretis nuper falsa quadam hominum fama dicturus in senatu putabatur eum, quem re vera regem habebamus, appellandum quoque esse regem, si salvi esse vellemus. Hoc si est in libris, in quem hominem et in quod tempus est? Callide enim, qui illa composuit, perfecit ut, quodcumque accidisset, praedictum videretur, hominum et temporum definitione sublata. Adhibuit etiam latebram obscuritatis, ut iidem versus alias in aliam rem posse accommodari viderentur.

We venerate the verses of the Sibyl, which she is said to have written while in a frenzy. Recently it was believed by a false rumor of men that one of the interpreters of the Sibylline Books was planning to announce in the senate that he whom we held as a king in fact, should likewise be called king, if we wanted to be saved. If this is in the Books, to what man and to what time does it refer? For that person was clever, who composed them, to make it that whatever happened would seem to have been predicted, since all reference to people and times had been left out. For

offer twice, and twice was refused, since Caesar saw that the people did not want a king. This apparently all was done at the will of Caesar, who truly desired the crown. See Plutarch *Iul. Caes.* 61.

⁴⁵³ Plutarch *Julius Caesar* 60, Cassius Dio 44.15, Appian *BC* 2.110

this person employed the trick of obscurity, so that these verses could be thought to apply to different things at different times.⁴⁵⁴

Since Cicero was a contemporary witness, his statement is invaluable in dispelling any doubt concerning the circulation of the rumor, which might otherwise be grouped with the apocryphal stories surrounding Caesar's death. He verifies, too, that this oracle was reputed to be derived from the Sibylline Books themselves, not any private oracles in the possession of Roman citizens. His brief account bears no significant discrepancy with the historians' versions; though Cicero does not mention the Parthians directly, it is nevertheless quite possible to understand that it was against these people that the king was intended to ensure that the Roman people should remain safe (*salvi*).

How are we to treat an oracle that never really was? As has already been shown in the case of prodigies, it was the act of reporting that made the event real. Yet though the rumor of the oracle obviously was discussed in Rome, the prophecy was never officially reported in the Senate. This could be either because Caesar's early death made the Sibylline verses meaningless, or because the prophecy was only a rumor all along and Cotta never actually intended to present it to the Senate. Some significant details, however, in the treatment of oracles in the late Republic may be gleaned from the story of this 'oracle that wasn't'. In the first place, it was at least conceivable to the Roman populace that such an oracle – a prophecy that threatened to change the entire political constitution of the Roman State – might be recorded in the Sibylline Books. In the second place, we see that oracles could be discussed and widely known, even before they were reported to the Senate. This may have been an exceptional case, but it is nevertheless noteworthy that such exceptions could occur in the late Republic.

⁴⁵⁴ Cicero *de Div.* 2.110

Cicero's account is fascinating in his arguments against the oracle, an oracle which, although it was never reported, he apparently still feels the need to disprove, even after the death of Julius Caesar. His point – that the oracle could refer to any person and any time – was probably an argument used against many politically relevant oracles. As we have already seen, Cassius Dio claimed that Gabinius' friends raised this same point in support of his reinstatement of Ptolemy. Yet in his work on divination, Cicero goes one step further: rather than simply claiming that the prophecy might apply to a different person than Caesar or a different time, he insinuates that the obscurity of an oracle is a convenient ploy for ensuring the veracity of the prediction. Thus the prophecy, being applicable for many people and many times, is actually accurate for none. This is a familiar argument against the veracity of prophecies in general. The same proof is commonly put forward against horoscopes or fortune cookies or palm readings today, which are presented with a vagueness that may allow any number of interpretations.

Yet Cicero did not suggest that the Sibylline Books be abandoned. Instead, he proposed that the Senate should secure tighter control over the circulation of the oracles:

Quam ob rem Sibyllam quidem sepositam et conditam habeamus, ut, id quod proditum est a maioribus, iniussu senatus ne legantur quidem libri valeantque ad deponendas potius quam ad suscipiendas religiones; cum antistitibus agamus, ut quidvis potius ex illis libris quam regem proferant, quem Romae posthac nec di nec homines esse patientur.

For this reason we should keep the Sibyl indeed safely hidden away, so that, according to the tradition instituted by our ancestors, the Books might not be read without the order of the Senate, and they might work toward putting down rather than raising up superstitions; and let us plead with the priests that they should bring forth from those books anything but a king, whom from this time on neither gods nor men should allow to exist in Rome.⁴⁵⁵

⁴⁵⁵ Cicero *de Div.* 2.112

Having just presented a terrific argument against oracles, implying that their vagueness makes them always right and therefore never true, Cicero then campaigns in favor of the Sibylline Books. He says that they have a usefulness in repressing superstition (the unusual but obviously correct translation of *religiones*). Cicero's main concern is the stability of the state constitution, and he believes that the Sibylline Books can help to secure it. This conviction, not religious belief, is why he emphasizes that they should be used in accordance with the traditions of the ancestors, who ensured not only that the oracles were not made public, but that they were not even consulted by the priests without the permission of the Senate. In this way he contrasts the circumstances of his own day – when a *quindecimvir* perhaps read the Books without the permission of the Senate⁴⁵⁶ and the rumor of a prophecy could be widely known before the oracle was even official – with the situation that held sway earlier in the Republic, when the Senate held complete control over the Sibylline Books. The image that he paints of his own day is one of anarchy.

The Sixth Oracle

Our sources record only one final Sibylline consultation before Actium. The expiatory response appears more traditional in character, advising rituals rather than offering prophecies. In 38 BC, three prodigies alarmed the Romans: the hut of Romulus burned down as a result of rituals that the *pontifices* were performing, a statue of Virtus fell on its face, and certain persons inspired by Mater Magna proclaimed that the goddess was angry with the Romans. The Sibylline Books confirmed this declaration – that the

⁴⁵⁶ Cicero does not state this directly, but his statement about reading the Books only with the permission of the Senate may imply it.

Mother of the Gods was angry – and advised that the statue of Virtus be purified in the sea. Cassius Dio tells us that this removal of the statue from the city incited further fear in the populus, but that their anxiety was assuaged when the statue was brought back to the city and four palm trees sprang up around her temple and in the Forum.⁴⁵⁷

The oracle of 38 BC appears very traditional in character. It advised an expiatory ritual, the purification of the statue of Virtus. The oracle thus stands as evidence that the Sibylline expiatory tradition had not disappeared. Nevertheless, the oracle did contain some small interpretative element: according to Cassius Dio, it confirmed that Mater Magna was angry with the Romans. This sort of interpretation is rarely recorded for earlier Sibylline oracles.

CONCLUSION

The major problem with comparing the accounts of the Sibylline oracles mentioned above is that two of the most interesting prophecies – the one that Lentulus Sura invoked in 63 BC, and the one that advised the Romans to accept a king in 44 – may not have come from the Sibylline Books at all. Yet something can still be learned from these dubious oracles. Whether part of the Sibylline corpus or not, the reports of these oracles were obviously credible, and thus such prophecies were within the realm of possibility for Sibylline verses.

With this in mind, we can distinguish two trends in the use of Sibylline oracles in the late Republic: 1) the oracles frequently have an obvious political significance; 2) the verses are being published or made known more often than they had in the past. These two trends, in fact, go together: In order for a prophecy to have had much influence as

⁴⁵⁷ Cassius Dio 48.43.4-6

political propaganda, it must have been made known to the public. Conversely, the fact that oracles in the earlier Republic were as a rule secret suggests that their involvement in politics, if any, must have been far less blatant and straightforward.

In the late Republic, the frequency and degree of the political relevance of the Sibylline Books testified to a change. This change was due not only to the destruction of the Sibylline Books, but also to the shattering of the senatorial consensus. Neither of the trends mentioned above –the politicization of the oracles and the publication of the verses – began with the new Sibylline collection. Already in 87 BC the Sibylline Books affirmed the expulsion of Cinna and six tribunes from Rome, and, in this great crisis, the Senate published the verses contrary to custom.

The factional use of the oracles in the late Republic is obvious: the Senate publishes an oracle against Cinna, Lentulus invokes the Sibyl in the Catiline conspiracy, Cato uses the Sibylline Books to block Pompey, and Caesar's supporters (or perhaps his enemies) divulge a prophecy supporting the kingship. All of a sudden the actions or potential actions of individual *quindecimviri*, like Cato and Cotta, become politically important. And as the events of 44 BC show, the Romans begin to worry about the ways that the Sibylline Books might be used. The degree of factionalism is apparent in the widely different motives that could be attributed to the *quindecimviri* at this time: In 56 BC, the conservative Cato used the Sibylline Books to block Pompey's rise to unprecedented power; just 12 years later, conservatives feared that Cotta would produce an oracle that seemed to require the restoration of the kingship.

In his chapter on diviners and divination in the Roman Republic, John North describes the Roman divinatory system as a reflection of the Roman political system.

Divination, like the Roman government, was defined by a great diffusion of power, with a number of priestly groups (not individuals) working alongside the Senate and magistrates. According to North,

. . . in this period a very close association existed between the character of the activity of diviners and the Republican system itself. Roman divination on this view should be seen not as a form characteristic of archaic Italy, surviving beyond its time; nor as some peculiar deformation caused by the narrow-minded and pragmatic character of the Romans themselves. Rather it is the expression in the religious sphere of some of the dominant characteristics of Roman Republicanism: there is an avoidance of the concentration of too much power on any individual; a tendency for decisions and actions to operate through groups or through changing individuals; a reluctance to recognize the special or charismatic qualities of special human beings. . . . the religion of Rome has to be seen as the construction of a ruling elite, of the greatest value to them in sustaining political control, but always vulnerable, at least potentially, to the emergence of powerful religious initiatives outside the officially sustained system.⁴⁵⁸

Earlier in the Republic, when the senatorial consensus was intact, Roman divination had reflected the state of Roman politics. And when the political system began to falter in the late Republic, Roman divination adapted to the changes. The Sibylline Books took on a new look: factionalism, with a focus on individuals and their actions.

The changes may not have seemed so drastic to those who witnessed them. For despite the Roman Sibylline tradition by which specific politics were generally avoided, and the publication of oracles was rare, there were definite exceptions to these rules in the early and middle Republic. Furthermore, many Romans would have been aware of the broader Sibylline tradition, based on Greek divinatory practices in which politicization and publication of oracles was famously common.

In their search for authority, individuals and factions turned to the Sibylline Books. Yet despite this grasping, the Sibylline Books retained a remarkable degree of

⁴⁵⁸ North (1990) 70-1

legitimacy. As Cicero's reaction to the Ptolemy oracle demonstrates, whether one believed that a Sibylline oracle was invented or authentic, he was obliged to engage with it as though it were true. Traditions could be broken – the oracles could be published and discussed among the people – but they could not be ignored. No one would dare impugn the truth of the oracles in public, because he knew that he might need to use them later. Cicero, for example, demanded that the Sibylline Books be searched for a punishment for Gabinius. And after Caesar's murder he expressed a hope that the Sibylline Books could be restored as a support of the Senate. In the next chapter, we will see whether Cicero's hope was fulfilled.

Chapter 6

The Sibylline Books Under Augustus

AUGUSTUS' RELIGIOUS REFORMS

As the use of the Sibylline Books shows, the late Republic was a time of unprecedented religious instability. Because of tremendous political upheavals, the consensus that had been the guiding principle of the state religion broke down. We have seen that Roman prodigy and expiation was a dynamic system, responding to the changing needs and circumstances of the Roman State. In the late Republic, when the State was shaken by factionalism and power-grabbing, Sibylline expiation was transformed. Ancient rules were broken as oracles were made public, and the verses applied to contemporary disputes. In this way, Rome's political breakdown was reflected in her religious system.

The late Republic did not, however, mark a permanent change in the use of the Sibylline Books. When the Republic ended, the oracles continued to be adapted to the State's needs, just as before. After Actium, this meant applying the Books to Augustus' own programme: a policy of *innovation* wrapped in the shroud of *restoration*. Augustus, no doubt like many of his contemporaries, associated the decline of the *res publica* with the decline of Roman values and piety.⁴⁵⁹ According to the emperor, the State fell into chaos in the late Republic not because their traditional religion had failed the Romans, but because the Romans had failed to honor their traditional religion. Augustus' effort to

⁴⁵⁹ For the decline in late republican religion as presented by Augustus, see Momigliano (1987) 180: "Augustus and his contemporaries thought, or perhaps in some cases wanted other people to think, that the preceding age (roughly the period from the Gracchi to Caesar) had seen a decline in the ancient Roman care for gods."

“restore” Roman religion was the answer to the general decline of the late republic and went hand in hand with his work to restore the State.⁴⁶⁰

Religion was integral to Augustus’ rule, and his work of “restoration” reached into all areas of religious life. As he boasts in his own record of achievements, the *Res Gestae*, he renovated 82 temples that had fallen into disrepair in Rome. He filled sacred posts like that of the *flamen dialis*, the Arval Brethren, and the Vestal Virgins that had sunk into oblivion or unpopularity. In waiting to take up the position of *pontifex maximus* until the death of Lepidus, who was serving in exile, Augustus showed a remarkable restraint (or at least he thought it was remarkable, since he mentioned it in his *Res Gestae*) and respect for tradition. Finally, he restored ancient rituals and festivals, like the ceremonies of the *fetiales* and the Ludi Saeculares.⁴⁶¹

Yet Augustus’ emphasis on restoration is in some ways deceptive. The Arval Brethren, for instance, of which Augustus himself was a member, may not have been an important priesthood at all in the Republic; we have only one reference to the Arvals in all of Republican literature.⁴⁶² At the same time, much of the “revived” fetial ritual seems to have been invented under Augustus.⁴⁶³ In the end, the Augustan “restoration”

⁴⁶⁰ Price (1996) 812: “The Augustan restructuring of the earlier system was represented at the time as restoration: ancient cults had faded away, temples had fallen down, priesthoods were vacant. The ‘restoration of the res publica’ by Augustus necessarily involved ‘restoration of the traditional cults.’ Scholars used to hold that this view was indeed correct: religion, in decline in the late Republic, was revived under Augustus.” See Orlin (2007).

⁴⁶¹ For the restoration of 82 temples, see Augustus’ *Res Gestae* 20. For the assumption of the post of *pontifex maximus*, see *Res Gestae* 10. For the performance of the Ludi Saeculares, see *Res Gestae* 22.

⁴⁶² Varro *LL* 5.85

⁴⁶³ See Wiedemann (1986) for the idea that the fetial ritual was invented in Augustus’ time. Tradition maintained that fetials had once declared by throwing a spear into their enemy’s territory, but that they moved this ritual to the Campus Martius when Rome’s enemies became too distant to make the ceremony practicable (see Servius *ad Aen.* 9.52). Wiedemann, however, claims that this was not an ancient ritual. He points out, I think rightly, that if legates could continue to visit foreign lands to make demands prior to a war, fetiales could make the journey, too. He maintains that this spear-throwing was actually an Augustan rite simply made to look traditional: “Perhaps the spear-throwing rite was not modified; perhaps there had never been any such archaic rite. There is no reference linking the spear-throwing to the Campus Martius

constituted a complete reworking of Roman religion, in which tradition and innovation became indistinguishable.

Posing as the savior of Roman religion – and thus as the savior of the Roman State – he set himself at the center of the entire system.⁴⁶⁴ He erected a new temple to Apollo, bringing the god inside the *pomerium* for the first time, and connected this temple to his own residence by a *porticus*.⁴⁶⁵ He set up a shrine to Vesta in his Palatine home, thus confusing the hearth of the state with his own family hearth.⁴⁶⁶ Though he balked at the accumulation of magistracies and political titles, he amassed more priesthoods than anyone before him, and thus set a precedent for all emperors who came after him. Augustus was a *pontifex*, *augur*, *quindecimvir*, *septimvir epulonum*, *frater arvalis*, *sodalis Titius*, and *fetial*.⁴⁶⁷ Not even Julius Caesar had dared to hold so many priesthoods.⁴⁶⁸ After 33 BC, no one besides the emperor and members of his family built temples in

before Octavian's declaration of war on Cleopatra in this way in 32 B.C. Of course, once that had been done, it became an age-old tradition forthwith.” (482) Dio 50.4.4f. says that Augustus himself performed this ritual as a *fetial* in 32 BC, in an attempt to validate his war with Antony as being against a foreign enemy rather than a fellow Roman.

⁴⁶⁴ Price (1996) 820 describes this Augustan combination of tradition and innovation: “The ancestral cults of Rome were not simply restored; they were restructured. Ruler cult in Rome was not a simple innovation; many aspects of it were deeply traditional.”

⁴⁶⁵ For Augustus' Palatine temple to Apollo, see Augustus *Res Gestae* 19, Propertius 2.31.9, Suetonius *Div. Aug.* 29, Servius *ad Aen.* 6.72.

⁴⁶⁶ At the close of the fourth book of his *Fasti*, Ovid claims that the three gods have their residence under Augustus' roof: Vesta, Apollo, and Augustus. Ovid *Fasti* 4.949-54: Aufer, Vesta, diem: cognati Vesta recepta est/limine; sic iusti constituere patres./ Phoebus habet partem: Vestae pars altera cessit:/quod superest illis, tertius ipse tenet./state Palatinae laurus, praetextaque quercu/stet domus: aeternos tres habet una deos.

⁴⁶⁷ Augustus *Res Gestae* 7

⁴⁶⁸ Julius Caesar was a *pontifex* (the *pontifex maximus*, in fact) and an *augur*. See Cassius Dio 42.51.4 for Caesar's reluctance to amass further priesthoods. Augustus' eagerness to acquire priestly titles should be contrasted with his reluctance to obtain magistracies. He constantly displayed himself as a mediator between Rome and the gods – a savior to Rome who influenced politics through his *auctoritas*, rather than a man who grasped for power.

Rome.⁴⁶⁹ Even Augustus' chosen name bore religious connotations, signifying a place consecrated by the augurs.⁴⁷⁰

In this climate of religious reformation and innovation, Roman religion found a second center; the Palatine home of the emperor now rivaled the Capitoline Temple of Jupiter as a focus of power. Amidst all these changes, the Sibylline Books did not remain untouched. Augustus, a *quindecimvir* himself, ordered his colleagues to edit and recopy the Books; he moved them to the Palatine Temple of Apollo, his patron and neighbor; and he used them to perform one of the most significant ceremonies of his age, the *Ludi Saeculares*. As I will show, these actions surrounding the Sibylline Books took place in a very limited time period. In this chapter, I will examine each of these changes in light of Augustus' religious and political program, and I will explore the implications in Augustus' brief interest in the Books.

THE END OF PRODIGIES?

Despite all of Augustus' wide-ranging religious reforms and restorations, Livy tells us that by his own day one important aspect of republican religion – the reporting of prodigies – had all but disappeared.

Non sum nescius ab eadem negligentia qua nihil deos portendere volgo nunc credant neque nuntiari admodum ulla prodigia in publicum neque in annales referri. Ceterum et mihi vetustas res scribenti nescio quo pacto antiquus fit animus, et quaedam religio tenet quae illi prudentissimi viri publice suscipienda censuerint, ea pro indignis habere quae in meos annales referam.

I am not unaware that because of this same negligence that leads men to believe that the gods portend nothing to the people, no prodigies are ever announced in public nor recorded in our histories. Yet not only does my

⁴⁶⁹ Price (1996) 831

⁴⁷⁰ Price (1996) 822

own mind become in some way old-fashioned as I write about these ancient matters, but also a certain reverence keeps me from considering unworthy for me to write in my history things which those very wise men judged should be undertaken for the common good.⁴⁷¹

In this famous passage, a rare interruption that pulls the reader into the author's own time, Livy tells us that prodigies are no longer reported publicly or recorded by historians. He uses the word *nuntiare*, the technical term for reporting a prodigy to a consul or praetor.⁴⁷² People, he claims, were no longer reporting prodigies. Some scholars may dismiss this statement as obvious Livian propaganda, a nod to the decline of his time so famously lamented in his preface. Yet we must keep in mind that Livy's intended audience was not 21st century scholars; it was the Romans of his own day. Could Livy have made such a concrete claim about contemporary practices if it were false?

Livy is not, after all, making a statement about a subjective topic, such as, "Young people do not respect their elders nowadays." He is making a claim about an objective reality, something that could be quantified, categorized, and discussed, and which would certainly have been recorded: the reporting of prodigies. If he were falsifying information on this matter, he would have seemed a fool or worse to his audience, contemporaries who certainly would have known the practices of their own time. Our other sources for the period support Livy's statement through their silence: From the victory at Actium in 31 BC, when Augustus secured sole power over Rome, to the

⁴⁷¹ Livy 43.13.1-2. We cannot date this passage accurately; Livy could have written it either before or after the Secular Games of 17 BC. See Stadter (1972) 291 for the composition of Books 41-45 as a unit.

⁴⁷² See Rasmussen (2003) 47 for this technical terminology.

emperor's death in 14 AD, ancient authors record only two prodigy lists, one in 17 BC, and the other in 16 BC.⁴⁷³

We will return to Livy's statement at the end of this chapter. In the meantime, it is important to keep in mind that all of the actions surrounding the Sibylline Books that we will discuss occurred at a time when the traditional practices of prodigy reporting and expiation had all but disappeared. Prodigies and expiations were no longer part of the annual rhythm of Roman life as they had been during the Roman republic; they were something entirely different. If, as Livy says, prodigies were no longer reported under Augustus, we must try to understand why the reporting of prodigies ceased so abruptly. Was it because of the policy of Augustus, or was it, as Livy claims, because Romans had become skeptical about direct communications from the gods? How might Augustus himself have viewed prodigies, and what place could they have had in his religious and political agendas?

THE QUINDECIMVIRI

Presenting himself as a religious reformer and Rome's representative to the gods, Augustus joined all the major priesthoods, and some that were not so major. He was a member of the *quindecimviri* by 37 BC, when a coin was issued showing the tripod, the symbol of the college.⁴⁷⁴ In 31 BC, following his victory at Actium and the beginning of promising relations with the Parthians, the Senate granted him a singular honor: the right

⁴⁷³ For the prodigies of 17 BC, see Obs. 71; for those of 16 BC, see Cassius Dio 54.19.7.

⁴⁷⁴ See Grueber (1910) 415 for the coin of 37 BC.

to choose priests even beyond the regular number.⁴⁷⁵ Augustus took advantage of this privilege, and by 17 BC, the year of the Ludi Saeculares, the *quindecimviri sacris faciundis* had at least twenty-one members.⁴⁷⁶ Their names appear multiple times in the inscribed marble record of the Ludi Saeculares, fragments of which were discovered in the northwest Campus Martius near the Tiber River. The names appear to be arranged in order of the members' entrance into the college.⁴⁷⁷ Only two of the priests listed in the inscription (Stolo and Scaevola) held no definite consulship in their lifetimes, while six had been consuls in recent years, between 24 and 19 BC.⁴⁷⁸ Augustus therefore increased the enrollment of the *quindecimviral* college and ensured that it was filled with distinguished men; thus despite the alleged freeze on prodigy reporting, the priesthood in charge of the Sibylline Books remained important.

THE RELOCATION OF THE SIBYLLINE BOOKS

Roman tradition held that when the Sibylline Books were first brought to Rome during the time of the kings, they were placed in a stone chest in the basement of the Capitoline Temple of Jupiter. For centuries, the original oracles resided in this temple. When the temple burned and new oracles were assembled, they were restored to their

⁴⁷⁵ Cassius Dio 51.20.3. In his *Res Gestae* Augustus mentions that 170 of the men who had served under him at Actium were appointed priests. This statement honors Augustus by honoring his supporters, but it also shows how he, having the power to appoint priests, supported his allies.

⁴⁷⁶ The number may be higher because the inscription may only include the names of the priests who were present for the Ludi Saeculares. While many of the priests who were serving abroad may have returned to Rome for such a grand occasion, it is possible that some would not have been able to leave their posts. See Hoffman (1952) p. 290 n. 6. However, the exact number of the priests is not significant; it is important to note that Augustus raised the membership of the priesthood drastically, whether the college had 21 members or more. In addition, it is interesting that the *name* of the priesthood, though based on the number of members, never changed from this time onward. The emperor maintained a flexibility in appointing new priests that was not dependent on any set number for the college.

⁴⁷⁷ See Hoffman (1952) 294 for the arrangement of the list of twenty-one *quindecimviri* on the *Acta Augusta*, the inscription commemorating the Ludi Saeculares.

⁴⁷⁸ See Gagé (1955) 551 for the magisterial status of the *quindecimviri* of 17 BC.

rightful position in the reconstructed Capitoline Temple; not even fire could keep the Sibylline oracles from their place. Augustus, however, managed to accomplish what the fire could not; he moved the Books from the Capitoline Temple to the Palatine Temple of Apollo.⁴⁷⁹

This relocation was by no means unreasonable; Sibylline lore confirmed that the Books did, in a sense, belong with Apollo. Apollo and the Sibyl had ancient and intimate connections. It was through the Sibylline Books that Apollo received his first temple in Rome in 431 BC. More than two centuries later, in 212 BC, the *decemviri* were involved in approving and directing the first performance of the Ludi Apollinares. And in 98 BC, Obsequens gives us a glimpse of the *decemviri* sacrificing in Apollo's temple.⁴⁸⁰

Furthermore, Apollo was renowned as a god of prophecy; the Greek myths told how Zeus had passed his oracular mantle to his son. Other legends, too, connected the god directly to the Sibyl: Vergil credits Apollo as the inspirer of the Sibyl's prophecies, while Ovid tells the story of Phoebus' passion for the Sibyl and his unfortunate gift of countless years to the seer.⁴⁸¹

Augustus initiated another similar redistribution of divine labor several years later: after he completed the temple to Mars Ultor in 2 BC, he displayed trophies of war in the temple and had the ceremonies accompanying the consuls' departure conducted there. Thus he removed certain rituals and prizes from Jupiter's care and placed them

⁴⁷⁹ For the relocation of the Sibylline Books to the Palatine temple, see Suetonius *Div. Aug.* 31. Servius *ad Aen.* 6.72 falsely assumes that the Books were always housed in the temple of Apollo. See also Steinby (1993) s. v. Apollo Palatinus.

⁴⁸⁰ See Livy 4.25.3 for the vowing of the Apollo temple, as recommended by the Sibylline Books. See Livy 25.12, Macrobius *Sat.* 1.17.25-30, Cicero *de Div.* 1.89 and 115, Servius *ad Aen.* 6.70-2, and Dio 15 (Zon. 9.1) for the events of 212 BC. See Obsequens 47 for the sacrifice in Apollo's temple in 98 BC.

⁴⁸¹ Vergil *Aeneid* 6 depicts the Sibyl in the thrall of Apollo; at 6.628 Vergil calls the Sibyl *Phoebi longaeva sacerdos*. Ovid *Met.* 14.123 tells the story of the Sibyl's unhappy gift from Apollo, eternal life combined with wasting youth.

under the eye of Mars, the patron god of the Octavii, and the deity who had helped him avenge Julius Caesar's death. With both these reassignments – that of Apollo and that of Mars – the relocations reveal not only a desire to appropriate honor for Augustus' own gods and temples but also to adhere to a division of labor that derived from a conception of the specializations of the various gods. In any case, neither move might have been possible if the destruction of the Temple of Jupiter in 83 BC had not broken its continuous reign as the storehouse of Rome's greatest treasures.

Perhaps it was because the relocation of the Sibylline Books was so logical that our ancient sources speak so little about it. Only Suetonius addresses the move directly. He claims that in 12 BC, after Augustus had become *pontifex maximus*, he transferred the Books from Jupiter's keeping to Apollo's.⁴⁸² Yet scholars have questioned the accuracy of this date. Suetonius includes a number of activities in this list of religious innovations that certainly did not take place at this time – including the Ludi Saeculares of 17 BC.⁴⁸³ In addition, the involvement of the *pontifex maximus* in the activities of the *quindecimviri* would have been a complete religious revolution. It was only later, as a result of the continuous assumption of this priestly mantle by subsequent emperors, that the *pontifex maximus* became the head of all Roman religion.

There is some evidence of an earlier date for the relocation of the Sibylline Books.⁴⁸⁴ In Book 6 of the *Aeneid*, Aeneas, spurred on by the raging Sibyl, offers prayers to Apollo. He promises a marble temple to Apollo and Diana and a festival to the god. Each of these vows, offered by the distant father of Rome through the promise of all of Roman history, was fulfilled much later: The marble temple was dedicated by Augustus

⁴⁸² Suetonius *Div. Aug.* 31

⁴⁸³ See Price (1996) 827.

⁴⁸⁴ I will outline this evidence below. See Gagé (1955) 542-5 for further analysis.

in 28 BC,⁴⁸⁵ while the games were begun in 212 BC, initiated by the Carmina Marciana. After addressing the god, Aeneas makes a promise to his servant, the Sibyl: an inner shrine (*penetralia*) where her oracles will be placed, and illustrious men to guard her words.⁴⁸⁶ It is possible, of course, that this vow refers only to the stone chest in the Capitoline Temple of Jupiter. But in the context of the passage, which alludes to Augustus' temple to Apollo, it is more likely a reference to the home that Augustus commissioned for the Books – a more glorious residence of solid gold cases set in the base of Apollo's statue. Thus it is quite likely that Vergil, who died in 19 BC, saw the Books moved to Apollo's temple in his own lifetime.

Tibullus provides even stronger evidence that the Books were in their new location by 19 BC. Tibullus dedicated an elegy (2.5) – his longest poem – to M. Valerius Messalla Messallinus upon his induction into the *quindecimviral* college, not long before the poet's death in 19 BC.⁴⁸⁷ This poem, commemorating a *quindecimvir*, takes the form of a paean to Apollo. In this way, Tibullus links the priesthood to the god. In lines 15-18 he writes:

Te duce Romanos numquam frustrata Sibylla,
 abdita quae senis fata canit pedibus.
 Phoebæ, sacras Messalinum sine tangere chartas
 vatis, et ipse precor quid canat illa doce.

With you as her guide, the Sibyl who sings the hidden fates

⁴⁸⁵ The mention of marble makes clear that the temple referred to by Vergil is not the original temple to Apollo, dedicated in 431 BC outside the pomerium, but the temple built by Augustus. For references to the marble construction of the temple, see also Prop. 2.31.9, Verg. *Aen.* 8.720, and Ov. *Trist.* 3.1.60.

⁴⁸⁶ Vergil *Aeneid* 6.69-76: Tum Phoebæ et Triviae solido de marmore templum/instituum festosque dies de nomine Phoebæ./Te quoque magna manent regnis penetralia nostris./Hic ego namque tuas sortes arcanaque fata/dicta meae genti ponam, lectosque sacro/alma, viros. Foliis tantum ne carmina manda,/ne turbata volent rapidis ludibria ventis;/ipsa canas oro.' Finem dedit ore loquendi.

⁴⁸⁷ Hoffman (1952) 290 FN 4. As the last name on the list of *quindecimviri* on the *Acta Augusta* of 17 BC, Messallinus must have been the most recent member of the college. Consul in 3 BC, he was a young man when chosen as a member of the *quindecimviral* college. Gagé (1955) 544 places Messallinus' enrollment in the college between 21 and 19 BC.

in hexameter verse has never deceived the Romans.
Phoebus, permit Messalinus to touch the sacred pages
of the seer and teach him yourself what she sings.

In this passage, Tibullus identifies Apollo as the guardian of the oracles of the Sibyl.

Apollo guides the seer and interprets her words for the priest. At the same time, he protects the pages of the seer's text, so that the priest must receive the blessing of Apollo in order to approach the Books. These lines could be explained away by Apollo's broader connections with the Sibyl, but Tibullus' verses make most sense if the Sibylline Books were by this time housed in the temple of Apollo.

Gagé cites one last piece of evidence in support of dating the relocation of the Sibylline Books to around 19 BC⁴⁸⁸: a coin of Antistius Vestus, dated to 16 BC, which may show the boxes where the Sibylline Books were kept.⁴⁸⁹ On the coin, which bears the inscription "Actio," Apollo, holding a cithara, stands atop a platform with three boxes underneath. It is difficult to distinguish these three objects on the coin; many scholars have assumed that they are ships' beaks. But Gagé, following Cahn, identifies these boxes as the golden chests containing the Sibylline Books.⁴⁹⁰

The literary evidence derived from Vergil and Tibullus, who both died in 19 BC, along with the evidence of the coin of 16 BC, point to an earlier date than 12 BC for the relocation of the Sibylline Books. This may have been as early as 28 BC, when the

⁴⁸⁸ Price (1996) 832-3 dates the move of the Books between 23 and 19 BC; Gagé (1955) 548 dates the move between 22 and 19 BC, but claims that it likely took place between 21 and 19 BC.

⁴⁸⁹ Gagé (1955) 545f. See Cahn (1944) 203-8 for a discussion of the coin.

⁴⁹⁰ Though Suetonius claims that there were two boxes containing the Books, it is quite possible that there were actually three. The origin stories of the Sibylline Books always talk about them in multiples of threes: Either there were originally three books which were reduced to one, or nine books which were reduced to three. The long and extensive search for replacement oracles after the fire of 83 BC likely resulted in the Romans' acquiring a collection comparable in size to the original set.

Temple of Apollo was dedicated.⁴⁹¹ The Books were, after all, kept *duobus forulis auratis sub Palatini Apollinis basi* (“in two golden boxes under the base of the Palatine Apollo statue.”)⁴⁹² It would be logical to assume that the oracles were moved when the statue was erected. On the other hand, the relocation of the Books may be connected with another event that occurred in 18 BC: the editing of the oracles.

COLLECTING AND EDITING ORACLES

According to Suetonius, Augustus did not just move the Sibylline Books in 12 BC. He also authorized a collection of oracles, taking up and destroying all the copies of Greek and Latin prophetic verse. He kept only the Sibylline Books, but not without editing even this collection (*hos quoque dilectu habito*).⁴⁹³ Tacitus mentions what seems to be the same event in the context of a later episode in his *Annals*. When in AD 32 Caninius Gallus, a *quindecimvir*, proposed that another Sibylline book be added to the official collection, Tiberius scolded him for applying an improper procedure for approving the oracles. The verses, the emperor maintained, were spurious. To assuage the young man’s enthusiasm, Tiberius mentioned the frequency with which Sibylline oracles were falsified, and he named some examples of fraudulent prophecies that had been destroyed in the past. Augustus, he claimed, had ordered the people to deliver their

⁴⁹¹ Gagé (1955) 548-9 expresses a reluctance to date the relocation to 28 BC, though with no good reason other than a sense that Augustus worked slowly, and that his moving the Books six years after the completion of the temple would not be extraordinary.

⁴⁹² Suetonius *Div. Aug.* 31

⁴⁹³ Suetonius *Divus Augustus* 31: *Postquam vero pontificatum maximum, quem numquam vivo Lepido auferre sustinuerat, mortuo demum suscepit, quidquid fatidicorum librorum Graeci Latinique generis nullis vel parum idoneis auctoribus vulgo ferebatur, supra duo milia contracta undique cremavit ac solos retinuit Sibyllinos, hos quoque dilectu habito; condiditque duobus forulis auratis sub Palatini Apollinis basi.*

oracles to the urban praetor, and after that time it was unlawful for private citizens to possess oracles.⁴⁹⁴

This collection offers evidence not only of the Roman people's enduring interest in oracles, but also of Augustus' own fear of their power.⁴⁹⁵ Through the destruction of these oracles, Augustus was able not only to lessen the latent threat of prophecy as it had been revealed in the late Republic, but also to validate the State's own Sibylline collection – those oracles that were so conveniently attached to Augustus' very home.

Again, since it has already been shown that Suetonius' date for the relocation is probably inaccurate, little weight can be given to his date of 12 BC for the editing of the oracles. Given the timing proposed above for the relocation in or before 19 BC, it is possible that the editing of the Books also occurred around this date. In fact, right around this time – in 18 BC – Cassius Dio claims that Augustus had the *quindecimviri* recopy the passages in the Sibylline Books that had become difficult to read through age.⁴⁹⁶ Gag   assumes that this meant that some texts survived from before the fire of 83 BC, but it could in fact represent a claim on Augustus' part – quite possibly true – that some of the oracles collected after the fire were actually very ancient.⁴⁹⁷ If Dio's date of 18 BC can be taken as a time of general editing of the Sibylline Books, it is noteworthy (and not

⁴⁹⁴ Tacitus *Annales* 6.12: *Relatum inde ad patres a Quintiliano tribuno plebei de libro Sibyllae, quem Caninius Gallus quindecimvirum recipi inter ceteros eiusdem vatis et ea de re senatus consultum postulaverat. Quo per discessionem facto misit litteras Caesar, modice tribunum increpans ignarum antiqui moris ob iuventam. Gallo exprobrabat quod scientiae caerimoniarumque vetus incerto auctore ante sententiam collegii, non, ut adsolet, lecto per magistros aestimatoque carmine, apud infrequentem senatum egisset. simul commonefecit, quia multa vana sub nomine celebri vulgabantur. Sanxisse Augustum quem intra diem ad praetorem urbanum deferrentur neque habere privatim liceret.*

⁴⁹⁵ Dio 56.25.5: Augustus outlawed astrology in AD 11, perhaps for some of the same reasons. See Barton (1994) 40-43 for astrology under Augustus.

⁴⁹⁶ Cassius Dio 54.17: καὶ τὰ ἔπη τὰ Σιβύλλεια ἐξίτηλα ὑπὸ τοῦ χρόνου γεγονότα τοὺς ἱερέας αὐτοχειρίᾳ ἐκγράψασθαι ἐκέλευεν, ἵνα μηδεὶς ἕτερος αὐτὰ ἀναλέξηται.

⁴⁹⁷ Gag   (1955) 547

surprising) that the relocation of the Books and the editing of the texts may have occurred at about the same time.

Augustus' collection and destruction of private oracles is reminiscent of the events of 213 BC, when the Senate ordered the urban praetor to collect and destroy oracles that were circulating among the people. In this earlier search, the praetor found one oracle that was worth saving: the *Carmina Marciana*. This text prophesied (or at least claimed to prophesy, since it was discovered after the fact) the Roman defeat at Cannae that had occurred in 216 BC, and it advised the Romans to conduct games to Apollo, the *Ludi Apollinares*. After the oracle was checked against the Sibylline Books, the Romans performed the games.⁴⁹⁸

Thus in his collection of oracles, Augustus may have been following an old and venerable precedent. But the similarities between the events of the Second Punic War and those of Augustus' reign go much further than the destruction of oracles. In both cases, the collection served to validate the State's own oracles, confirming the State's exclusive right to possess and judge oracles. And if the dating proposed here for Augustus' actions is accurate – if the Books were moved around 19 BC, and edited shortly thereafter – Augustus' collection, like that of 213 BC, also resulted in the performance of an important festival, the *Ludi Saeculares*, which took place in 17 BC.⁴⁹⁹ The Secular Games, however, were advised not by a private oracle that had just been brought to light, but by the Sibylline Books themselves. In the next section, I will examine the role of the Sibylline Books in the performance of these games, and the place of the *Ludi Saeculares* in the political and religious program of Augustus.

⁴⁹⁸ For the *Carmina Marciana* and the collection of 213 BC, see Livy 25.1 and 25.12.

⁴⁹⁹ Gagé (1955) 546 compares Augustus' collection of oracles and subsequent performance of the *Ludi Saeculares* with the events of 213-212 BC.

THE LUDI SAECULARES

The Sources

The Ludi Saeculares are the best-documented of all Roman ceremonies, with evidence extant from a wide variety of sources. The most important of these are the *Acta Augusta*⁵⁰⁰, or *Commentarium Ludorum Saecularium*, a marble inscription with a long and complex history. Twelve fragments of the inscription exist today. The majority of the fragments (Fragments D, F, G, H, I, K, L, and M) were discovered in 1890 in medieval fortification walls near the Tiber River; they were then placed in the Therme Museum. Before this find these pieces had likely never moved very far; the original inscription was probably erected near this spot on the Tiber's banks, in the Campus Martius, where several ceremonies of the Ludi Saeculares were performed. Fragments A and E were part of the collection of inscriptions of the Villa Ceuli at least since 1576. Fragment A was lost, and only two copies survive. Fragment E came into the hands of Fulvio Orsini, and was later donated to the Capitoline Museum, then joined the Tiber fragments in the Therme Museum. Fragment A, though long known to scholars, was dismissed by Mommsen as not belonging to the Augustan *Commentarium Ludorum Saecularium*. His opinion persuaded even Giovanni Battista Pighi, whose 1941 edition of the fragments was for a long time the standard. The final fragments, B and C, were first published in 1982-4 by Luigi Moretti; they were moved in 1852 from the Palazzo Albani

⁵⁰⁰ This name distinguishes the fragments from later *Acta* of a performance of the Ludi Saeculares in 204 AD, under the Severans. These Severan *Acta* have been instrumental in reconstructing missing lines from the *Acta Augusta*.

di Soriano del Cimino to the Palazzo Chigi, and now reside in Florence's Uffizi Museum.⁵⁰¹

The fragments as they exist today number 195 incomplete lines. The text as it can be pieced together is remarkable in its rather humdrum bureaucratic approach: no superlatives for gods or men, just a deep concern with recording all of the administrative details accurately.⁵⁰² The inscription begins with the very mundane issue of the funding of the Ludi Saeculares. No advice on the financing of the games was discovered in the *antiqueis libreis*, so the games were modelled on the ceremonies of 20 BC conducted for the health of Augustus. It is unclear what these *antiqueis libreis* might have been – either the Sibylline Books themselves, or the *commentarii* of the *quindecimviri* or some other sort of priestly or magisterial record.⁵⁰³ Perhaps the inscription gives us a clue as to what might actually have been recorded in priestly *commentarii*. The inscription describes the actions of the consuls, the senate, and the priests in preparing for the games, then the performance of the ceremonies in detail. It seems to have been based on a written record intended to provide accurate guidelines for a future repetition of the games; the

⁵⁰¹ For the fragments of the *Acta Augusta* see Mommsen (1891 and 1913), Pighi (1941 and 1965²), Moretti (1982-4), and Schnegg-Köhler (2002). Pighi is useful as a collection of most of the ancient sources on the Ludi Saeculares, beyond just the *Acta Augusta*. Schnegg-Köhler provides a very helpful transcription of all of the fragments of the *Acta*, with a parallel German translation and commentary.

⁵⁰² For example, the *Acta Augusta* give two very simple reasons for the performance of the Ludi Saeculares: propter religionem atque etiam quod tali spectaculo [nemo iterum intererit - - - lu-] (“because of religion and because no one will ever be present for them again”) (Fragments D-M ln. 54 from Schnegg-Köhler 2002). In other words, no mention of prodigies or of the tradition of the games, just a simple statement about *religio* and spectacle. This line has a fascinating parallel in Cicero's *de Haruspicum Responsis* 24, where Cicero discusses Clodius' bands of slaves who stopped free people from attending the Megalenses: quo si qui liber aut spectandi aut etiam religionis causa accesserat, manus adferebantur . . . (“If any free person either for the sake of watching or for the sake of religion had gone there, the bands would have prevented him . . .”) Each passage seems to distinguish between matters of religion and matters of spectacle.

⁵⁰³ The ancient *commentarii* of the *quindecimviri* had quite possibly been destroyed in the Capitoline fire along with the Sibylline Books; it would have made sense for the two collections to have been stored together. For the possible identity of these ancient books as senatorial records or *quindecimviral commentarii*, see Scheid (1998) and Liberman (1998) in the same volume.

inscription itself, with its careful attention to detail, records and memorializes the complexity and gravity of the games.⁵⁰⁴

A second important record of the Ludi Saeculares is Horace's *Carmen Saeculare*, the hymn composed by the poet to be performed at the games. It was sung by 27 boys and 27 girls on both the Capitoline and the Palatine Hills.⁵⁰⁵ In contrast to the *Acta Augusta*, which stood more as a record of the ceremonies, this hymn marks the religious and state concerns behind the festival. The *Carmen Saeculare* bears a more modern tone than the prayers inscribed in the *Acta*, which ask anachronistically for the continued submission of the Latins; Horace's hymn turns the gods' attention to contemporary Roman concerns, such as the Parthians⁵⁰⁶ and Augustus' marriage legislation of 17 BC. Duncan Barker points out the limited and rather practical scope of Horace's song. We are left to wonder what form the hymn might have taken under the hand of Vergil, who had he not died in 19 BC would likely have been chosen to compose the song. Perhaps Horace's focus on contemporary matters and the concerns of daily life would have been superseded by more grandiose themes, and the *aurea mediocritas* would have been replaced by *saecula aurea*.⁵⁰⁷

Even more importantly for this study of the Sibylline Books, we also have the Sibylline oracle that initiated the games, as preserved by Phlegon of Tralles and Zosimus.

⁵⁰⁴ The grandiosity of this inscription, along with the explicit mention of the Ludi Saeculares in Augustus' *Res Gestae*, reveal the importance of the games.

⁵⁰⁵ The singing of the hymn is described in the *Acta Augusta*, Fragments D-M Ins.147-9: *Sacrificioque perfecto pueri [X]XVII quibus denuntiatur erat patrimi et matrimi et puellae totidem/carmen cecinerunt. Eo[de]mq[ue] modo in Capitolio. (vacat)/Carmen composuit Q. Hor[at]ius Flaccus. (vacat)* The sacrifice described was to Apollo and Diana on the Palatine. The stipulation that the children have both parents living was a common one in such public rituals. See Warde Fowler (1910) for the singing of the hymn in both locations.

⁵⁰⁶ Gagé (1945) 548 connects the performance of the Ludi Saeculares with the Parthians' surrender of the Roman standards in 20/19 BC.

⁵⁰⁷ See Barker (1996) for Horace's constant play against the Vergilian idea of the return of the golden age of Saturn. Perhaps the *Carmen Saeculare* would have looked much more like the Fourth Eclogue had Vergil lived just two years longer.

This Greek oracle, consisting of 38 lines of hexameter, is not composed in acrostics; only a few lines of the poem take the acrostic form. I will discuss this Sibylline oracle in more detail later. As will be shown below, the games are further documented by coins which commemorated the Ludi and the testimony of a number of ancient sources, including Zosimus and Censorinus.⁵⁰⁸

The Ceremonies

Augustus' Ludi Saeculares, which began on the night of May 31, 17 BC, consisted of three nights and three days of sacrifices. The ceremonies spanned a wide range of locations in the city – the Campus Martius, the Capitoline, and the Palatine – and involved a vast number of people. Augustus, who was serving as *magister* of the *quindecimviri*, conducted sacrifices alone by night, and Agrippa joined him by day. Select matrons, girls, and boys held their own special roles, while the distribution of torches, sulphur, and asphalt to the entire free population and the demand that the people bring offerings of first-fruits ensured widespread public participation.⁵⁰⁹

On the first night, Augustus sacrificed nine goats to the Moirai (the Fates) at the place called Tarentum, which was located in the Campus Martius near the Tiber River.⁵¹⁰ *Ludi* were then held on a stage, with no theater or seating, and 110 matrons chosen by the *quindecimviri* held *sellisternia* for Juno and Diana. On the following day (June 1), Augustus and his son-in-law Marcus Agrippa sacrificed two bulls to Jupiter Optimus

⁵⁰⁸ See Pighi (1941) for these sources.

⁵⁰⁹ For the bringing of first-fruits, see the *Acta Augusta* Fragments D-M lns 8-11. For the distribution of torches, see Price (1996) 835, who points out that this widespread participation was not a part of the Republican ritual. See also Bendlin (2000) 128 for the encouragement of participation in the games through the advertisement of trombonists, the distribution of fumigants, and the suspension of certain religious and legal restrictions on attendance.

⁵¹⁰ See Steinby (1993) s.v. Tarentum.

Maximus on the Capitoline. Afterward, Latin plays were displayed in a wooden theater in the Campus Martius, and matrons again performed *sellisternia*. Later that night, Augustus offered nine cakes to Ilythia at the Tarentum.

On the following day (June 2), Augustus and Agrippa each sacrificed a cow to Juno Regina on the Capitoline. After they offered the appropriate prayer, Agrippa conducted the 110 matrons in a prayer to Juno Regina. Plays were again held, and that night at the Tarentum Augustus sacrificed a pregnant sow to Terra Mater. Afterward, the matrons repeated the *sellisternia*. On the next day (June 3), Augustus and Agrippa offered nine cakes to Apollo and Diana on the Palatine, and Horace's *Carmen Saeculare* was sung by 27 boys and 27 girls on the Palatine and then the Capitoline. Following theatrical games, chariot racing was presented in the Campus Martius. Finally, seven additional days of games, beginning on June 5, were added to the games, including Latin plays in the Campus Martius, Greek shows in the theater of Pompey, Greek plays in the Circus Flaminius, a hunting display, and circus games. On the final day, June 12, boys participated in the *Lusus Troiae*, and Marcus Agrippa presented chariot races and a hunting display.

The History and Timing of the Ludi Saeculares

The Ludi Saeculares were thought of as a traditional Republican ritual, a celebration of the end of one age, or *saeculum*, and the beginning of a new one. The festival was to be performed anew when every man who had seen it before had died.⁵¹¹

⁵¹¹ Censorinus *DN* 17.2: *Saeculum est spatium vitae humanae longissimum partu et morte definitum.* ("A saeculum is the longest span of human life measured from birth to death.") See also the *Acta Augusta* Frgs. D-M lines 53-4: [. . . *quod ludi saeculares sunt instituti*] *propter re[ligione]m atqu<e> etiam quod tali*

In theory, therefore, the saeculum was flexible: *modus Romani saeculi est incertus*.⁵¹²

But the Roman State fixed the timing based on estimates of man's longest possible life expectancy; sources disagree on whether this was 100 or 110 years.⁵¹³ The aetiological legend of the games, however, associated the first performance not with the new *saeculum* but with a plague. The games were supposedly conducted under Valerius Publicola, either in his first consulship in 509 BC or his second in 504.⁵¹⁴ They were based on an ancient ceremony performed by Valerius' ancestor, the Sabine Valesius. When his children were terribly ill, Valesius traveled to the Campus Martius near the Tiber River, at a place called the Tarentum, to sacrifice at an altar to Dis Pater and Proserpina. The children recovered, and Valesius established a three-night festival in

spectaculo [nemo iterum intererit - - lu-] ("that the Secular Games were instituted because of religion and also that no one again would be present for such a spectacle").

⁵¹² Censorinus *DN* 17.7

⁵¹³ There is a great deal of confusion surrounding the length of the *saeculum*. Censorinus *DN* 17.8-9 writes that Varro, along with Livy, set the *saeculum* at 100 years. Augustine *CD* 22.28, on the other hand, claims that Varro wrote that a period of renewal began after 440 years: *Genethliaci quidam scripserunt, inquit, esse in renascendis hominibus quam appellant *paliggenesi/an Graeci; hac scripserunt confici in annis num ero quadringentis quadraginta, ut idem corpus et eadem anima, quae fuerint coniuncta in homine aliquando, eadem rursus redeant in coniunctionem*. Many scholars have taken this number of 440 years, divisible by 110, as a sign that Varro accepted a *saeculum* of 110 years, despite Censorinus' direct statement to the contrary. See Beard, North, and Price (1998) 205 and Taylor (1934) 105 for the scholarly acceptance of Varro's *saeculum* as 110 years. Denis Feeney (2007) 145, on the other hand, appears to accept (I think rightly) Censorinus' statement that Varro's *saeculum* was 100 years. He cites Watkins (1995) 351, who sees the "ideal human lifespan of 100 years" as "Indo-European patrimony." The Augustan Verrius Flaccus, as quoted in the Pseudo-Acro Scholia on Horace Carmen Saeculare 8, claims that the *saeculum* was fixed at 110 years during the First Punic War: *Valerius* (the Schol. Cruq. have the correct Verrius) *Flaccus refert carmen saeculare et sacrificium inter annos centum et decem Diti et Proserpinae constitutum bello Punico primo ex responso decemvirorum, cum iussi essent libros Sibillinos inspicere ob prodigium, quod eo bello accidit. Nam pars murorum urbis fulmine icta ruit. Atque ita responderunt: bellum adversus Kartaginenses prospere geri posse, si Diti et Proserpinae triduo, idest tribus diebus et tribus noctibus, ludi fuissent celebrati et carmen cantatum inter sacrificia. Hoc [autem] accidit consulibus P. Claudio Pulchro L. Iunio Pulchro (249 BC). Cum Roma pestilentia laboraret, ex libris Sibillinis iussum est, ut Diti Patri ad Tarentum stipes mitteretur. Hoc etiam idem libri iusserunt, ut nobilium liberi in Capitolio hoc carmen decantarent*. Yet according to Festus s.v. *Saeculares Ludos*, Verrius Flaccus numbered the *saeculum* at 100 years. It is significant that there was such great confusion on the subject. This may give weight to the theory that the Ludi Saeculares were not instituted as a regular festival until rather late in the Republic (see below). Or it may signal a later change in the length of the *saeculum*, perhaps under Augustus, from 100 to 110 years.

⁵¹⁴ Valerius Maximus *Memorable Deeds and Sayings* 2.4.5 and Zosimus 2.1-3 place Valerius Publicola's games in his first consulship in 509 BC, Plutarch *Publicola* 21 dates them to his second consulship in 504.

honor of the god and goddess.⁵¹⁵ Later, when Rome was afflicted by a plague in the early Republic, the consul Valerius Publicola was said to have performed his ancestor's ceremony in the name of all Rome.

Though the name implies regularity in its performance, the dates of the Ludi Saeculares were variable, and true historical performances are difficult to recover. Many scholars believe that the earliest actual performance took place in 249 BC when the First Punic War was in its worst phase for the Romans.⁵¹⁶ The sources differ on the reason that the Romans conducted these games, whether because of the prodigy of lightning strikes, a plague, or the desperate nature of the war.⁵¹⁷ Varro calls these games, performed to Dis Pater and Proserpina, the Ludi Tarentini because they were held at the spot called the Tarentum in the Campus Martius.⁵¹⁸ Other sources date a later performance of these rites to 149 or 146 BC, approximately 100 years after the earlier games.⁵¹⁹ This was the last known performance before the time of Augustus. Either date – 149 or 146 BC – places the games in the time of the Third Punic War, and therefore connects this performance circumstantially to that of 249 BC.⁵²⁰

⁵¹⁵ Valerius Maximus *Memorable Deeds and Sayings* 2.4.5, Zosimus 2.1-3

⁵¹⁶ See Beard, North, and Price (1998) 71 for the dating of the first Ludi Saeculares to 249 BC. Contra Taylor (1934) who puts a previous set of games in 348 BC.

⁵¹⁷ For the games of 249 BC, see Livy *Per.* 49, Cens. *DN* 17.8, Fest. 441.4, Schol. ad Hor. CS 8

⁵¹⁸ Varro in Censorinus *DN* 17.8. According to Beard, North, and Price (1998) 71, Ludi Tarentini may have been the original Republican title of the games; the name Ludi Saeculares may in fact be Augustan. Cf. Livy, *Per.* 49, where the games of 149 BC that repeat those of 249 are called simply *ludi Diti patri ad Tarentum: altero et sescentesimo ab urbe condita anno . . . ludi Diti patri ad Tarentum ex praecepto librorum facti, qui ante annum centesimum primo Punico bello, quingentesimo et altero anno ab urbe condita facti erant.*

⁵¹⁹ Censorinus *DN* 17.11: *Antias enim et Varro et Livius relatos esse prodiderunt L. Marcio Censorino M'. Manilio Coss. post Romam conditam anno DCV. at Piso Censorius et Gn. Gellius, sed et Cassius Hemina, qui illo tempore vivebat, post annum factos tertium adfirmant Gn. Cornelio Lentulo L. Mummio Achaico Coss., id est anno DCVIII.* Since contemporary sources date the festival to 146 BC, this is usually accepted. See Taylor (1934) 111, 117.

⁵²⁰ According to Beard, North, and Price (1998) 111, it was during the performance of the 2nd century BC that the Ludi Saeculares became centennial games. Celebrated originally because of the circumstances of war, they came to be a regular celebration. "The first revival of these games is likely to be the time when

Thus by either reckoning – whether the 100 or 110 year *saeculum* – the games should have taken place decades before 17 BC. There are some indications, in fact, that earlier performances were discussed. Civil war made it impossible to hold the games at the appropriate time based on a hundred-year *saeculum*, in 49 or 46 BC, but the ceremonies were not forgotten: in 45 BC, the moneyer P. Valerius Asciculus, a member of the family most associated with the Ludi Saeculares, the Valerii, placed symbols of the *saeculum* on his coins.⁵²¹ After Julius Caesar's death, when the comet proclaimed his new divinity, plans again seem to have been made for the celebration, as symbols of the *saeculum* appeared on coins, and Vergil's Fourth Eclogue announced the coming of a new age. But the performance was put off a second time, perhaps because of the battles between Octavian and Antony's brother and wife, Lucius Antonius and Fulvia. Much later, in the 20's BC, Augustus' plans to celebrate the new *saeculum* must have been known; Vergil alludes to the new age in *Aeneid* 6.792-3, when he says that Augustus Caesar *aurea condet saecula*.⁵²²

Significantly, however, when Augustus and the *quindecimviri* finally performed the Ludi Saeculares in 17 BC, they conducted it without reference to the previous abortive attempts. In fact, they invented a whole series of four Republican games, each separated by a *saeculum* of 110 years, to establish Augustus' Ludi Saeculares in their proper order in the sequence.⁵²³ These games, inscribed in the margins of the Fasti

they were recognized as regular centennial games, again suggesting conscious decisions, presumably this time on the initiative of the *decemviri sacris faciundis*."

⁵²¹ See Taylor (1934) 118.

⁵²² Vergil *Aeneid* 6.791-7: hic uir, hic est, tibi quem promitti saepius audis,/Augustus Caesar, diui genus, aurea condet/saecula qui rursus Latio regnata per arua/Saturno quondam, super et Garamantas et Indos/proferet imperium; iacet extra sidera tellus,/extra anni solisque uias, ubi caelifer Atlas/axem umero torquet stellis ardentibus aptum. See also *Aeneid* 6.65-70.

⁵²³ For the cycle of 110 years in Augustus' Ludi Saeculares, see lines 1-2 of the Sibylline oracle, Horace *Carmen Saeculare* line 21, the *Acta Augusta* Frgs. D-M ln. 25.

Capitolini, were dated to 456, 346, 236, and 126 BC.⁵²⁴ This dating permitted the continued association of the Ludi Saeculares with the Valerii, since Valerius Maximus and Valerius Corvus were consuls in 456 and 346 respectively.⁵²⁵ Thus the games of 17 BC were presented not as another Augustan restoration – a make-up ceremony intended to appease gods who had been slighted at the proper time – but a performance that occurred just when it was intended, when the new *saeculum* was truly approaching.⁵²⁶

Many scholars have pointed out that the celebration in 17 BC was actually one year off the supposed historical cycle of the games; it should have occurred in 16 BC, 110 years after the last performance in 126. Yet as Lily Ross Taylor suggests, a variation of one year in the sequence may not have caused much concern at all.⁵²⁷ And there are reasons why Augustus may have seen 17 BC as the ideal time for the performance of the Ludi Saeculares. In the first place, this was the ten year anniversary of one of the greatest moments of Octavian's career, when he restored the Republic to the people and established his rule by the *imperium maius*. In 27 BC, the Senate granted the *princeps* remarkable honors for this restoration: the doorposts of Octavian's house were decorated with laurels, the civic crown was posted over his doorway, and the *clipeum virtutis* was set up in his honor at the Senate House. And even more significantly, in this year the *princeps'* name was changed in honor of his victory over Antony and Egypt, as the

⁵²⁴ Fasti Cons. Cap. C. I. L. I, 12, p. 29. Taylor (1934) 106 FN 20: "Augustus' celebration is listed as the fifth. Another fragment, an obvious addition on the margin of the stone, has a record of the third celebration in 236, which even gives the names of the magistri of the decemviri, a detail which shows that the inventions of the quindecimviri were fairly explicit. Similar records, now lost, must have existed for the celebrations of 456, 346, and 126."

⁵²⁵ Taylor (1934) 119: "Instead of the series 457, 347, 237, 127 which would have been the natural antecedents for the year 17, they chose 456, 346, 236, and 126. The reason seems to be that there were no Valerian consuls in the first series and that Valerius Maximus and Valerius Corvus, both in the line of the Valerii from whom the Valerii Messallae claimed descent, were consuls in the first two years of the second series."

⁵²⁶ Perhaps it would not have made sense to "make up" this ceremony. If the ceremony marks the new *saeculum*, it must be performed at the proper time.

⁵²⁷ Taylor (1934) 119

Senate granted Octavian the title “Augustus”. Ten-year spans were important to the Romans; we have already seen how Catiline’s conspiracy was associated with the burning of the Capitoline temple twenty years before and the trial of the Vestal Virgins ten years earlier.⁵²⁸ For later emperors, the ten-year anniversary of their assumption of power would be a time of major celebration, the Decennalia.⁵²⁹ Thus Augustus’ *Ludi Saeculares* may have been a sort of early Decennalia.⁵³⁰

In addition, in the previous year (18 BC), Augustus’s famous marriage laws, the *Lex Iulia de maritandis ordinibus* and the *Lex Iulia de adulteriis coercendis*, had been passed.⁵³¹ The former encouraged marriage and procreation, barring those who refused to marry and have children from receiving inheritances and attending public games. The latter made adultery a crime punishable by law, rather than just a family concern.⁵³² Despite their appeal to Roman tradition, these laws intruding on morality and family were an innovative form of legislation. The purpose of these laws – to restore ancient values and build stronger families – fit well with the idea of the new *saeculum*, when a former age would vanish, and a new one would take its place. Augustus’ celebration emphasized the elements of family life. It involved ceremonies by 110 matrons, – one for each year

⁵²⁸ Flower in Gardner and Osterloh, forthcoming: “In the increasingly tense political climate of the 60s BC it is not surprising, to see that the twentieth anniversary of the temple fire in 63 was apparently evoked by Catiline’s fellow conspirators, who were accused of planning to set fire to the city and to overthrow its traditional government, in alliance with some Gauls.” See Cicero *In Cat.* 3.9, Sallust *BC* 47.2.

⁵²⁹ Cassius Dio 53.16.2-4: τῆς γοῦν δεκαετίας ἐξελεύσεως ἄλλα ἔτη πέντε, εἴτα πέντε, καὶ μετὰ τοῦτο δέκα καὶ ἕτερα αὖθις δέκα πεμπτάκις ἃ αὐτῷ ἐψηφίσθη, ὥστε τῇ τῶν δεκετηρίδων διαδοχῇ διὰ βίου αὐτὸν μοναρχῆσαι. καὶ διὰ τοῦτο καὶ οἱ μετὰ ταῦτα αὐτοκράτορες, καίτοι μηκέτ’ ἐς τακτὸν χρόνον ἀλλ’ ἐς πάντα καθάπαξ τὸν βίον ἀποδεικνύμενοι, ὅμως διὰ τῶν δέκα αἰεὶ ἐτῶν ἐώρτασαν ὥς καὶ τὴν ἡγεμονίαν αὖθις τότε ἀνανεούμενοι· καὶ τοῦτο καὶ νῦν γίγνεται. See also Cassius Dio 54.12, 58.24, 76.1; Trebell. Poll. *Salonin.* 3, *Gallien.* 7. For speeches commemorating the five- and ten-year anniversaries of later emperors’ accessions, see Nixon and Rodgers (1994) 82 FN 5.

⁵³⁰ Augustus celebrated another anniversary year of his rise to power in 13 BC, “the thirtieth anniversary of his *dies imperii* (7 January 43 BC. . .), of his *acclamatio* as *imperator* (16 April 43 BC), and of his first consulship (19 August 43 BC).” See DuQuesnay (1995) 141.

⁵³¹ For Augustus’ marriage legislation, see Mette-Dittmann (1991).

⁵³² This may be another 10-year anniversary, if the laws really did fail in 28 BC. See Syme (1939, 2002 edition) 443, Propertius 2.7, Livy *Praef.* 9.

of the saeculum –hymns by 27 boys and 27 girls who had both parents living, a traditional stipulation for children’s participation in such ceremonies. Additional ceremonies were performed by women identified as *matres familiae* in the *Acta Augusta* – not just matrons, but mothers of children.⁵³³ The hymn that Horace composed for the occasion, the *Carmen Saeculare*, commemorated the marriage law explicitly.

Diva, producas subolem patrumque
prosperes decreta super iugandis
feminis prolisque novae feraci
lege marita,

Certus undenos deciens per annos
orbis ut cantus referatque ludos
ter die claro totiensque grata
nocte frequentes.

Goddess Ilithyia, raise our youth
and bless the decrees of the Senate
concerning wedlock and the marriage law,
fated to be fruitful in new offspring,

That the fixed cycle of 110 years
may bring back song and games
celebrated three times in bright daylight
and as many times in pleasant night.⁵³⁴

Thus the marriage laws, which Augustus claimed were essential to the continuance of the Roman race, were associated with the generational performance of the Secular Games. Even the origin myth of the Ludi, which claimed that Valesius had performed ceremonies to save the lives of his children, could be tied to Augustus’ attempt to shore up the Roman citizenry.⁵³⁵

⁵³³ See the *Acta Augusta* Frags. D-M lines 80 and 109. The fragmentary nature of line 80 makes it difficult to determine what rituals the *matres familiae* performed here, but line 109 describes sellisternia conducted on June 1 following the sacrifices to Jupiter Optimus Maximus.

⁵³⁴ Horace *Carmen Saeculare* lines 17-24

⁵³⁵ Also related to the issue of family, Augustus adopted his grandsons Lucius and Gaius in 17 BC. See Cassius Dio 54.18.

Furthermore, the years 18 to 17 BC constituted a rare two-year period in which Augustus stayed in Rome, not leaving the city to visit other provinces. In 23 BC, he had been in the city for a long period, but this year and the next were marked with trouble: a long illness, and the conspiracy against Augustus by Fannius Caepio and Aulus Terentius Varro Murena.⁵³⁶ From 22 until 19 BC, Augustus toured the East. And in 16 BC, he left for a three-year tour of Gaul and Spain. In 18 and 17 BC, his time in Rome gave Augustus the opportunity to institute his new legislation and plan the Secular Games. We can see, therefore, that 17 BC was an important year for Augustus, the tenth year after he established the new Roman constitution, and only one year after the passage of his marriage legislation. Each of these acts – his restoration of the state to the people in 27 BC, and his creation of moral legislation in 17 – was vital in presenting Augustus as a reformer who sought to restore the traditional values of the Roman State. The *Ludi Saeculares*, a celebration of a new age that was nevertheless tied with the traditional Roman past, was a fitting commemoration of Augustus' policies.

The Prodigies

One other explanation (or perhaps an excuse) may be offered for the performance of the games in 17 BC: the prodigies that were reported in that year. Obsequens records three prodigies for 17 BC: an earthquake at the estate of Livia in the Apennines; a comet (*fax caelestis*) which passed through the sky from south to north; and a tower in the *Horti Caesaris* near the Colline Gate that was struck by lightning.⁵³⁷ Obsequens does not relate these prodigies to the *Ludi Saeculares*; in fact, he does not mention the games at all.

⁵³⁶ For the crisis of 23-22 BC, see Kienast (1999) 99-109, Bleicken (1998) 345f.

⁵³⁷ Obsequens 71. These prodigies may have occurred in the previous year, as it seems to be common at least in the Republic to expiate prodigies at the beginning of the year after they had occurred.

Likewise, the *Acta Augusta*, the inscriptions of the games, fail to mention the prodigies. But in addition to the timing, there are reasons to believe that these prodigies preceded and helped to initiate the games.

Each of these three prodigies has a particular significance. The first stands out as being associated with a specific individual: Livia, the wife of Augustus. Based on the information in our sources, only one other prodigy in Roman history can be connected with a particular person: the speech of the consul's cow in 192 BC.⁵³⁸ Most prodigies, as we have seen, were associated not with individuals, but with places – towns or regions. The prodigy of 17 BC was exceptional, therefore, in being linked with an exceptional person; the mention of Livia associates the earthquake not only with Augustus, but with the entire imperial family.⁵³⁹

The second prodigy in the list, the comet spotted in the sky, appears to have also had an association with Augustus' family, since a comet most famously proclaimed Julius Caesar's divinity upon his death in 44 BC.⁵⁴⁰ But the comet had a further connection not just with Augustus' adoptive father, but also with the new *saeculum*. The comet was a renowned symbol of the *saeculum*, a herald of a new age. A coin of 17 BC bears striking witness to this complex association between the comet, the *saeculum*, and

⁵³⁸ See Livy 35.21.4 for the speech of the cow of the consul Gnaeus Domitius.

⁵³⁹ For another omen (this one private, not public) concerning Livia, see Pliny *NH* 15.136-7, Suetonius *Galba* 1, and Cassius Dio 48.52.3-4. According to legend, shortly after Augustus and Livia married in 38 BC, an eagle dropped a white hen unharmed into her lap. The bird held a laurel branch in its mouth. Livia cared for the hen and planted the laurel sprig, Pliny says by the advice of *haruspices*. The hen and the sprig flourished, producing many chickens and a grove of laurel trees. Augustus and later emperors wore this laurel in triumphal processions. Flory (1989) 347: "The laurel was the traditional attribute of the Republican triumphator, but by laying claim to and displaying a laurel of divine origin, Octavian proclaimed the special relationship of his gens to the gods." Flory (1989) 351 suggests that the white hen became the source of the *pulli* that Augustus and his descendants used in augury.

⁵⁴⁰ Suetonius *Div. Iul.* 88: *Periit sexto et quinquagesimo aetatis anno atque in deorum numerum relatus est, non ore modo decernentium, sed et persuasione uolgi. siquidem ludis, quos primo[s] consecrato[s] ei heres Augustus edebat, stella crinita per septem continuos dies fulsit exoriens circa undecimam horam, creditumque est animam esse Caesaris in caelum recepti; et hac de causa simulacro eius in uertice additur stella.* For Julius Caesar's comet see Domenicucci (1996) and Ramsey and Licht (1997).

Augustus' adoptive father. Inscribed with the title of the Ludi Saeculares, the coin carries the images of the head of Julius Caesar and a comet.⁵⁴¹

Like the comet, the third prodigy – lightning in the *Horti Caesaris* – is associated with Julius Caesar, but it may also have had a connection to a previous performance of the Ludi Saeculares. According to Varro, quoted in Censorinus *de Die Natali* 17.8, the first *ludi scaenici* took place at a performance of the Ludi Saeculares (here called the Ludi Tarentini after the spot in the Campus Martius, the Tarentum, at which they took place) which were held for just this reason:

Cum multa portenta fierent, et murus ac turris, quae sunt inter portam Collinam et Esquilinam, de caelo tacta essent, et ideo libros Sibyllinos Xviri adissent, renuntiarunt uti Diti patri et Proserpinae ludi Tarentini in Campo Martio fierent tribus noctibus, et hostiae furvae immolarentur, utique ludi centesimo quoque anno fierent.

When many portents had occurred, and the wall and tower which are between the Colline Gate and the Esquiline were struck by lightning, and for that reason the *decemviri* consulted the Sibylline Books, they announced that the Ludi Tarentini should be held to Dis Pater and Proserpina in the Campus Martius for three nights, and that black victims should be sacrificed, and that the games should be held every hundredth year.

The prodigy that Varro describes here – lightning strikes at the walls and towers between the Colline and Esquiline Gates – is remarkably similar to the third prodigy in Obsequens' list, lightning that struck a tower in the *Horti Caesaris* near the Colline Gate. The exact spot of the *Horti Caesaris* is unknown; they may have been on the opposite side of the Colline Gate, away from the Esquiline. Yet the general location and the nature of the prodigy of 17 BC seem to match too closely to Varro's prodigy to be a coincidence. And the mention of the *Horti Caesaris*, the gardens of Augustus' deceased

⁵⁴¹ See Galinsky (1996) 105, Weinstock (1971) 196 for the coin associating the Ludi Saeculares with Julius Caesar and the comet.

but divine father, again ties Augustus' Secular Games to Julius Caesar. Thus this final prodigy connected the games of 17 BC not only to a previous performance, but also to Augustus' family.

The prodigies leading up to the Ludi Saeculares, with their obvious connections to Augustus and his family and the traditions of the *saeculum*, give a strong impression that the games were closely orchestrated. The jurist and antiquarian Ateius Capito, whom Zosimus tells us was an advisor in the performance of the games, may have been involved in assembling and interpreting these prodigies.⁵⁴² Other details, too, mentioned above point to the lengthy planning and elaborate thought behind the *ludi*: the coincidence of the timing of the games with important events in Augustus' reign, the invention of a list of previous performances of the Ludi Saeculares, and the reference that Vergil made to Augustus' new *saeculum* in the 20's BC.

The Sibylline Oracle

In the same way, the Sibylline oracle which advised the *ludi*, recorded by Phlegon and Zosimus, appears to be a creation of Augustus' time. The text is a patchwork of several oracles: though the majority of the verses are not written in acrostics, an unmistakable acrostic shows up in lines 25-31, where the first letters spell out *dapedo-* (presumably the word was *dapedon*, meaning a flat surface.)⁵⁴³ The oracle must have been pieced together from a number of different texts, whether written in Augustus' time or earlier.

⁵⁴² Zosimus 2.4

⁵⁴³ See Diels (1890) 13-15 for the use of acrostics.

The most interesting lines of this Sibylline oracle are the last ones, which advise the Romans to perform the ceremonies in order to keep all of Italy and the Latins under Roman rule.⁵⁴⁴ This was certainly not a concern in Augustus' era, after the Social War had eradicated such divisions in Italy. Instead, it alludes most conspicuously to an earlier time – perhaps the period leading up to the Social War, or even the mid-fourth century when Rome finally consolidated her power over the Latins.⁵⁴⁵ The idea was also a major part of the ceremonies of the *ludi*, when Augustus and the matrons prayed that the Latins might always be obedient.⁵⁴⁶ This phrase, spoken multiple times by multiple performers, was thus a very public statement of the antiquity of the ceremonies.

This archaic and obviously anachronistic phrase proclaims a certain antiquity for the oracle and for the games. Yet we know that the Sibylline Books were destroyed in 83 BC. Based on the silence of our sources and the extensiveness of the efforts to assemble new oracles, we may assume that this destruction was complete. It is possible, of course, that the *quindecimviri* possessed *commentarii*, preserved in some other location, that went back to the time before the fire.⁵⁴⁷ But the claim of antiquity may have gone beyond just a few oracles. According to Cassius Dio, Augustus' recent editing of the Sibylline Books was due to the great age of the collection, whose deterioration made it necessary that they be recopied.⁵⁴⁸ Cassius Dio knew, of course, that Rome's Sibylline Books had been assembled less than sixty years ago; in Rome, where Augustus could

⁵⁴⁴ Phlegon of Tralles in Jacoby *FGrH* 2b, 257f, Frg. 37: καὶ σοι πᾶσα χθὼν Ἰταλὴ καὶ πᾶσα Λατίνων/αἰὲν ὑπὸ σκήπτροισιν ἐπαυχένιον ζυγὸν ἔξει.

⁵⁴⁵ Taylor (1934) argues that an early performance of the Ludi Saeculares should be dated to 348 BC.

⁵⁴⁶ See the *Acta Augusta* Fragments D-M lines 94 and 127: *utique semper Latinus obtemperassit*.

⁵⁴⁷ I find this unlikely, however. Where else would the *commentarii* of the *quindecimviri* have been stored, if not in the same safe location as the Sibylline Books? The priests also had a strong connection with Apollo, of course, but it is unclear when this association might have first been made.

⁵⁴⁸ Cassius Dio 54.17

allegedly read the inscription on the linen corselet of the consul of 428 BC,⁵⁴⁹ sixty-year-old documents were hardly impressive in their antiquity. Thus the editing may actually have been intended to advertise that even though these oracles had been assembled only 60 years ago, the texts themselves were of great antiquity, being already old when the Roman legates found them.

Tradition and Innovation

Through its association with the Sibyl, the collection boasted a certain age, and Augustus emphasized their antiquity in editing the oracles. So much that had to do with the Ludi Saeculares, in fact, connected them to previous festivals: the anachronistic phrases in the Sibylline oracle and the prayers in the ceremonies; the fictitious dates of previous performances that verified the timing of the Augustan games; the prodigy that tied it to earlier Ludi Saeculares; the primitive games conducted without theater or seats⁵⁵⁰; and the rituals performed at the Tarentum, the rarely used altar in the Campus Martius. This careful orchestration reveals a deep concern of the Augustan Age, the desire to “relate the present to the past.”⁵⁵¹

Despite the likelihood that the oracle was assembled or written exclusively for the Augustan Ludi Saeculares, the ceremonies nevertheless had a marked Sibylline character. They involved the active participation of women in *sellisternia*, a common element of

⁵⁴⁹ Livy 4.20

⁵⁵⁰ Theater was important to the early Ludi Saeculares, according to Varro, who associates the origins of theatrical performances in Rome with the *Ludi Tarentini*. See Beard, North, and Price (1998) 204: “Those who had read their Varro knew that quaint games of this type had to be incorporated into the new structure.” The same might be said of the shows held in wooden theaters constructed for the purpose, rather than the more modern theater of Pompey that was used for the Greek plays.

⁵⁵¹ Price (1996) 813: “Religion in the late Republic is best seen as suffering from disruption, not decline, while preoccupation with revival ignores the extent of change in the system. But Augustan stress on restoration need not be treated as a cunning obfuscation. The age was fundamentally concerned to relate the present to the past.”

Sibylline rites. As we have seen, it may have been only through the Sibylline Books that women first gained an important role in Roman public ritual.⁵⁵² In addition, 27 maidens (along with 27 boys) played a role in the ceremony by singing the hymn that Horace had composed for the festival, the *Carmen Saeculare*. This is reminiscent of the fairly common Sibylline expiation first begun in 207 BC, when 27 maidens sang the hymn of Livius Andronicus. Finally, the ceremonies called for the broad participation of the Roman populace. In preparation of the games, torches, sulphur, and asphalt were distributed to the entire free population of Rome. The ban on those who had violated the marriage laws was suspended, and mourning was forbidden to allow fuller participation in the games.

Yet despite their ties to tradition, the ceremonies of 17 BC were very Augustan in nature. Little of the republican performance could be recognized in the Augustan rites. Though Varro tells us that the Republican Ludi Saeculares involved sacrifices to Dis Pater and Proserpina, these deities are not mentioned at all in the official records of the Augustan games. Instead, the Moirae, Ilythia, Terra Mater, Jupiter, Juno, Apollo, and Diana receive honors. Thus Augustus' Secular Games replaced the dark god and goddess of death with deities who promised new life and fecundity – the Fates, who guarded the destiny of Rome; Ilythia, who watched over the passage of childbirth; and Terra Mater, who made the earth fertile. Jupiter and Juno, of course, presided over the whole Roman

⁵⁵² See Beard, North, and Price (1998) 71: "But the presence of separate groups of women in festivals, normal practice in Greek civic festivals, seems not to have been the normal Roman way at any date. It is only in this period [the third century BC] that we begin to find such processions and the fact that the Sibylline Books were so prominently connected with the innovation strongly supports the idea that it was Greek influence that lay behind the change."

city, while Apollo was the patron god of Augustus, who had elevating the position of the god in the city of Rome.⁵⁵³

Thus the Sibylline oracle and the Ludi Saeculares were at once very Augustan, yet very traditional. They fit perfectly with Augustus' promotion of his marriage legislation, and with the general idea of Rome's great destiny, renewed by the *princeps*. At the same time, those who orchestrated the games went to great lengths to establish their place in Roman tradition: they invented a list of historical games which the Augustan Ludi Saeculares capped off; they pieced together an oracle that, through its references to the Latins, bore the flavor of antiquity; they performed rituals in the customary Sibylline vein; and they invented or emphasized prodigies that linked the Augustan performance to earlier ceremonies. Thus Augustus made a great effort to tie these games, so obviously a product of his own era, with the distant and enduring Roman past. As Denis Feeney writes, "The rite, at least in its Augustan incarnation, the only one for which we have adequate evidence, provides a pivot for looking backwards and forwards in time, invoking the gods to help the city in the future, as they have in the past."⁵⁵⁴

PRODIGIES UNDER AUGUSTUS

We may now return to the question with which we began our discussion of Augustus: Is it true that, as Livy says, prodigies were no longer reported or recorded under Augustus? In order to answer this question, we will examine the one additional prodigy report that occurred between Actium and Augustus' death. According to Cassius Dio, this took place in 16 BC, only one year after the Ludi Saeculares were held. In this

⁵⁵³ At least the rituals at the Palatine temple to Apollo could not have been performed in the Republic, since the Palatine temple was only built by Augustus in 28 BC. See Taylor (1934) 106.

⁵⁵⁴ Feeney (2007) 147

year, the following prodigies were reported: the Temple of Iuventus burned, a wolf had killed people in the Forum and the Via Sacra, ants swarmed near the Forum, and a flame crossed the sky from north to south. As a result of these prodigies, prayers were offered for the safe return of Augustus, who had left Rome on an expedition to Gaul.⁵⁵⁵

Dio does not say what priesthood recommended this expiation. The Sibylline Books may or may not have been involved. However, it is interesting that all of this activity surrounding the Books in particular, and prodigy and expiation in general, occurred at about the same time. The Sibylline oracles were moved to the Palatine Temple of Apollo, they were edited and other oracles collected and destroyed, the Ludi Saeculares were performed, and prodigies were reported and prayers offered for Augustus' safety all within a span of a few years.

With only two prodigy reports known for the entire period from Actium to Augustus' death, Livy seems justified in claiming that prodigies were no longer *officially* reported in his own day.⁵⁵⁶ But was it really, as Livy suggests, a lack of belief that ended the reports? The pages of other authors, such as Suetonius and Cassius Dio, are filled with omens and prodigies. The difference, however, is that these later signs often relate to single individuals rather than the entire Roman State. When in 26 BC, for example, Augustus is nearly struck by lightning in Cantabria, he builds a temple in Rome to Jupiter

⁵⁵⁵ Cassius Dio 54.19.7

⁵⁵⁶ It is quite possible that Livy wrote Book 43 before 17 BC, before the prodigies of 17 and 16 BC were reported, but we cannot be sure. One interesting fact in the matter of prodigy and expiation is this: though we do not hear often of official reports of prodigies under Augustus, there are a number of omens that are difficult to distinguish between personal and public prodigies. For example, when an eagle dropped a hen unharmed with a sprig of laurel in its mouth into Livia's lap, Pliny *NH* 15.136 says that the *haruspices* advised that the hen and its offspring should be cared for, and the laurel preserved. When Augustus' land was struck by lightning, he built a temple to Apollo at that spot. And when Augustus was nearly killed by lightning in 26 BC during his Cantabrian campaign, he vowed a temple to Jupiter Tonans in thanks for his life. These all seem like possible expiations of prodigies, but the involvement of the Senate is not mentioned. Otherwise, Augustus' personal omens seem very similar to public prodigies.

Tonans.⁵⁵⁷ Suetonius details the omens heralding Augustus' rise to power, and the signs predicting his death.⁵⁵⁸ Such omens, which assign divine authority to an individual life and mark it with uncommon significance, are typical to ancient biography. Yet the reader of Suetonius' work would find it hard to accept that the Romans had dismissed the belief in divine signs.

Under the empire, emphasis on the individual is not a trait peculiar to biography; it appears to spill over into real life. The two prodigy reports and expiations recorded for Augustus' principate are remarkable in their focus on Augustus and his political agendas. The relocation and editing of the Sibylline Books seem to lead up to the performance of the Ludi Saeculares, which not only gave a religious expression to Augustus' marriage legislation, but also were tied to Augustus through the prodigies that preceded the games. In the following year, though the prodigies could not be tied to Augustus directly, the expiation focused on him, with prayers offered for his safe return. Was Augustus threatened by the prodigy and expiation system, so often used as a political tool in the late Republic? Perhaps. Did he fear the power that prodigy reports and expiations gave the Senate, or the negative implications of prodigies that might overshadow his own reign? Maybe. But one thing is certain: prodigy and expiation in Rome was now focused on the emperor. Augustus had recentered Roman religion so completely around himself, that prodigy and expiation were now related entirely to him.

⁵⁵⁷ For the Jupiter Tonans temple, see Suetonius *Div. Aug.* 29, Cassius Dio 54.4, Augustus *Res Gestae* 19, Mart. 7.60.2, Fast. Amit. Ant. Arv. ad Kal. Sept., CIL I2 p244, 248; vi.2295.

⁵⁵⁸ Suetonius *Div. Aug.* 94ff

Epilogue

Because of the constraints of time, I have ended this dissertation with Augustus. But I am interested in pursuing the topic of the Sibylline Books through the reign of Nero. Two incidents related to the Books occurred during the time of Tiberius. First, in AD 15, after a flood of the Tiber River, the quindecimvir Asinius Gallus proposed that the Sibylline Books be consulted. Tiberius, however, refused. In describing his refusal, Tacitus uses an interesting phrase: *renuit Tiberius, perinde divina humanaque obtegens*.⁵⁵⁹ In the end, instead of consulting the Books, practical measures were taken to confine the flood. Yet the Books were not forgotten. In AD 32, the quindecimvir Caninius Gallus proposed that a new book of Sibylline oracles be added to the State's collection. Gallus presented this proposal to the Senate, while a plebeian tribune, Quintilianus, presented it to the people. Tiberius, however, scolded the two in a letter for handling the procedure wrongly. He reminded them of the many false oracles in circulation. In the end, the oracles were submitted to the examination of the *quindecimviri*; Tacitus does not mention whether they were finally approved or not.⁵⁶⁰

It seems that under Tiberius and Gaius, prodigies were no longer reported. Thus they continued the trend set by Augustus after 16 BC, of not accepting or expiating

⁵⁵⁹ Tacitus *Annales* 1.76

⁵⁶⁰ Tacitus *Annales* 6.12: *Relatum inde ad patres a Quintiliano tribuno plebei de libro Sibyllae, quem Caninius Gallus quindecimvirum recipi inter ceteros eiusdem vatis et ea de re senatus consultum postulaverat. Quo per discessionem facto misit litteras Caesar, modice tribunum increpans ignarum antiqui moris ob iuventam. Gallo exprobrabat quod scientiae caerimoniarumque vetus incerto auctore ante sententiam collegii, non, ut adsolet, lecto per magistros aestimatoque carmine, apud infrequentem senatum egisset. Simul commonefecit, quia multa vana sub nomine celebri vulgabantur. Sanxisse Augustum quem intra diem ad praetorem urbanum deferrentur neque habere privatim liceret. Quod a maioribus quoque decretum erat post exustum sociali bello Capitolium, quaesitis Samo, Ilio, Erythris, per Africam etiam ac Siciliam et Italicas colonias carminibus Sibyllae, una seu plures fuer datoque sacerdotibus negotio quantum humana ope potuissent vera discernere. Igitur tunc quoque notioni quindecimvirum is liber subicitur.*

prodigies. However, the process was apparently revived under Claudius, as several prodigies and expiations are reported for his reign.⁵⁶¹ Given his antiquarian interests, and his reforms of the haruspical priesthood, this may be no surprise. Though the sources do not mention any expiations conducted by the Sibylline Books under Claudius, he did revive their use, since he celebrated another Ludi Saeculares in AD 47, the 800th year since the founding of the city.⁵⁶² Nero, however, did consult the Sibylline Books for an expiation, after the fire of AD 64; the oracles advised supplications to Vulcan, Ceres, Proserpina, and Juno.⁵⁶³

When I work further on this project, I will investigate the use of the Sibylline Books in the early empire, after Augustus. It would be interesting to note how the perception and use of the Books change in this period.

⁵⁶¹ For the prodigy and expiation of AD 43, see Pliny *NH* 10.35; for AD 45, see Phlegon *Mirab.* frg. 36; for AD 51, see Tacitus *Annales* 12.43, Suetonius *Claud.* 22, Pliny *NH* 2.99; for 54 AD, see Tacitus *Annales* 12.64.1-3.

⁵⁶² For Claudius' Secular Games, see Suetonius *Claud.* 21.

⁵⁶³ See Tacitus *Annales* 15.44.1-2.

Appendix: Phlegon's Oracles

Hermaphrodite Oracle of 125 BC

Phlegon *Mirab.* Ch. 10 = *FGrH* 257 F 36 X

First Oracle

- 1a. <Μοῖραν ὀπισθομαθῶν, τίν' ἔφυ πᾶς εἰς τόπον ἐλθεῖν,
1. "Ὅσα τέρα τε καὶ ὅσα παθήματα δαίμονος Αἴσης
Ἰστὸς ἐμὸς λύσει, τάδ' ἐνὶ φρεσὶν αἴ κε νοήσης,
Ῥώμη ἔη πίσυνος. καὶ τοί ποτέ φημι γυναῖκα
Ἀνδρόγυνον τέξεσθαι ἔχοντά περ ἄρσενά πάντα
5. Νηπίαχοί θ' ὅσα θηλύτεραι φαίνουσι γυναῖκες.
Οὐκ ἔτι δὴ κρύψω, θυσίας δέ τοι ἐξαγορεύσω
Προφρονέως Δήμητρι καὶ ἀγνῇ Περσεφονείῃ,
Ἰστῶ δ' αὐτὴ ἄνασσα θεά, τὰ μὲν εἰ κε πίθηαι
Σεμνοτάτῃ Δήμητρι καὶ ἀγνῇ Περσεφονείῃ·
10. Θησαυρὸν μὲν πρῶτα νομίσματος εἰς ἓν ἄθροίσας,
"Ὅττι θέλεις ἀπὸ παμφύλων πόλεων τε καὶ ἀστέων,
Μητρὶ Κόρης Δήμητρι κέλευ θυσίαν προτίθεσθαι.
Αὐτὰρ δημοσίᾳ κέλομαί σε τρὶς ἑννέα ταύρους

13a-g. (seven lines missing)

- Φανὰς ἠυκέρους θυέμεν λευκότριχας, αἴ κε ν
15. Ὑμετέρᾳ γνώμῃ κάλλει προφερέσταισι ὦσιν.
Παῖδας, ὅσας πάρος εἶπα, κέλευ' Ἀχαιοὶ τάδ' ἔρδειν
Ἀθανάτην βασίλισσαν ἐπευχομένας θυέεσσιν
Σεμνῶς καὶ καθαρῶς· τότε δὴ μετέπειτα δεχέσθω
Ἐμπεδ' ἀφ' ὑμετέρων ἀλόχων ἱέρ', αὐτὰρ ἐπ' αὐτοῖς
20. Ἰστῶ ἐμῶ πίσυνοι λαμπρὸν φάος αἶδε φερόντων
Σεμνοτάτῃ Δήμητρι. τὸ δεύτερον αὖτε λαβοῦσαι
Τρὶς τόσα νηφάλιμ' ἄντα πυρὸς μαλεροῖο τιθέντων,
"Ὅσαι ἐπισταμένως θυσίαν γραῖαι προτίθενται.
Προφρονέως δ' ἄλλαι Πλουτωνίδι τόσσα λαβοῦσαι,
25. "Ὅσαι ἐν ἡλικίῃ νεοθηλέα θυμὸν ἔχουσιν,
Νηπίαχοι, σεμνὴν Πλουτωνίδα παντοδίδακτον
Ἐν πάτρᾳ εὐχέσθων μίμνειν πολέμου κρατέοντος,
Λήθην δ' ἐν στέθεσσι πεσεῖν πολέμου τε καὶ ἄστεως·
Θησαυρὸν δὲ κόροι καὶ παρθέναι ἔνθα φερόντων
(three lines missing)

Second Oracle

- (many lines missing)
30. Ἰστῶ θειοπαγεῖ, καὶ ὑφάσματα ποικίλα σεμνὰ
Πλουτωνὶς κοσμεῖσθω, ὅπως σχέσις ᾗσι κακοῖσι.

- Προφρονέως δ' ὅτι κάλλιστον καὶ εὐκτὸν ἐπ' αἶαν
 ὣς θνητοῖσιν ἰδέσθαι ἐπέπλετο, καὶ τὸ φέρεσθαι
 ἴστω σύμμικτον δῶρον βασιλῆϊδι κούρη.
35. Αὐτάρ, ὅτ' ἂν Δήμητρι καὶ ἀγνῇ Περσεφονείῃ
 Γαίας ὑμετέρας ἀπερυκέμεναι ζυγὸν αἰεῖ,
 Αἰδωνεῖ Πλούτωνι βοὸς κυανότριχος αἶμα
 Λαμπροῖς εἵμασι κοσμητοῦ μετὰ ποιμένος, ὅστις
 Λήματι ὦ πίσυνος βοὸς ἄρταμος αὐτὸς ὅδ' ἔσται,
40. Ὅσοι τ' ἄλλοι ὁμοῦ πίσυνοι κατὰ πατρίδ' ἔασι·
 Μὴ γὰρ ἀπιστόφιλος θυσίαισιν ἀνὴρ παρεπέσθω,
 Ἐξω δ', ἐνθα νομιστὸν ἐπέπλετο φωτὶ τὰδ' ἔρδειν
 Νηπίστῳ καὶ ἄδαιτον ἔχειν θυσίαν. κατὰ δ' αὐτὴν,
 Ὅστις ἂν ἡμετέρων χρησμῶν ἴδρις ἐς τόδ' ἴκηται,
45. Σεμνὸν Φοῖβον ἀνακτα μετελθέτω ἐν θυσίαισι,
 Προφρονέως βωμοῖς ἐπὶ πίονα μηρία καύσας,
 Αἰγῶν πανλευκῶν νεάτην· ἀτάρ, οἶδατε πάντες,
 Λισσέσθω Φοῖβον Παιήονα κρᾶτα πυκάσας
 Ἰκτὴρ ἐσπίπτοντος ὅπως λύσις ἦσι κακοῖο,
50. Νοστήσας δ' ἀπὸ τοῦ βασιλῆϊδα πότνιαν Ἥρην
 Ἀργὴν βοῦν θύων πατρίοισι νόμοις κατ' αἶσαν·
 Ὑμνεῖν δ', αἶ κε γένει προφερέστεραι ὥς ἐνὶ λαοῖς

52a-b. (two lines missing)

- Καὶ νήσων ναέται τὴν ἀντιπάλων, ὅτ' ἂν αἶαν
 Οὐ δόλω, ἀλλὰ βία Κυμαίδα πρόφρονες αὐτε
55. Νάσσωνται, σεμνῆς βασιλῆϊδος οἶδε τιθέντων
 Ἐν πατρίοισι νόμοις Ἥρας ξοάνον τε καὶ οἶκον.
 Ἰξεῖ δ', ἂν μύθοισιν ἐμοῖς τάδε πάντα πίθηαι
 Σεμνοτάτην βασίλισσαν ἐπελθὼν ἐν θυσίαισιν
 Νήφαλά τ' εὖ ῥέξας, ὅσαι ἡμέραι εἴς ἐνιαυτοῦ
60. Ἐν πολλῷ χρόνῳ αὖ τόδ' ἐφ' ὕστερον, οὐκ ἔτ' ἐπ' αὐτοῖς.
 Ὅς κε τάδε ῥέξη, κείνου κράτος ἔσσεται αἰεῖ·
 Νηφαλίμων ἀρνῶν τε ταμῶν χθονίοις τάδε ῥέξον.
 Ἥμος ἂν ἤδη ἔχῃς μεγάλ' Ἥρης οἰκί' ἀπάντη,
 Ξεστά θ' ὅτ' ἂν ξοάν' ἦσι καὶ ἄλλ' ὅσ' ἔλεξα, σάφ' ἴσθι,
65. Ἐν πετάλοισιν ἐμοῖς—ὑπὸ κερκίδος ἀμφὶ καλύπτραν
 Ἰμέρτ' ὅσ' ἔβαλον γλαυκῆς ἐλάας πολυκάρπου
 Ἀγλαὰ φύλλα λαβοῦσα—λύσιν κακοῦ· ἥμος ἂν ἔλθῃ
 Ὑμμι χρόνος μάλα κείνος, ἐν ᾧ ποτε τᾶλλα νεόγν' ἦ,
 Τρῶς δῆτ' ἐκλύσει σε κακῶν, ἅμα δ' Ἑλλάδος ἐκ γῆς.
70. Αὐτὰρ ποῦ μεταβᾶσαν ἐποτρύνεις ἀγορεύσαι

(end missing)

1. Ἄλλ' ὁπότε ἂν μήκιστος ἦι χρόνος ἀνθρώποισιν
ζωῆς, εἰς ἐτέων ἑκατὸν δέκα κύκλον ὁδεύσας,
μεμνήσθαι, Ῥωμαῖε, καὶ εἰ μάλα λήσει ἑαυτόν,
μεμνήσθαι τάδε πάντα, θεοῖσι μὲν ἀθανάτοισι
5. ῥέζειν ἐν πεδίῳ παρὰ Θύβριδος ἄπλετον ὕδωρ,
ὅππῃ στεινότατον, νύξ ἥνικα γαῖαν ἐπέλθῃ,
ἡλίου κρύψαντος ἔον φάος· ἔνθα σὺ ῥέζειν
ἱερὰ παντογόνους Μοίραις ἄρνας τε καὶ αἰγας
κυανέας, ἐπὶ ταῖς δ' Εἰλειθυίας ἀρέσασθα
10. παιδοτόκους θυέεσσιν, ὅπῃ θέμις· αὐθι δὲ Γαίῃ
πληθομένη χοίροις ὥς ἱρεύοιτο μέλαινα.
πάνλευκοι ταῦροι δὲ Δίος παρὰ βωμὸν ἀγέσθων
ἥματι μῆδ' ἐπὶ νυκτί· θεοῖσι γὰρ Οὐρανίδησιν
ἡμέριος πέλεται θυέων τρόπος· ὥς δὲ καὶ αὐτὸς
15. ἱρεύειν. δαμάλης τε βοὸς δέμας ἀγλᾶν Ἥρης
δεξάσθω νηὸς παρὰ σεῦ. καὶ Φοῖβος Ἀπόλλων,
ὅστε καὶ Ἥλιος κικλήσκεται, ἴσα δεδέχθω
θύματα Λητοίδης. καὶ ἀειδόμενοί τε Λατῖνοι
παιᾶνες κούροις κόρησιν τε νηὸν ἔχοιεν
20. ἀθανάτων. χωρὶς δὲ κόραι χορὸν αὐταὶ ἔχοιεν
καὶ χωρὶς παίδων ἄρσιν στάχυν, ἀλλὰ γονήων
πάντες ζώντων, οἷς ἀμφιθαλὲς ἔτι φύτλη.
αἱ δὲ γάμου ζευγαῖς δεδμημένοι ἥματι κείνῳ
γνύξ Ἥρης παρὰ βωμὸν αἰοδιμον ἐδριόωσαι
25. δαίμονα λισσέσθωσαν. ἅπασιν δὲ λύματα δοῦναι
ἀνδράσιν ἡδὲ γυναιξί, μάλιστα δὲ θηλυτέρησιν.
πάντες δ' ἐξ οἴκοιο φερέσθων, ὅσσα κομίζειν
ἔστι θέμις θνητοῖσιν ἀπαρχομένοις βιότοιο,
δαίμοσι μελιχίοισιν ἰλάσματα καὶ μακάρεσσιν
30. Οὐρανίδαις. τὰ δὲ πάντα τεθησαυρισμένα κείσθω,
ὅφρα τέλη θυμέλῃσι ---
**θηλυτέρησι καὶ ἀνδράσιν ἐδριόωσιν
ἐνθεν πορσύνῃς μεμνημένος. ἡμασὶ δ' ἔστω
νυξί τ' ἐπασσύτερησι θεοπρέπτους κατὰ θώκους
35. παμπληθὲς ἄγυρις· σπουδὴ δὲ γέλῳτι μεμίχθω.
ταῦτά τοι ἐν φρεσὶν ἥσιν αἰεὶ μεμνημένος εἶναι,
καὶ σοὶ πᾶσα χθὼν Ἰταλὴ καὶ πᾶσα Λατίνων
αἰὲν ὑπὸ σκήπτροισιν ἐπαυχένιον ζυγὸν ἔξει.

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