

The Passion Narrative in the *Sibylline Oracles*

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Introduction

The question of the relationship between apocryphal and canonical Scriptures is fascinating, but it has to be asked in different ways depending on the apocryphal text under study. In this paper I look at the way the passion narratives are retold in the *Sibylline Oracles*. The question is to be asked specifically for the Sibyls who are “vaticinating” in Books 1, 6, and 8 of the collection. A special place must be given to the first Book,¹ because in

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¹ This book consists of 400 hexameters, an important part of which – verses 1 to 323 – is probably the work of a Jewish author of the turning point of our era, “rewritten” by a Christian who intended to complete it by adding a long section on Jesus and his earthly ministry. Most scholars see Books 1 and 2, separated in the manuscripts by a colophon, as a single writing. Some date its composition in the second or third century of the Christian era. Some others consider that there is no reason to distinguish a primitive Jewish stratum and a Christian rewriting, and conclude that the double Book 1–2 is an entirely Christian work of the second, third or fifth century (see the conclusion below). For recent studies of this double book, see J.L. Lightfoot, *The Sibylline Oracles. With Introduction, Translation, and Commentary on the First and Second Books* (Oxford 2008); O. Waßmuth, *Sibyllinische Orakel 1/2: Ein apokalyptisches Dokument des kleinasiatischen Judentums und seine christliche Adaption. Studien und Kommentar* (to be published in the series “Ancient Judaism and Early Christianity” at Brill, Leiden, in 2010); and T. Beech, *A Socio-Rhetorical Analysis of the Development and Function of the Noah-Flood Narrative in Sibylline Oracles 1–2* (Ph.D. Thesis submitted to the Faculty of Theology, Saint Paul University, Ottawa, February 2008). A first review of J.L. Lightfoot’s book was published by A. Kachuk in *Bryn Mawr Classical Review*, June 21, 2008; very recently a shorter review has been published by G.L. Watley in *The Classical Review* 59/1 (2009), 101–103 (who is about to finish his own dissertation on the *Sibylline Oracles* 1–2). See also M. Monaca, *Oracoli Sibillini* (Testi patristici 199; Rome 2008). Translations of the *Sibylline Oracles* are taken from J.J. Collins, “The Sibylline Oracles,” in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha* (ed. by J.H. Charlesworth; vol. 1: *Apocalyptic Literature and Testaments*; Garden City, N.Y. 1983), 317–472 (unless otherwise stated). The Greek text, sometimes emended, is taken from J. Geffcken, *Die Oracula Sibyllina* (GCS 8; Leipzig 1902; repr. Berlin 1967).

it the Sibyl predicts not only the advent of Christ, his passion, and his resurrection but, still more surprisingly, she also predicts the gospel and the end of the prophets (vv. 382 and 386). This means that the Sibyl, who is a pagan prophetess, considers herself to be on the same level as the prophets, prophesying the history of salvation with them, and also completes them, explaining that their promises are realised in Jesus. And she even pretends to a kind of superiority, since she predicts the teachings of the gospels (v. 382) and the end of prophecy (v. 386). In order to realize this divinatory fiction – since it is obviously a fiction – the Sibyl intends to use both the prophets and the Gospels, often combining the two, either by implicit allusions, or by literal quotations, or even by precise lexical borrowings. In order to build her passion narrative, the Sibyl selects elements from both canonical and apocryphal traditions, sometimes identified and sometimes not, which she illustrates with texts from the prophets.

The Passion Narrative in Books 1, 6 and 8 of the Sibylline Oracles (*Sibyllina Oracula*)

Thus this paper analyzes textual fragments related to the passion in Books 1, 6, and 8 of the *Sibylline Oracles* and compares them with the corresponding passages in the New Testament. Subsequently, the paper evaluates the Sibyl's rewriting, points of contact between her work and the canonical Scriptures, possible dependencies, and discrepancies.

Sib Or 1:365–366 and Sib Or 8:287–290

In the *Sibylline Oracles*, the passion narrative proper starts with Christ's scourging, when he receives blows and spit. We find the scourging in *Sib Or 1:365–366* and *Sib Or 8:287–289*, while the canonical narrative can be read in Matt 26:67 and 27:30; Mark 14:65 and 15:19, and Luke 22:63–65.

Sib Or 1:365–366

καὶ τότε δὴ κολάφους καὶ πτύσματα φαρμακόμεντα

Then indeed Israel, with abominable lips,

Ἰσραὴλ δώσει μισαροῖς ἐνὶ χεῖλεσι τούτῳ

And poisonous spittings, will give this man blows.

Sib Or 8:287–290

εἰς ἀνόμων χειρας καὶ ἀπίστων ὕστερον ἦξει,

Later he will come into the hands of lawless and faithless men,

δώσουσιν δὲ θεῷ ῥαπίσματα χερσὶν ἀνάγνοις

and they will give blows to God with unholy hands

καὶ στόμασιν μιαιοῖς ἐμπτύσματα φαρμακόμεντα,

and poisonous spittings with polluted mouths.

δώσει δ' εἰς μάστιγας ἀναπλώσας τότε
 νῶτον.

Then he will stretch out his back and give it
 to the whips.

Luke's narrative, where there is no mention of the spit, is too different from the text in the *Sibylline Oracles* to have served as a source for the Sibyl. We can thus set it aside. The words ῥαπίσματα and ἔμπτύσματα of *Sib Or* 8:288–289, however, reveal a close kinship with Matthew's narrative, where we find the corresponding verbs ἔμπτύω and ῥαπίζω in Matt 26:67, and the verb ἔμπτύω alone in Matt 27:30. The same terms ῥαπίσματα and ἔμπτύσματα also show a link with Mark's narrative, where in 14:65 we find the verbs ἔμπτύω and the substantive ῥαπίσματα in the dative plural. Nevertheless, since Mark is closer to Luke than to Matthew and we have set aside the third evangelist, we can conclude for now that the closest parallel is with Matthew. Several other passages in the *Sibylline Oracles* confirm that Matthew was the Gospel *par excellence*, as is generally the case for most Christian apocalyptic literature of the second and third centuries.

In the case of *Sib Or* 1:365, the kinship with Matt seems to be particularly clear, since Matt 26:67 uses κολαφίζω and ἔμπτύω, while the Sibylline verse combines the substantives κολάφους and πτύσματα; an abbreviated form of ἔμπτύσματα in *Sib Or* 8:288.

In the canonical Gospels the spit upon Jesus is mentioned twice and in two different contexts. In Matt 26:67 // Mark 14:65 it is done in front of the Sanhedrin, while in Matt 27:30 // Mark 15:19 it is done by the Roman soldiers.² The context is not defined clearly in the *Sibylline Oracles*. But in *Sib Or* 1:365–366, the responsibility for the scourging is explicitly stated: it is Israel. “*Then indeed Israel, with abominable lips, / and poisonous spittings, will give this man blows.*” This anti-Judaism is not new in Book 1 of the *Sibylline Oracles*, since it appears earlier, in lines 360–361: “*And then Israel, intoxicated, will not perceive / nor yet will she hear, afflicted with weak ears.*” Yet, in Book 8 the Sibyl leaves the identity of the guilty party vague, because she introduces the scourging by saying that the Logos “*will come into the hands of lawless and faithless men*” – Jesus is called this two lines earlier (v. 285: “*and the Logos, who creates forms, to whom everything is subject*”). Who these *lawless and faithless men* are cannot be easily determined. Nevertheless, we may wonder if the words ἀνόμοι and ἀπίστοι refer to the Romans rather than to the Jews, because the latter had

² In the fourth Gospel, Jesus is also struck twice, the first time by one of the guards of the High Priest (John 18:22: ῥάπισμα), the second time by the Roman soldiers (John 19:3: ῥαπίσματα).

received the Law (“νόμος”), which is not the case for the Romans.³ But we can also wonder if the use of these two adjectival nouns does not distinguish two categories of unbelievers: on the one hand, the Romans, deprived of the Law (άνόμοι), and, on the other hand, the Jews, who are faithless (άπίστοι). If so, the two adjectival nouns would echo the Gospel narrative, where Jews and Romans alternately participate in the trial of Jesus. It is true that earlier in Book 8 (v. 220: “*Both faithful and faithless men will see God*”), specifically in the acrostic poem narrating Christ’s parousia and the Last Judgment, these two words are used interchangeably in order to contrast “*just*” with “*unjust*” or “*faithful*” with “*faithless*.”⁴ But some lines earlier in Book 1 (vv. 362–363), where the anti-Jewish polemic is obvious, the Sibyl announces that “*when the raging wrath of the Most High comes upon the Hebrews / it will also take faith away from them.*” In the eyes of this Sibyl, there are Jews who are faithless (άπίστοι).

In Book 8 (v. 290), the scene continues with a line which does not have any parallel in Book 1: “*Then he will stretch out his back and give it to the whips.*”⁵ The source here is not found in the canonical Gospels but in the third song of the suffering Servant of Isa 50:6 (NRSV): “*I gave my back to those who struck me, and my cheeks to those who pulled out the beard; I did not hide my face from insult and spitting.*”⁶ Three key words of this biblical verse are to be found in the scourging narrative in Book 8 of the *Sibylline Oracles*: μάστιγας, ραπίσματα, and έμπτυσμάτων, with one difference: in the third song of the suffering Servant the scourging precedes the

³ T. Nicklas, “Apokryphe Passionstraditionen im Vergleich: Petrus-evangelium und Sibyllinische Orakel (Buch VIII)”, in *Das Evangelium nach Petrus. Text, Kontexte, Intertexte* (ed. by T.J. Kraus & T. Nicklas; TU 158; Berlin and New York 2007), 263–279, here 270.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ Lactantius (*Divine Institutes*, 4:18:15), Augustine (*City of God*, 18:23:2), and the author of the *Tübingen Theosophy* (Beatrice, *Anonymi Monophysitae Theosophia. An Attempt at Reconstruction* [VigChr.S 56; Leiden, Boston and Cologne 2001], 55,225 = Erbse, *Fragmente griechischer Theosophien* [Hamburger Arbeiten zur Altertumswissenschaft 4; Hamburg 1941], 10,274) have a slightly different text: “*But he will give for their blows simply a holy back.*” The last is the epitome of a collection of pagan testimonia compiled at the end of the 5th or at the beginning of the 6th century of our era and which relies mostly on Lactantius: see the bibliography in Beatrice and Lightfoot (n. 1), *passim*.

⁶ Isa 50:6 LXX: Τὸν νῶτόν μου δέδωκα εἰς μάστιγας, τὰς δὲ σιαγόνας μου εἰς ραπίσματα, τὸ δὲ πρόσωπόν μου οὐκ ἀπέστρεψα ἀπὸ αἰσχύνῃς έμπτυσμάτων. – έμπτυσμα is a *hapax legomenon* in Isaiah. This biblical verse is also the background of Matt 26:67; cf. U. Luz, *Matthew 21–28. A Commentary* (Hermeneia; Minneapolis 2005), 448, n. 11. Jesus’ prediction of the Son of Man’s sufferings in the Synoptics (Mark 10:34 and parallels) is surely inspired by this verse of Isaiah; see D.J. Moo, *The Old Testament in the Gospel Passion Narratives* (Sheffield 1983), 88–89 and 139–144.

blows and the spit. The process of rewriting in this section of Book 8 is similar to what we read in the *Epistle of Barnabas* 5:14 which quotes Isa 50:6–7 without 6b–7a: “Again he says, ‘See! I have set my back to whips and my cheeks to blows; and I have set my face as a hard rock.’”⁷

It must be pointed out that, although they sometimes differ from each other, the two passages from the *Sibylline Oracles* both qualify the spit upon Jesus’ face as φαρμακόμεντα, i.e. “poisonous” or “venomous.” This is not the case in the biblical text. Now, if the canonical Gospels merely say that Jesus received spit on his face, literally “in his eyes,” the *Sibylline Oracles* are more interested in stating that the spit comes from “abominable” or “unclean lips” (1:366) and “polluted mouths” (8:289). Although the adjectives are not the same, the idea of “unclean lips” in *Sib Or* 1:366 surely comes from Isa 6:5, where the prophet accuses himself and the people to whom he belongs, that is to say, Israel, of having “unclean lips” (ἀκάθαρτα χεῖλη ἔχων ἐν μέσῳ λαοῦ ἀκάθαρτα χεῖλη ἔχοντος). This parallel seems to be more than likely, because the verses quoted (*Sib Or* 1:360–361, 369–371) are a free rewriting of the same chapter in the Book of Isa 6:9–10, where Israel is accused of stubbornness and stupidity: “And he said, “Go and say to this people: ‘Keep listening, but do not comprehend; keep looking, but do not understand.’ Make the mind of this people dull, and stop their ears, and shut their eyes, so that they may not look with their eyes, and listen with their ears, and comprehend with their minds, and turn and be healed.” (NRSV)⁸ *Sib Or* 8:289 is much less explicit in its accusation on this point.

Some scholars state that these verses of the *Sibylline Oracles* (8:287–290) are reminiscent of the *Gospel of Peter* 9⁹, but this is unproven. A de-

⁷ *Barn.* 5:14: Καὶ πάλιν λέγει· Ἴδού, τέθεικά μου τὸν νῶτον εἰς μάστιγας, καὶ τὰς σιαγόνας εἰς ῥαπίσματα, τὸ δὲ πρόσωπόν μου ἔθηκα ὡς στερεὰν πέτραν. Translation by B.D. Ehrman in: *The Apostolic Fathers* (vol. 1; Loeb Classical Library; Cambridge, Mass. 2003); reprint in: id., *Lost Scriptures. Books that Did Not Make It into the New Testament* (Oxford 2003), 224.

⁸ Isa 6:9–10 LXX: καὶ εἶπε Πορεύθητι καὶ εἶπον τῷ λαῷ τούτῳ Ἄκοη ἀκούσετε καὶ οὐ μὴ συνήτε καὶ βλέποντες βλέψετε καὶ οὐ μὴ ἴδητε· ἐπαχύνθη γὰρ ἡ καρδία τοῦ λαοῦ τοῦτου, καὶ τοῖς ὠσίν αὐτῶν βαρέως ἤκουσαν καὶ τοὺς ὀφθαλμοὺς αὐτῶν ἐκάμμυσαν, μήποτε ἴδωσι τοῖς ὀφθαλμοῖς καὶ τοῖς ὠσίν ἀκούσωσι καὶ τῇ καρδίᾳ συνῶσι καὶ ἐπιστρέψωσι καὶ ἰάσωμαι αὐτούς.

⁹ *Gospel of Peter* 9: “Others standing there were spitting in his face; some slapped his cheeks; others were beating him with a reed; and some began to flog him, saying, ‘This is how we should honor the Son of God!’” Καὶ ἕτεροι ἐστῶτες ἐνέπτυσον αὐτοῦ ταῖς ὄψεσι καὶ ἄλλοι τὰς σιαγόνας αὐτοῦ ἐράπισαν, ἕτεροι καλάμῳ ἔνυσσον αὐτὸν καὶ τινες αὐτὸν ἐμάστιζον λέγοντες· ταύτη τῇ τιμῇ τιμήσωμεν τὸν υἱὸν τοῦ θεοῦ. Translated by Ehrman, *Lost Scriptures* (n. 7), 32; on the critical text cf. T.J. Kraus / T. Nicklas, *Das Petrus-evangelium und die Petrusapokalypse. Die griechischen Fragmente mit deut-*

tailed comparison shows that the differences are more important than the similarities, and the latter are better explained by the imagery of the suffering Servant in Isa 50:6 than by a literary dependence between both texts.¹⁰

It is interesting to note that the verses 287-290 of *Sib Or* 8 are quoted after Isa 50:5–6 and Ps 34:15–16 in the *Divine Institutes* of Lactantius (4:18:15), written at the beginning of the fourth century of our era, as proofs of pagan prophecies of Christ's Passion.¹¹ Augustine also cites them, but in Latin, in his *City of God* 18:23:2, after he presents and discusses the Sibyl's famous acrostic. The Bishop of Hippo attempts to gather into a coherent unity those verses of the *Sibylline Oracles* spread throughout Lactantius' work, "to support the progression of his argument," as Augustine says. It must be pointed out that all of the 17 verses gathered by Augustine refer to the Passion of Jesus:

Afterwards, says she [= the Sibyl], he shall fall into the unjust hands of unbelievers; they shall strike God with unclean hands and shall spit upon him the poisonous spittle of their impure mouths; but he shall simply give over his holy back to their whips.¹² And silently he shall take their blows so that none may know what word, or whence, He comes to speak to hell as he is crowned with thorns.¹³ For meat they have given him gall, and for drink, vinegar; this is the kind of hospitality they shall show him at table.¹⁴ Thou fool – not to have recognized thy God, displaying himself before the minds of men; instead, you crowned him with thorns and brewed him the cup of bitter-tasting gall.¹⁵ But the veil of the temple shall be rent; and at midday there shall be a night of pitch-blackness lasting for three hours.¹⁶ And, having died, he shall sleep the sleep of death for three days; then he shall come back from hell to the daylight; the first of the arisen, establishing the beginning of resurrection for those whom he has recalled.¹⁷ (*The City of God*, 18:23:2)¹⁸

*sch*er und englischer Übersetzung (GCS NF 11; Neutestamentliche Apokryphen 1; Berlin and New York 2004).

¹⁰ This is also the point of view of Nicklas, "Apokryphe Passionstraditionen" (n. 3), 270–271. See also L. Vaganay, *L'évangile de Pierre* (ÉtB; Paris 1930), 164–165. Vaganay's conclusions have been accepted by Mara, *Évangile de Pierre* (SC 201; Paris 1973; 2006). 23; Ead., *Il Vangelo di Pietro* (Scritti delle origini cristiane 30; Bologna 2003), 19; M. Erbetta, *Gli apocrifi del Nuovo Testamento. Vangeli I.1: Scritti affini ai vangeli canonici – composizione gnostiche – materiale illustrativo* (Torino 1975), 141; J. Dencker, *Die theologiegeschichtliche Stellung des Petrusevangeliums. Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte des Doketismus* (EHS XXIII.36; Bern and Frankfurt, Main 1975), 19–20.

¹¹ They can also be found in the *Tübingen Theosophy* (Beatrice [n. 5], 55,222–225 = Erbse [n. 5], 10,271–274).

¹² *Sib Or* 8:287–290; Lactantius, *Div. Inst.*, 4:18:15.

¹³ *Sib Or* 8:292–294; Lactantius, *Div. Inst.*, 4:18:17.

¹⁴ *Sib Or* 8:303–304; Lactantius, *Div. Inst.*, 4:18:19.

¹⁵ *Sib Or* 6:22–24; Lactantius, *Div. Inst.*, 4:18:20.

¹⁶ *Sib Or* 8:305–306; Lactantius, *Div. Inst.*, 4:19:5.

¹⁷ *Sib Or* 8:312–314; Lactantius, *Div. Inst.*, 4:19:10.

¹⁸ Augustinus, *The City of God*, 18:23:2: "in manus iniquas", inquit, "infidelium postea ueniet; dabunt autem deo alapas manibus incestis et inpurato ore expuent uenena-

These verses come mainly from Book 8 of the *Sibylline Oracles* (except three verses coming from Book 6). Book 1 apparently was unknown to Lactantius (and consequently to Augustine, who relied on the latter for his knowledge of these lines).

Sib Or 8:292–293

The first Book of the *Sibylline Oracles* jumps directly from the scourging and the spit to the food and drink given to Jesus on the Cross (1:367).

But in Book 8, verses 292–293, there is an interesting development in Jesus' attitude at the scourging: "*Beaten, he will be silent, lest anyone recognize who he is, whose son, and whence he came, so that he may speak to the dead.*" The blows are noted by the same verb, *κολαφίζω*, that we find in Matt 26:65 and Mark 14:65. This is nothing new, except that the order of events here is closer to the canonical Gospels than in Book 1. As for Jesus' silence, the four Gospels mention it (Matt 26:63; 27:13; Mark 14:61; 15:4; Luke 23:9; John 19:9) twice in both Matthew and Mark, first in front of the Sanhedrin, and second before Pilate. In Luke and John, only Jesus' refusal to answer to Pilate is mentioned. The Gospels never use the verb for silence, *σιγάω*, which the *Sibylline Oracles* might be using for metric reasons. The *Sibylline Oracles* do not mention any specific interrogation, while the canonical Gospels relate several. But the expression *τίς τίνοσ ὄν* in the *Oracles* could well echo a question about Jesus' messianic mandate and divine filiation, as is read in Matt 26:63, Mark 14:61, and Luke 22:67. Furthermore, Lactantius and those who rely on him present a variant: "...

tos sputus; dabit uero ad uerba simpliciter sanctum dorsum." "et colaphos accipiens tacebit, ne quis agnoscat, quod uerbum uel unde uenit, ut inferis loquatur et corona spinea coronetur." "ad cibum autem fel et ad sitim acetum dederunt; inhospitalitatis hanc monstrabunt mensam." "ipsa enim insipiens tuum deum non intellexisti, ludentem mortalium mentibus, sed et spinis coronasti et horridum fel miscuisti." "templi uero uelum scindetur; et medio die nox erit tenebrosa nimis in tribus horis." "et morte morietur tribus diebus somno suscepto; et tunc ab inferis regressus ad lucem ueniet primus resurrectionis principio reuocatis ostenso." Translated by G.G. Walsh, and D.J. Honan, *Writings of Saint Augustine* (vol. 8, in: *The Fathers of the Church. A New Translation*; vol. 24; New York 1954), 117. On this topic, see J.-M. Roessli, "Augustin, les sibylles, et les *Oracles sibyllins*," in: *Augustinus afer. Saint Augustin: africanité et universalité. Actes du colloque international, Alger-Annaba, 1–7 avril 2001* (ed. by P.-Y. Fux, J.-M. Roessli and O. Wermelinger; Paradosis 45/1; Fribourg 2003), 263–286, here 275–276. I corrected the mistranslated "so that none may know the source or the meaning of the word he addresses to hell" with "so that none may know what word, or whence, He comes to speak to hell."

so that no one may know / that he is the Word, and whence he comes,”¹⁹ which tends to confirm this interpretation.

Sib Or 1

Sib Or 8:292–293

καὶ κολαφιζόμενος σιγήσει, μή τις ἐπιγνῶ,
Beaten, he will be silent, lest anyone
recognize
τίς τίνος ὦν πόθεν ἦλθεν, ἵνα φθιμένοισι
λαλήσει,
who he is, whose son, and whence he came,
so that he may speak to the dead;

The subsequent question, πόθεν ἦλθεν, used indirectly in the *Oracles*, might also well echo Pilate’s question about Jesus’ kingship in Jn 19:9: πόθεν εἶ σύ; “Where are you from?”

There is some doubt about the subordinate clause: ἵνα φθιμένοισι λαλήσει. Should it be interpreted in connection with these three indirect questions: “... who he is, whose son, and whence he came”? If this is the case, the Sibyl certainly wants to emphasize that the Word can speak to the dead because of his filiation and his divine identity: “lest anyone recognize who he is, whose son, and whence he came to speak to the dead.” There is another possible reading. Nothing prevents this subordinate clause, introduced by ἵνα, from being connected to the main verb of the sentence. Thus, if the Word chooses to keep silent and refuses to reveal his identity, it is in order to speak to the dead: “he will be silent, lest anyone recognize who he is, whose son, and whence he came, so that he may speak to the dead.” I do not think it is grammatically and syntactically possible or even necessary to choose between these two readings, which corresponds very well to the multiple meanings inherent to the *Sibylline Oracles*. Whatever the case, this subordinate clause anticipates the ultimate goal of the Word’s Passion, which is not only to redeem the dead, but also to speak to them (v. 293).

A more direct source for the Word’s silence at this instance may not be found in the Synoptic Gospels but in the Book of Isaiah. Isaiah writes about the suffering Servant in 53:7: “He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he did not open

¹⁹ Lactantius (*Div. Inst.*, 4:18:17), Augustine (*City of God*, 18:23:2), and the author of the *Tübingen Theosophy* (Beatrice [n. 5], 55,230 = Erbse [n. 5], 10,281): τίς λόγος ἦ; quod uerbum uel unde uenit.

his mouth.” (NRSV)²⁰ Lactantius notes it and connects it to the Sibylline verses.²¹

The *Gospel of Peter* also presents Jesus’ silence, but it is the Lord’s silence on the Cross, and with a totally different meaning from the one in the *Sibylline Oracles*. The apocryphal gospel (v. 10) adds: “*But he was silent, as if he felt no pain.*”²² Leaving aside the question of whether any docetism is present in this assertion,²³ it is certain that Jesus, the Lord (κύριος), is silent to hide his sufferings and not to keep a secret.

In Book 8 of the *Sibylline Oracles*, the Word’s silence has a totally different function; its role precisely is to conceal, at least for a while, the meaning of his suffering in salvation history. Jesus, portrayed earlier as the creative Word of all things and the Saviour of the dead (vv. 285–286), is actually going to become the one who speaks to the dead (v. 293). The contrast between Jesus’ silence in front of the living during his Passion and his willingness to speak to the dead after his own death, is very striking. Everything unfolds as if the Word wanted somehow to save his word for those who had lost it. This contrast furthermore reveals a very interesting rhetorical structure. At the beginning of creation the Word is (v. 285). At the end of times, that is to say, at the Last Judgement, he speaks with the dead. In the meantime, during his trial, the Word is silent, because he must not be recognized as such by the living, as the variant transmitted by Lactantius and his successors stresses: “*so that no one may know / that he is the Word, and whence he comes.*” Nowhere to my knowledge, even in the canonical Gospels, has the Passion such a strategic position between creation and eschatology.²⁴

²⁰ Isa 53:7 LXX: καὶ αὐτὸς διὰ τὸ κεκακῶσθαι οὐκ ἀνοίγει τὸ στόμα· ὡς πρόβατον ἐπὶ σφαγῆν ἤχθη καὶ ὡς ἄμνος ἐναντίον τοῦ κείροντος αὐτὸν ἄφωνος οὕτως οὐκ ἀνοίγει τὸ στόμα αὐτοῦ.

²¹ Lactantius, *Div. Inst.*, 4:18:16–17: “*Likewise of His Silence, which He kept tenaciously even unto death, Isaiah spoke again thus: “He was led as a sheep to the slaughter, and he was as a lamb before his shearers, without a word, and thus he did not open his mouth.” (Isa 53:7) And the above-mentioned Sibyl: “And receiving the blows he will be silent, so that no one may know what the word is or whence he comes, in order that he might address the lowly and wear a crown of thorns.*” [Sib Or 8:292–294a] (Translated by M.F. McDonald, in: *The Fathers of the Church. A New Translation* [vol. 49; New York 1964]), 293.

²² Ehrman, *Lost Scriptures* (n. 7), 32. See Mara, *Évangile de Pierre* (n. 9), 106–111.

²³ See, e.g., G.W. McCant, “The Gospel of Peter: Docetism Reconsidered,” *NTS* 30 (1984), 258–273; P.M. Head, “On the Christology of the Gospel of Peter,” *VigChr* 46 (1992), 209–224.

²⁴ As Nicklas, “Apokryphe Passionstraditionen” (n. 3), 272 rightly emphasized it.

Sib Or 8:294–298 and Sib Or 1:373–374a

Book 8 (vv. 294–296) of the *Sibylline Oracles* continues to narrate Jesus' crowning with thorns and the piercing of his sides. In so doing, the Sibyl combines two separate episodes of the New Testament: the mockery of Jesus with a crown of thorns and a reed before his crucifixion (Matt 27:29 and Mark 15:17), and the piercing of his side with a spear when he is on the Cross (John 19:34). The language used by the Sibyl leaves no doubt. The expression στέφανον ἀκάνθινον is directly borrowed from Matt and Mark, while πλευράς νύξουσιν (“*they pierced his sides*”) is an almost exact copy of the Johannine phrase: τὴν πλευρὰν ἐνύξεν (“*[one of the soldiers] pierced his side with a spear*”), except that *Sib Or 8:296* uses the plural while John and *Sib Or 1:373* maintain the singular. As for the spear (λόγχη) in John, it is replaced by the reed (κάλαμος) of Mark and Matt. By the choice of the verb νύσσω, “*to pierce*,” the Sibyl may well have intended to imply the realization of Zechariah’s prophecy (12:10b): “*When they look on the one whom they have pierced, they shall mourn for him, as one mourns for an only child, and weep bitterly over him, as one weeps over a first-born*” (NRSV).²⁵

Sib Or 1:372–374a

ἀλλ’ ὅταν ἐκπετάσῃ χεῖρας καὶ πάντα
μετρήσῃ
But when he will stretch out his hands and
measure all,
καὶ στέφανον φορέσῃ τὸν ἀκάνθινον ἠδέ
τε πλευρὰν
and bear the crown of thorns – and they
will stab

νύξουσιν καλάμοισι νόμου χάριν ...
his side with reeds according to the law...

Sib Or 8:[302] 294–296

[ἐκπετάσει χεῖρας καὶ κόσμον ἅπαντα
μετρήσει,
He will stretch out his hands and measure
the entire world.]
καὶ στέφανον φορέσει τὸν ἀκάνθινον ἐκ
γὰρ ἀκανθῶν
and he will wear the crown of thorns. For,
made of thorns,
τὸ στέφος ἐκλεκτῶν αἰώνιων ἐστιν
ἄγαλμα,
the crown is the eternal array of chosen
men.

πλευράς νύξουσιν καλάμῳ διὰ τὸν νόμον
αὐτῶν
They will stab his sides with a reed on
account of their law.
ἐκ καλάμων γὰρ σειομένων ὑπὸ πνεύματος
ἄλλου
For by reeds shaken by another wind

²⁵ Zech 12,10b LXX: ἄνθ’ ὧν κατωρχήσαντο καὶ κόψονται ἐπ’ αὐτὸν κοπετὸν ὡς ἐπ’ ἀγαπητὸν καὶ ὀδυνηθήσονται ὀδύνην ὡς ἐπὶ πρωτοτόκῳ. As Nicklas, “Apokryphe Passionstraditionen” (n. 3), 273, n. 48 noticed, this prophet’s quotation was widespread in the early Christian literature: *Barn.* 7:8–9; *Proto-Gospel of James*, 24:3; Justin, *Dial.* 32:2; *Apol.* 52:11; Irenaeus, *haer.* 4:33:11, etc.

προσκλίματα ψυχῆς ἐστράφη ὀργῆς καὶ
ἀμοιβῆς
the inclinations of the soul are turned from
the wrath and change.

In order to illuminate this theological “midrash,” which borrows much from both the canonical Gospels and the Prophets, Book 8 proposes two interesting new exegeses: one about the crown of thorns, the other about the reed.

In the first, the Sibyl explains (vv. 295–296), rather surprisingly, that, thanks to its thorns, the crown becomes “*the eternal array of the elected ones*.”²⁶ In so doing, she distances herself from the canonical Gospels (and from the *Gospel of Peter* 8, which is very close to the canonical Gospels on this matter), for whom the crown is the emblem of a humiliated King stripped of his kingdom (*Spottkönig* in German). She transforms the crown into an eternal “array” (ἄγαλμα), a symbol *par excellence* of election. With this exegesis, which Lactantius might allude to in his *Divine Institutes* 4:26:21,²⁷ the Sibyl emphasizes once again the close link between the Passion and eschatological redemption.

In the second exegesis, that of the reed, the text of vv. 297–298 is unfortunately unclear. I translate it so: “*For by reeds shaken by another wind /*

²⁶ My translation. Collins translates it in the following manner: “*For, made of thorns, the crown of chosen men is an eternal delight*.” Compare with J.-M. Roessli, “*Les Oracles sibyllins: Livre 6, 7 et 8* (vv. 217–428),” in: *Écrits apocryphes chrétiens*, (ed. by P. Geoltrain and J.-D. Kaestli, Index established by J.-M. Roessli and S. Voicu; Bibliothèque de la Pléiade 516, t. 2; Paris 2005), 1045–1083 (reprint 2006), here 1076: “*Car c’est en raison de ses épines que la couronne des élus est une parure éternelle*.” The *Tübingen Theosophy* has the same text as the classes of manuscripts Φ and Ψ: “τὸ στέφος ἐκλεκτῶν ἁγίων αἰώνιον ἦξει,” “*For out of thorns shall ever come the crown of holy ones elect*,” translated by M.S. Terry, *The Sibylline Oracles Translated from the Greek Into English Blank Verse* (New York and Cincinnati 1890), 189; see also id., *The Sibylline Oracles. Translated from The Greek into English Blank Verse, New Edition Revised After the Text of Rzach* (New York and Cincinnati 1899 [reprint New York 1973]), 60: “*For of thorns is the crown an ornament / Elect, eternal*.”

²⁷ Lactantius, *Div. Inst.*, 4:26:21: “*Nam corona spinea capiti eius imposita id declarabat fore ut diuinam sibi plebem de nocentibus congregaret. Corona enim dicitur circumstans in orbem populus*.” “*For the placing of a crown of thorns upon His head, declared that it would come to pass that He would gather to Himself a holy people from those who were guilty. For people standing around in a circle are called a corona*.” (Translated by W. Fletcher, *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, edited by A. Roberts, J. Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe [vol. VII; Buffalo, N.Y. 1886], 128). See also Clement of Alexandria, *Paedagogue*, 2:8:74:1–3. This exegesis (*Sib Or* 8:295–296) anticipates the interpretation of *Sib Or* 8:302, which Lactantius clearly alludes to later in the same chapter of *Divine Institutes*, 4:26:36; cf. below the discussion on *Sib Or* 8:302.

the inclinations of the soul are turned from wrath and change."²⁸ We can certainly recognize an allusion to John the Baptist. First Jesus asks (Matt 11:7 and Luke 7:24): "*What did you go out into the wilderness to look at? A reed shaken by the wind?*" Secondly, there is a reminder of the Baptist's preaching (Matt and Luke 3:7): "*You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?*" The link with the Passion is hard to establish, but it is possible that the reed with which Jesus was beaten reminds the readers of the imminence of Judgment, which John the Baptist announced.²⁹ In this case, the Sibyl of Book 8 intends to connect the Word's passion with the Last Judgment, as Nicklas inclines to think on the basis of the passion narrative's position after the parousia's acrostic in Book 8:217–250.³⁰

The juxtaposition of the verb *νύσσω* and the substantive *κάλαμος* can also be found in the *Gospel of Peter* 9, quoted above. Peter also makes the reed stroke an act of derision preceding the Crucifixion, just as in *Sib Or* 8:296, without saying that the reed pierces Jesus' side. The same can be found in the Gnostic and docetic section of *Acts of John* 97 ("... 'John, for the people below in Jerusalem I am being crucified and pierced with lances and reeds and given vinegar and gall to drink. But to you I am speaking, and listen to what I speak.' Jesus then goes on to reveal to John the true meaning of the crucifixion, concluding, 'So then, I have suffered

²⁸ I slightly corrected the first hemistich of Collins' translation: "*For by winds [sic!] shaken by another wind...*" Instead of the verb "to turn from" (*ἐστράφη*) of Ψ, one could also chose the variant "to nourish" (*ἐτρέφει*) of Φ. In that case, these verses would be translated as follows: "*For from reeds shaken by another wind the inclinations of the soul were nourished of wrath and change.*" Most scholars do not translate these lines, as they are considered to be corrupted. See nevertheless Terry, *Sibylline Oracles* (1890, n. 26), 189: "*For from the reeds by another spirit moved / Was he brought up for judgments of the soul, / And wrath and recompense,*" id., *Sibylline Oracles* (1899, n. 26), 60: "*For of reeds shaken by another spirit / Were nourished inclinations of the soul, / Of anger and revenge*") or E. Massaux, *Influence de l'évangile selon saint Matthieu sur la littérature chrétienne avant Irénée* (Universitas Catholica Lovaniensis II.42; Louvain/Gembloux 1950), 235: "*Car par un autre des roseaux qui vacillaient au vent, l'âme a été amenée au jugement de la colère et de la rétribution,*" Roessli, "Les Oracles sibyllins" (n. 26), 1076–77: "*Car c'est des roseaux secoués par un autre vent / que les inclinations de l'âme se sont détournées de la colère et du châtement,*" and Monaca, *Oracoli Sibillini* (n. 1), 176: "*Dalle canne agitate dal vento, poi, un altro si alimentò / guardando al giudizio della passione dell'anima e alla redenzione.*"

²⁹ John the Baptist is alluded to in *Sib Or* 1:336–343, but nowhere else in Book 8, so that Waßmuth, *Sibyllinische Orakel* (n. 1) considers that *Sib Or* 8, with its highly developed christology, was no longer interested in the figure of the Baptist. On Matt 11:7, see Hilary of Poitiers, *In Matt.*, 11:4 and Ambrose of Milan, *In Lucam*, 5:104–106; in the latter, the reed becomes the very flesh of Christ. I thank Agnès Bastit for these references.

³⁰ Nicklas, "Apokryphe Passionstraditionen" (n. 3), but see also below note 34.

none of those things which they will say of me,")³¹ which dates back to the second century Syria, and is found in the *Oracle of Baalbek*, lines 74–75 ("And they will pierce his side with a reed (stake) and will not harm him,")³² except that in these texts the stroke is given during the Crucifixion itself, as in the first Book of the *Sibylline Oracles*.³³ No direct borrowing can be established between the *Gospel of Peter*, the *Acts of John*, and the *Sibylline Oracles*, but it is likely that the *Oracle of Baalbek* follows the *Sibylline Oracles* on this point.

Book 1 of the *Sibylline Oracles* also presents the crown of thorns and the piercing of the Lord's side with reeds, but it happens during the Crucifixion, and only one side of the Lord is pierced, as in the Gospel of John. Unlike in Book 8, no exegesis is given. In Book 1 the scene is presented as follows: after a violent accusation against Israel and its people (vv. 369b–371), the Sibyl narrates Jesus' crucifixion itself. She does it in an extraordinary manner. Isolated from its context, the language the Sibyl uses could

³¹ Translated by R.E. Van Voorst, "Extracanonical Passion Narratives," in: *The Death of Jesus in Early Christianity* (ed. by J.T. Carroll and J.B. Green; Peabody, Mass. 1995), 151, n. 6 (Curiously, this author does not mention the *Sibylline Oracles* at all.) On this text, see *Acta Iohannis. Textus alii, commentarius, indices*, (ed. by E. Junod and J.-D. Kaestli; CC.SA 2; Turnhout 1983), 581–677; id., "Les Actes de Jean," in *Écrits apocryphes chrétiens* (ed. by F. Bovon and P. Geoltrain; Bibliothèque de la Pléiade; t. 1; Paris 1997), 973–1037, here 979–981. Let us note that the *Acts of John* combine the plural of John 19:34 (λόγχη, "spear" or "lance") and the plural of Matt 11:7 and 27:29 (κάλαμος, "reeds"). On Matt 27:29, see Hilary of Poitiers, *In Matt.*, 33:3 and Ambrose of Milan, *In Lucam*, 10:105–106; in the latter, the reed represents Christ's humanity. I thank Agnès Bastit for these references.

³² P.J. Alexander, *The Oracle of Baalbek. The Tiburtine Sibyl in Greek Dress* (Dumbarton Oaks Studies; Washington 1967), 13: καὶ κάλαμῳ νύξουσιν αὐτοῦ τὴν πλευρὰν καὶ οὐδὲν ἀδικήσουσιν αὐτόν. The *Oracle of Baalbek* is not the original version of the better known Latin *Tiburtine Sibyl*, but an amplified version, dating back to the beginning of the sixth century, of the original Greek version of the latter which is to be dated to the fourth century. There are also versions of the *Tiburtine Sibyl* in Arabic and Ethiopic; on this, see J. Schleifer, "Die Erzählung der Sibylle: ein Apokryph. Nach den karshunischen, arabischen und äthiopischen Handschriften zu London, Oxford, Paris und Rom," *Denkschriften der Kaiserlichen Akademie der Wissenschaften. Philosophisch-historische Klasse* 53 (1910), 1–80; R.Y. Ebied and M.J.L. Young, "A Newly-Discovered Version of the Arabic Sibylline Prophecy," *OrChr* 60 (1976), 83–94; id., "An Unrecorded Arabic Version of a Sibylline Prophecy," *OrChrP* 43 (1977), 279–307; as well as translations into old French; on this, see J. Haffen, *Contribution à l'étude de la Sibylle médiévale. Étude et édition du MS. B.N., F. FR. 25407 fol. 160v–172v: Le livre de Sibille* (Annales littéraires de l'Université de Besançon 296; Paris 1984); J. Baroin and J. Haffen, *La Prophétie de la Sibylle Tiburtine. Édition des MSS B.N. FR. 375 et Rennes B.M. FR. 593* (Annales littéraires de l'Université de Besançon 355; Paris 1987). In all of these versions only one side of Jesus is pierced, while the *Acts of John* remain silent on this point.

³³ Both texts are mentioned by Lightfoot, *The Sibylline Oracles* (n. 1), 437.

have a totally different meaning. It could express Jesus' or God's lordship over the universe. In the *Oracles* it is also a barely veiled allusion to Jesus' crucifixion (vv. 372–373): “*But when he will stretch out his hands and measure all, / and bear the crown of thorns – and they will stab.*”

The same idea can also be found in Book 8 (v. 302): “*He will stretch out his hands and measure the entire world.*” It comes later, after the crown of thorns, and it forms an independent sentence. It could have, even more than in Book 1, a totally different meaning if isolated from its context.³⁴

In both cases, of course, the context alludes to, as well as interprets, the Crucifixion. By this very positive reading of the Crucifixion, the Sibyl reinforces the link she wants to draw between the Passion and Salvation, as Lactantius also understands it, when he inserts a Latin version of this line in the fourth Book of his *Divine Institutes*: “*Therefore in His suffering He stretched forth His hands and measured out the world, that even then He might show that a great multitude, collected together out of all languages and tribes, from the rising of the sun even to his setting, was about to come under His wings, and to receive on their foreheads that great and lofty sign.*”³⁵ Many other patristic and apocryphal texts confirm this interpretation of the Crucifixion, in which the Crucified takes the whole world under his protection.³⁶

³⁴ Ch. Alexandre (*Oracula Sibyllina* [Paris 1841], 281, note to 302; *Oracula Sibyllina* [Paris 1869], 237, note to 302ff.) proposed to move this verse after 298. It must be noted that in most of the manuscripts of the *Sibylline Oracles* the order of the verses in Book 8 is very chaotic. That is the reason why I personally would not give so much weight and credit as Nicklas, “Apokryphe Passionstraditionen” (n. 3) does to the literary context – narrower or broader – of the passion narrative in the *Sibylline Oracles*. Nobody has followed Alexandre on this point. In my opinion, verse 302 is in its right position after the announcement of the abrogation of the Law by Jesus in the preceding verses (vv. 299–301); see below.

³⁵ Lactantius, *Div. Inst.*, 4:26:36: “*Extendit ergo in passione manus suas orbemque dimensus est, ut iam tunc ostenderet ab ortu solis usque ad occasum magnum populum ex omnibus linguis et tribubus congregatum sub alas suas esse uenturum signumque illud maximum atque sublime frontibus suis suscepturum.*” Translated by Fletcher, *Ante-Nicene Fathers* (n. 27), 129. Cf. Rev 7:1–4; 14:1. Cf. *Sib Or* 8:302.

³⁶ Irenaeus of Lyon, *haer.*, 5 Frg. gr. 16:10 ff.: “*Through the extension of the hands of a divine person, gathering together the two peoples to one God...*” [= 5:17:4 (inspired by Eph 3:18): “*This word, then, what was hidden from us, did the dispensation of the tree make manifest, as I have already remarked. For as we lost it by means of a tree, by means of a tree again was it made manifest to all, showing the height, the length, the breadth, the depth in itself; and, as a certain man among our predecessors observed, through the extension of the hands of a divine person, gathering together the two peoples to one God. For these were two hands, because there were two peoples scattered to the ends of the earth; but there was one head in the middle, as there is but one God, who is above all, and through all, and in us all.*” (Translated by A. Roberts and W. Rambaut,

Sib Or 8:299–301 and Sib Or 1:332

But before this evocation of the crucifixion (v. 302), the Sibyl of Book 8 prophesies the dissolution of the Law by Jesus (vv. 299–301): “*But when all these things of which I have spoken are fulfilled, / then for him every law will be dissolved which from the beginning / was given in decrees to men, on account of a disobedient people.*” These lines seem to be deeply influenced by the Paul of *Galatians* and, in a certain way, of *Romans*. The same idea, even more explicit and polemical, is found in the already mentioned *Oracle of Baalbek*, lines 41–42, where Jesus is said to dissolve the Law of the Hebrews in order to establish and impose his own law: “*He will dissolve the Law of the Hebrews and establish his own law, and his law will reign.*”³⁷ In Book 8 the reference to the Law of the Hebrews is alluded to indirectly by the mention of “*a disobedient people*” (διὰ λαὸν ἀπειθῆ)³⁸. Paul J. Alexander, the editor of the *Oracle of Baalbek*, correlated the Sibyl’s prophecy that Jesus will destroy the Jewish Law with Marcion’s “*doctrine of the fundamental opposition of Law and Gospel.*”³⁹ We know that “in his *Antitheses* Marcion deleted Jesus’ saying (Matt 5:17) that he had not come to destroy the Law or the Prophets and inserted into his ver-

Ante-Nicene Fathers [ed. by A. Roberts, J. Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe; vol. 1; Buffalo, N.Y. 1885]); Hippolytus, *The Antichrist*, 61: “... *Jesus Christ, who, in stretching forth His holy hands on the holy tree, unfolded two wings, the right and the left, and called to Him all who believed upon Him, and covered them as a hen her chickens.*” (Translated by Ph. Schaff, *Ante-Nicene Fathers* [ed. by A. Roberts, J. Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe; vol. 5; Buffalo, N.Y. 1885]); Lactantius, *Div. Inst.*, 4:26:21, quoted above in n. 27 in relation to *Sib Or 8:295–296*. See also the *Ode of Solomon 27:2–3* (M. Lattke, *Oden Salomos. Text, Übersetzung, Kommentar. Teil 2. Oden 15–28* [NTOA 41/2; Fribourg and Göttingen 2001], 253–256); *Ode of Solomon 42:1–2* (id., *Oden Salomos. Text, Übersetzung, Kommentar. Teil 3. Oden 29–42* [NTOA 41/3; Fribourg and Göttingen 2005], 249–252; English translation: *The Odes of Solomon: A Commentary*, Minneapolis 2009); *Sib Or 5:257* and *8:251* (about Moses).

³⁷ Alexander, *Oracle of Baalbek* (n. 32), 12: λύσει τὸν νόμον τῶν Ἑβραίων καὶ ἴδιον νόμον στήσει, καὶ βασιλεύσει ὁ νόμος αὐτοῦ.

³⁸ I do not follow Nicklas, “Apokryphe Passionstraditionen” (n. 3), 273, n. 47, for whom what is meant by “*every law*” (or also, and maybe better, by “*the whole law*,” πᾶς νόμος) is unclear and may not be related to the Jewish Law, because of this allusion to “*a disobedient people*”. This expression is also found in *Sib Or 1:204*; *3:668*; and *6:11* (after correction), where it obviously refers to the Jewish people. But above all, I do not think it could relate to any other law than to the Law of the Hebrews, as is confirmed by the *Oracle of Baalbek*. This is also J.H. Charlesworth’s view (“Jewish and Christian Self-Definition in the Christian Additions to the Apocryphal Writings,” in: E.P. Sanders [ed.], *Jewish and Christian Self-Definition* [vol. 2; London 1980], 27–55 and 310–315, here 53). See, however, Nicklas, “Apokryphe Passionstraditionen” (n. 3), 275, where he identifies the law of *Sib Or 8:307* with the Jewish Torah. Curiously, Nicklas does not seem to link *Sib Or 8:299–301* to *Sib Or 8:307–309*; see below.

³⁹ Alexander, *Oracle of Baalbek* (n. 32), 72.

sion of the Gospel of Luke a Jewish charge before Pilate that Jesus ‘was destroying the Law and the Prophets.’⁴⁰ Later Marcionists then incorporated into their gospel the words of Jesus himself which said the very opposite of Matt 5:17: ‘Do you believe that I have come to fulfil the Law or the Prophets? I have come to destroy, but not to fulfil.’⁴¹

Sib Or 1:332

αὐτὸς πληρώσει δε θεοῦ νόμον, οὐ κατα-
λύσει
He will fulfil the Law of God – he will not
destroy it –

Sib Or 8:299–301

ἀλλ’ ὅτε ταῦτά γε πάντα τελειωθῆ ἅπερ
εἶπον,
But when all these things of which I have
spoken are fulfilled,
εἰς αὐτὸν τότε πᾶς λύεται νομος, ὅστις ἀπ’
ἀρχῆς
then for him every law will be dissolved
which from the beginning
δόγμασιν ἀνθρώποις ἐδόθη διὰ λαὸν
ἀπειθῆ.
was given in decrees to men, on account of
a disobedient people.

The exegesis of Book 8 strongly contrasts with the assertion of Book 1 of the *Sibylline Oracles* (v. 332): “He will fulfil the Law of God – he will not destroy it –”, which echoes Matt 5:17 (“Do not believe that I have come to destroy the Law and the prophets; I have not come to destroy but to fulfil.”)⁴² except that the Sibyl speaks more precisely of the “Law of God,”⁴³ omits the prophets, and predicts this right at the beginning of her “Gospel epitome” in Book 1. The *Tiburtine Sibyl*, as well as the medieval translations of this text in old French, will say almost the same thing: “He will fulfil the Law of the Hebrews and make additions to it,”⁴⁴ with the substitu-

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, n. 27.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 72. Alexander quotes Isidore of Pelusa, *Ep.* I.371, and refers, of course, to A. von Harnack, *Marcion: Das Evangelium vom fremden Gott* (TU 15; Berlin 1924), 80 and 261; 173 and 235; 369ff. See also Nicklas, “Apokryphe Passionstraditionen” (n. 3), 278.

⁴² See Lightfoot, *The Sibylline Oracles* (n. 1), 427, who refers to D.A. Hagner, *Matthew 1–13* (WBC 33A; Columbia 1993), 105–106, for the meaning of the verb πληρῶσαι. The same explanation can be read in a note to Matt 5:17 in the ecumenical French translation of the New Testament (TOB), Paris 1989. For Jesus and the Law, Lightfoot also refers to R.S. McConnell, *Law and Prophecy in Matthew’s Gospel: The Authority and Use of the Old Testament in the Gospel of St. Matthew* (Dissertation; Basel 1969), 6–100.

⁴³ As in *Sib Or* 3:256, 276, 284, 580, 600, 686, 719, 757, 768; 7:128 and 11:37; on this, see R. Buitenwerf, *Book III of the Sibylline Oracles and its Social Setting, With an Introduction, Translation, and Commentary* (SVTP 17; Leiden and Boston 2003), 339–342.

⁴⁴ E. Sackur, *Sibyllinische Texte und Untersuchungen. Pseudo-Methodius, Adso und die tiburtinische Sibylle* (Halle 1898; reprint Turin 1963), 179, line 28. For a French translation of this text, see R. Basset, *Les apocryphes éthiopiens. X. La sagesse de Sibylle* (Paris 1900). In the manuscripts edited by J. Haffen, *Contribution* (n. 32), 116, one reads:

tion of the “*Law of God*” with the “*Law of the Hebrews*,” and the idea that Jesus will add something to it.

Sib Or 1:367–368a and Sib Or 8:303–304

How do the two Sibylline Books (*Sib Or 1:367–368a* and *Sib Or 8:303–304*) present the episode of the Passion regarding the drink given to Jesus, in comparison with the canonical Gospels?

Or Sib 1, 367[–371]

εἰς δὲ τὸ βρώμα χολήν καὶ εἰς ποτὸν ὄξος
ἄκρατον

For food they will give him gall and for
drink

δυσσεβέως δώσουσι κακῶ βεβολημένοι
οἴστρω

unmixed vinegar, impiously, smitten in
breast

στήθεα καὶ κραδίην, ἀτὰρ ὄμμασιν οὐκ
έσορῶντες

and heart with an evil craze, not seeing
with their eyes

τυφλότεροι σπαλάκων, φοβερώτεροι
έρπυστήρων

more blind than blind rats, more terrible
than poisonous

θηρῶν ἰοβόλων, βαρέι πεπεδημένοι ὕπνω
Creeping beasts, shackled with heavy
sleep.

Or Sib 8, 303–304

εἰς δὲ τὸ βρώμα χολήν καὶ πιεῖν ὄξος
ἔδωκαν·

They gave him gall for food and vinegar to
drink.

τῆς ἀφιλοξενίης ταύτην δείξουσι
τράπεζαν.

They will show forth this table of
inhospitality.

Each of the canonical Gospels narrates how Jesus “*was given drink*” at the Crucifixion (Matt 27:34,48; Mark 15:36; Luke 23:26, and John 19:29) and all of them mention the vinegar, but only Matt 27:34 speaks of “*gall*,” without saying that this is given “*as a meal*” and without associating it with vinegar. According to Matthew it is mingled with wine. The most relevant parallel for the Sibylline verses is found in Ps 68:22 LXX, “*They gave me also gall for my meat; and in my thirst they gave me vinegar to*

“La Lei aemplira / E la soie ajoindra” (vv. 249–250), and by Barouin and Haffen, *La Prophétie* (n. 32), 89: “e aemplira le loy des Hebruius et ajoutera ses propres choses a une chose” (27c, ll. 91–92). According to the abstracts of two other old French versions of the *Tiburtine Sibyl* (M. Le Merrer, “Des sibylles à la sapience dans la tradition médiévale,” *Mélanges de l’École française de Rome. Moyen Âge* 98 [1986], 13–33, here 24: “*Il déposera la loi judaïque et suscitera une nouvelle loi*,” and Ph. Verdier, “La naissance à Rome de la vision de l’Ara Coeli. Un aspect de l’utopie de la paix perpétuelle à travers un thème iconographique,” *Mélanges de l’École française de Rome. Moyen Âge* 94 [1982], 85–119, here 94: “*Il remplacera l’ancienne loi par la loi nouvelle*,”) it is not impossible that some medieval translations of the *Tiburtine Sibyl* have kept the memory of the doubts or controversies concerning Jesus’ attitude towards the Law.

drink,”⁴⁵ as Lactantius also writes in his *Divine Institutes* (4:18:18).⁴⁶ Almost every word used by the Sibyl is found in the biblical text: εἰς τὸ βρώμα, χολήν, ὄξος; only the verb πίνω of *Sib Or* 8:303 is somewhat different, but its meaning is not far from ποτίζω (“to give to drink”), of which we have the substantive in *Sib Or* 1:367. In the case of *Sib Or* 8:303, the kinship goes even further, since we find the same form, ἔδωκαν, which is an aorist in a context where a future tense would be expected, as in the following and preceding verses. It can legitimately be asked if the Sibyl of Book 8 had merely copied from the *Septuagint* without adapting it to the temporal framework of the oracular discourse, which requires a future tense. It is still more probable that this is the case since the following verse (v. 304) alludes to a table, τράπεζα, of inhospitality, the source of which is certainly found in the next verse of the same Psalm 68:23 LXX.⁴⁷ The Sibyl ironically and sarcastically summarizes, with this laconic clause: “they will show forth this table of inhospitality,” what Jesus’ meal will be during the Passion. Taken as a whole, the sequence of verses 288–304 shows that Book 8 of the *Sibylline Oracles* tries to connect the sufferings of the Incarnate Word both with the suffering Servant in Isaiah and the Just in Psalm 68 LXX. Book 1 completes its oracle with a further development of Isa 6:9–10 quoted above in relation to *Sib Or* 1:360–361. These lines (vv. 369–371) are intended to heighten the accusation against Israel: “*Impiously, smitten in breast / and heart with an evil craze, not seeing with their eyes / more blind than blind rats, more terrible than poisonous / creeping beasts, shackled with heavy sleep.*”⁴⁸

Clearly, verse 22 of Psalm 68 LXX also inspired the evangelists, even if John alone alludes to it without quoting it explicitly (John 19:28–29, “in

⁴⁵ Ps 68:22 LXX: καὶ ἔδωκαν εἰς τὸ βρώμά μου χολήν καὶ εἰς τὴν δίψαν μου ἐπότισέν με ὄξος.

⁴⁶ Lactantius, *Div. Inst.*, 4:18:18–19: “But respecting the food and the drink which they offered to Him before they fastened Him to the cross, David thus speaks in the sixty-eighth Psalm: ‘And they gave me gall for my meat; and in my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink.’ The Sibyl foretold that this also would happen: ‘They gave me gall for my food, and for my thirst vinegar; this inhospitable table they will show.’ [*Sib Or* 8:303–304]” (Translated by Fletcher, *Ante-Nicene Fathers* [n. 27], 120–121). Nicklas, “Apokryphe Passionstraditionen” (n. 3), 274, n. 51, notes that the link between Jesus’ meal on the Cross and Ps 68:22 LXX was already drawn by Origen, *Commentary on Matthew*, ser. 137 to Mt 27:47–49.

⁴⁷ Also mentioned by Nicklas, “Apokryphe Passionstraditionen” (n. 3), 273, and Lightfoot, *The Sibylline Oracles* (n. 1), 436, who rightly points out that the Sibyl does not mention Jesus’ clothes, as does Matt 27:35, a detail inspired by Ps 21:19 (20:18 LXX).

⁴⁸ Cf. Lightfoot, *The Sibylline Oracles* (n. 1), 436 for a discussion. On the proverbial blindness of blind rats, see W. Schrage, τυφλός, τυφλώ, *ThWNT* 8 (1969), 270–294, here 275–77.

order to fulfil the Scripture.”) It is almost certain that Matthew was inspired by it, since he replaces the myrrh mingled with wine with the gall, when Jesus arrives on Golgotha.⁴⁹ Thus, Matthew changes the wine mixed with myrrh into a disgusting and humiliating drink and, in so doing, he changes an act of compassion into an act of nasty mockery. The *Gospel of Peter*, the *Epistle of Barnabas*, and Melito of Sardis’ *On Pascha*⁵⁰ come still closer to the spirit of Psalm 68:22 LXX than Matthew, but the Sibyl is the most strongly inspired by this verse, since she never speaks of wine, or vinegar, mingled with gall, but of gall alone which, furthermore, is not called a drink but is presented as food, as in Psalm 68:22 LXX. From Matthew to the *Sibylline Oracles*, we can see an increase in nastiness, and in order to realize it, the latter draw directly from the text of the LXX.⁵¹

Finally, in Book 6 of the *Sibylline Oracles*, the shortest of the collection, the entire Passion of Jesus – the “*Son of the Immortal*” in this Book – is epitomized by these two items: the crown of thorns and the drink mixed with gall. The Passion is expressed here with a remarkable economy (21–25): “*For you alone, land of Sodom, is destined calamity. / For you were malicious, and did not recognize your own God / When he came with mortal eyes. But you crowned him / with acanthus, and terrible gall you mixed / for insult and drink. That will cause you calamity.*”⁵² Lines 22–24 are quoted in the same passage of the *Divine Institutes* mentioned above (4:18:19),⁵³ in relation to Psalm 68:22 LXX. The same anti-Judaism, which

⁴⁹ The Antiochian recension of Matthew also replaces the wine by vinegar, which is a further proof of the influence of Ps 68:22 LXX. See also Nicklas, “Apokryphe Passions-traditionen” (n. 3), 274, n. 52.

⁵⁰ *Gospel of Peter*, 16: “*And someone of them said: ‘Give him to drink gall with vinegary wine.’ And having made a mixture, they gave to drink;*” *Barn.* 7:3: “*When fixed to the cross, He had given Him to drink vinegar and gall;*” *Barn.* 7:5: “*Because to me, who am to offer my flesh for the sins of my new people, you are to give gall with vinegar to drink;*” Melito of Sardis, *On Pascha*, 79:573:574: “*You prepared for Him sharp nails and false witnesses and ropes and scourges and vinegar and gall;*” 582–583: “*While you had wine to drink and bread to eat, He had vinegar and gall.*” See Mara, *Évangile de Pierre* (n. 9), 129–132, although she does not mention the *Sibylline Oracles*; Nicklas, “Apokryphe Passions-traditionen” (n. 3), 274, n. 52.

⁵¹ See Moo, *The Old Testament* (n. 6), 249–252 and 278–280 and Massaux, *Influence* (n. 28), 89.

⁵² My own translation. For a detailed study of this short hymn, see M.D. Usher, “The Sixth Sibylline Oracle as a Literary Hymn,” *Greek, Roman and Byzantine Studies* 36 (1995), 25–49, and J.-M. Roesli, “Le VI^e livre des Oracles sibyllins,” in: *Les Sibylles. Actes des VIII^e Entretiens de La Garenne Lemot, Nantes 18–20 octobre 2001*, (ed. By J. Pigeaud; Nantes 2005), 203–230. An exhaustive bibliography of the previous scholarship on this book will be found there.

⁵³ Lactantius, *Div. Inst.*, 4:18:19: “*And another Sibyl rebukes the land of Judaea in these verses: ‘For you, entertaining hurtful thoughts, did not recognize your God sporting with mortal thoughts; but crowned Him with a crown of thorns, and mingled dreadful*

is found in Book 1 of the *Sibylline Oracles*, appears in this violent judgement, where all Israel is identified with Sodom.

Sib Or 1:375–378 and Sib Or 8:305–309

The *Sibylline Oracles* go immediately from the pseudo-meal offered to Jesus to the tearing of the Temple veil and to the darkness in the middle of the day. The first Book reverses the order of the events, as do the canonical Gospels; the eighth Book prefers to have the tearing of the veil before the darkness.

Sib Or 1:375–378

νύξ ἔσται σκοτόεσσα πελώριος ἡματι
μέσσω
There will be monstrous dark night in
midday
καὶ τότε δὴ ναὸς Σολομώνιος ἀνθρώ-
ποισιν
And then indeed the temple of Solomon
will effect
σῆμα μέγ' ἐκελεύσει, ὅποταν' Αἰδωνέος
οἶκον
a great sign for men, when he goes to the
house of Hades
βέσεται ἀγγέλλων ἐπαναστασίην τεθνεώ-
σιν.
Announcing the resurrection to the dead.

Sib Or 8:305–309

ναοῦ δὲ σχισθῆ τὸ πέτασμα καὶ ἡματι
μέσσω
The veil of the Temple will be rent, and in
midday
νύξ ἔσται σκοτόεσσα πελώριος ἐν τρισὶν
ῥαῖς.
there will be dark monstrous night for
three hours.

οὐκέτι γὰρ κρυφίῳ τε νόμῳ ναῶ τε λα-
τρεῦειν
For it has been again revealed that there
would no longer be obedience to a temple
φαντασίαις κόσμου κεκαλυμμένῳ αὐτίς
ἐδείχθη
nor to a secret law hidden behind the
illusions of the world,
αὐθέντου καταβάντος ἐπὶ χθονὸς ἀενάοιο.
when the eternal sovereign came down to
earth.

The two events are narrated in the Synoptics (Matt 27:51; Mark 15:38; Luke 23:45; and Matt 27:45; Mark 15:33; Luke 23:34), but the treatment in the *Sibylline Oracles* is quite different.

Apart from the reverse order of the two events, Book 8 is very close in its formulation to the Synoptics, since the substantive *ναός* and the verb

gall.' [*Sib Or 6:22–24*]” (Translated by Fletcher, *Ante-Nicene Fathers* [n. 27], 120–121.) Lactantius has another variant in the first hemistich of verse 23, which explains the difference in translation; on this, see Roessli, “Le VI^e livre des *Oracles sibyllins*” (n. 52), 226–227.

σχίζω are found in it. Only the word πέτασμα replaces, for obvious metric reasons, the composite word καταπέτασμα of the Synoptics. Furthermore, Book 8 seems to link the tearing of the veil and the coming of the Word on earth to the lifting of all restrictions on reaching God (v. 307–309): “*For it has been again revealed that there would no longer be obedience to a temple / nor to a secret law hidden behind the illusions of the world, / once the eternal sovereign has come down to earth.*”⁵⁴ These verses are certainly to be read in relation to lines 299–301, as if they were written to follow them (“*For it has been again revealed...*”). They also refer to one of the possible interpretations of Matt 27:51 (“*At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom,*” [NRSV]) the veil of the sanctuary pointing possibly both to the veil separating the parvis of the Temple itself – the renting of which opens up access to the presence of God to the pagans – as well as to the veil separating the Holy place from the Holy of Holies – the tearing of which means the end of the priesthood of the Ancient Covenant.⁵⁵ This is not the same in the first book, where the Sibyl takes some liberties in describing the Temple (ναός) as “Solomonian” – as she does again later (v. 393).⁵⁶ She predicts not the tearing of the veil – which is totally absent in this version of the narrative – but that a great sign (σῆμα) would echo from the Temple. This imagery belongs to the sibylline repertoire of signs (σήματα) and prodigies (*Sib Or* 4:56; 12:74; 14:221, and, above all, *Sib Or* 8:244).⁵⁷

However, as stated above, the darkness which had covered the earth is known to the Synoptics (Matt 27:45, Mark 15:33, and Luke 23:44) and

⁵⁴ My translation. Collins’ translation is: “*For no longer with secret law and temple must one serve / the phantoms of the world. That which had been hidden was again made manifest / when the eternal sovereign came down to earth.*” Compare also with Terry, *Sibylline Oracles* (1899, n. 26), 60: “*For it was no more pointed out again / How to serve secret temple and the law / Which had been covered with the world’s displays, / When the Eternal came himself on earth,*” and with Roessli, “Les oracles sibyllins” (n. 26), 1077: “*Car il fut à nouveau révélé qu’on ne servirait plus un temple / et une loi secrète qui se cache dans les images du monde, / une fois le souverain éternel descendu sur terre.*” A similar idea is found later in 8:326–328: “*... appearing gentle to all so that he [the king Jesus] may lift our yoke / of slavery, hard to bear, which lies on our neck / and undo the godless ordinances and constraining bonds.*” See Lightfoot, *The Sibylline Oracles* (n. 1), 438, who refers to Hagner, *Matthew 14–28* (n. 42), 849. See also Nicklas, “Apokryphe Passionstraditionen” (n. 3), 275, who rightly identifies the law of *Sib Or* 8:307 with the Jewish Torah, and wonders sceptically (n. 54) if the “secret law” of this verse has something to do with the secret revelation added to the Torah, of which the apocalyptic tradition speaks.

⁵⁵ See note to Matt 27:51 (TOB [n. 42]).

⁵⁶ The adjective Σολομώνιος is found only here and in *Sib Or* 3:167, 214 in the Judaeo-Hellenistic literature.

⁵⁷ See Lightfoot, *The Sibylline Oracles* (n. 1), 437.

happens after the tearing of the veil, contrary to what happens in Book 8. In the Synoptics there is darkness from the sixth to the ninth hour, i.e. for three hours, but it is not said that it was night during the day. The *Gospel of Peter* again shows kinship with the *Sibylline Oracles*, because it, too, speaks of darkness at midday (v. 15): “*it was noon and darkness came over all of Judea.*”⁵⁸ The *Gospel of Peter* differs when this happens abruptly before the drinking scene and because the drink consists in a mixture of gall and vinegar (v. 16), something we do not find in the *Sibylline Oracles*.

So, it seems that once again the *Gospel of Peter* and the *Sibylline Oracles* drew on common sources, without necessarily depending on each other, since we find as many points of convergence as points of divergence between them.⁵⁹

Patristic tradition⁶⁰ saw in the miraculous darkness at Calvary the accomplishment of the prophecies by Amos 8:9 “‘*On that day, says the Lord GOD, I will make the sun go down at noon, and darken the earth in broad daylight*’” and Jer 15:9: “‘... *her sun went down while it was yet day.*”⁶¹ Lactantius offers a good example, since he refers to these biblical prophecies before quoting our Sibylline verses:

Therefore, being lifted up and nailed to the cross, He cried to the Lord with a loud voice, and of His own accord gave up His spirit. And at the same hour there was an earthquake; and the veil of the temple, which separated the two tabernacles, was rent into two parts; and the sun suddenly withdrew its light, and there was darkness from the sixth even to the ninth hour. Of which event the prophet Amos testifies: ‘And it shall come to pass in that day, says the Lord, that the sun shall go down at noon, and the daylight shall be darkened; and I will turn your feasts into mourning, and your songs into lamentation.’ Also Jeremiah: ‘She who brings forth is affrighted, and vexed in spirit; her sun is gone down while it was yet mid-day; she hath been ashamed and confounded; and the residue of them will I give to the sword in the sight of their enemies.’ And the Sibyl: ‘And the veil of the temple shall be rent, and at midday there shall be dark vast night for three hours.’⁶²

⁵⁸ *Gospel of Peter*, v. 15a: ἦν δὲ μεσημβρία καὶ σκότος κατέσχε πᾶσαν τὴν Ἰουδαίαν. Translated by Ehrman, *Lost Scriptures* (n. 7), 32. See Nicklas, “Apokryphe Passionstraditionen” (n. 3), 274.

⁵⁹ On this, see, of course, Nicklas, “Apokryphe Passionstraditionen” (n. 3), who did not take Books 1 and 6 into account in his comparison.

⁶⁰ Irenaeus, *haer.*, 4:33:12; Tertullian, *Against the Jews*, 10; *Against Marcion*, 4:42; Cyprian, *Testimonia*, 2:23; Eusebius, *Evangelical Demonstration*, 10:6:1; Aphraate, *Homelies*, 1:11; Cyril of Jerusalem, *Cat.*, 13:25.

⁶¹ Amos 8:9 LXX: δύσεται ὁ ἥλιος μεσημβρίας. Jer 15:9: ἐπέδυ ὁ ἥλιος αὐτῇ ἔτι μεσοῦσης τῆς ἡμέρας. See E. Massaux, *Influence* (n. 28), 89–90.

⁶² Lactantius, *Div. Inst.*, 4:19:2–5: “Suspensus igitur et adfixus exclamavit ad Deum uoce magna et ultro spiritum posuit. Et eadem hora terrae motus factus est et uelum templi quod separabat duo tabernacula scissum est in duas partes et sol repente subductus est et ab hora sexta usque in nonam tenebrae fuerunt. Qua de re Amos propheta testatur: ‘Et

Neither the Sibyl in Book 1 nor the Sibyl in Book 8 mentions the simultaneous earthquake of Matt 27:51 (“*The earth shook, and the rocks were split*”) and parallels.⁶³

Sib Or 1:377b–380 and Sib Or 8:310–314

In Book 1 the sound or sign (σημα) which resounds in the Temple coincides with the descent of Christ into Hell.⁶⁴ In Book 8 the descent happens when the veil of the temple is rent and the night comes in midday. This event seems present in the NT (cf. 1 Cor 15:20: “*the first fruits (ἀπαρχή) of those who have died*,” and perhaps 1 Pet 3:19: “*in which also he [Christ] went and made a proclamation to the spirits in prison*”), where it is connected to prophetic expectations. When Lactantius cites *Sib Or* 8:312–314 in his *Divine Institutes* (4:19:10), he does it in relation to Psalm 3:6 [3:5] and 16 (15):10, and above all Hos 6:2 (“*After two days he will revive us; on the third day he will raise us up, that we may live before him*”) and 13:13–14 (“*The pangs of childbirth come for him, but he is an unwise son; for now he does not present himself at the mouth of the womb. Shall I ransom them from the power of Sheol? Shall I redeem them from Death? O Death, where are your plagues? O Sheol, where is your destruction? Compassion is hidden from my eyes.*” [NRSV]) But the Christian tradition, especially at the beginning, has a hard time agreeing about what Christ actually said when he was in Hell.⁶⁵ The *Sibylline Oracles* reflect this diversity of views. In Book 1, Christ is presented as proclaiming the resurrection of the dead without any exception (v. 378). In Book 8, however, he offers hope for all the saints (v. 310–311; cf. v. 227), and announces the end of time and the last day (v. 311). Verse 312 goes further in promising that Christ will put an end to death: “*And he will complete the fate of death when he has slept the third day.*” It is also in this way that Lactantius understood it: “*And the Sibyl, too, said that he would impose a terminus on death after a sleep of three days: ‘And the sleep of death hav-*

erit in illo die, dicit Dominus, occidet sol meridie et obtenebricabitur dies lucis: et conuertam dies festos uestros in luctum et cantica uestra in lamentationem.’ Item Hieremias: ‘Exterrita est quae parit et taediuit anima, et subiuit sol ei, cum adhuc medius dies esset, contusa est et maledicta: reliquos eorum in gladium dabo in conspectu inimicorum eorum.’ Et Sibylla: [Or sib 8,305–306]” (Translated by W. Fletcher, *Ante-Nicene Fathers* [n. 27], 122.)

⁶³ Lightfoot, *The Sibylline Oracles* (n. 1), 437.

⁶⁴ Ἀιδωνέος is probably a poetic form of Ἀιδης (8:310) rather than the genitive of Adonis (Ἀιδωνεύς), as Collins believed and which I correct.

⁶⁵ On this topic, see R. Gounelle, *La descente du Christ aux enfers. Institutionnalisation d’une croyance* (CEA; Série Antiquité 162; Paris 2000); id. (ed.), *La descente du Christ aux enfers* (Supplément Cahiers Évangile 128; Paris 2004), although he says nothing about the *Sibylline Oracles*.

ing been undergone, he shall be dead for three days. And then coming back from the dead he shall come to light, the first of resurrection, showing the beginning to those called.’ (*Sib Or* 8:312-314)”⁶⁶

Sib Or 1:377b–380

... ὅπoταν Ἰδωνέος οἶκον
... when he goes to the house of Hades

βήσεται ἀγγέλλων ἐπαναστασίην τεθνε-
ώσιν
Announcing the resurrection to the dead.
αὐτὰρ ἐπὴν ἔλθῃ τρισὶν ἡμασιν ἐς φάος
αὐτίς
When he comes again in three days to the
light
καὶ δείξῃ θνητοῖσι τύπον καὶ πάντα
διδάξῃ
and shows his wounds and teaches all...

Sib Or 8:310–314

ἦξει δ’ εἰς Ἰδὴν ἀγγέλλων ἐλπίδα πᾶσιν
He will come to the Hades announcing hope
for all
τοῖς ἀγίοις, τέλος αἰώνων καὶ ἔσχατον
ἡμᾶρ
the holy ones, the end of ages and last day,
καὶ θανάτου μοῖραν τελέσει τρίτον ἡμᾶρ
ὑπνώσας
and he will complete the fate of death when
he has slept the third day.
καὶ τότε ἀπὸ φθιμένων ἀναλύσας εἰς φάος
ἦξει
And then, returning from the dead, he will
come to light,
πρώτος ἀναστάσεως κλητοῖς ἀρχὴν ὑπο-
δείξας
first of the resurrection, showing a begin-
ning to the elect...

Conclusion

When one examines the relationships between the Scriptures and the Books of the *Sibylline Oracles* considered in this paper, it can be concluded that the latter reveal clear affinity with the Gospel of Matthew, as is frequently the case for several Christian literary works written before the third century. They also show the faint influence of other canonical writings, of certain apocrypha and, of course, of the Prophets. However, we find no explicit quotations from Mark and Luke in Books 6 and 8,⁶⁷ while Mark shows up in Book 1 by a short allusion to the story of John the Bap-

⁶⁶ Lactantius, *Div. Inst.*, 4:19:10: “Et ideo Sibylla impositurum esse morti terminum dixit post tridui somnum: [*Sib Or* 8:312–314]” (Translated by M.F. McDonald, in *The Fathers of the Church. A New Translation*, vol. 49; New York 1964, 297–298). The passion narrative ends here. Books 1 and 8 continue with the apparition of the Resurrected and his ascension to heaven (*Sib Or* 1:380–381 and 8:318–320), preceded in 8:315–317 by an exegesis of the baptism.

⁶⁷ See Massaux, *Influence* (n. 28), 80–98, for the last point 97. See also W.-D. Köhler, *Die Rezeption des Matthäusevangeliums in der Zeit vor Irenäus* (WUNT II.24; Tübingen 1987).

tist's murder (1:342–343) and an apparent verbal similarity (1:373).⁶⁸ In Book 1 there are still more episodes closely copied from Matthew than in Books 6 and 8, and some passages specifically reflect the vocabulary of John (1:373–374, and 1:340–341 and 360–361 for episodes other than the passion narrative), which does not seem to be the case in Books 6 and 8. The main difference consists of opposing views on Jesus' attitude towards the Law. The Sibyl of Book 1 asserts that he “*will fulfil*” it (v. 332), while the Sibyl of Book 8 insists that he will abolish it and all what is connected to it (vv. 300–301; 307–309, 326b–328, quoted by Lactantius in *Div. Inst.* 7:18:8).⁶⁹ Furthermore, Book 8 is much more interested in mystical and typological interpretations and its language is much more metaphorical, sometimes even a bit florid (see, e. g., *Sib Or* 8:294–298).

The juxtaposition and combination of various Gospel sources cause us to think that the authors of these works could have used a Gospel harmony, since there is evidence for such harmonies for this period (second and third centuries).⁷⁰ Nevertheless, the *Oracles* are sometimes too eclectic for a harmony, although some episodes might reflect such an approach, for example, the fusion of two episodes: the mockery of Jesus with a crown of thorns and a reed before the crucifixion and the piercing of his side during the crucifixion in 1:373–374 and 8:294–296.

In fact, the Sibyl seems particularly interested in the Gospel narratives which have a prophetic background or which explicitly quote prophetic texts. Thus, the Sibyl shows an inclination for Matthew and other New Testament writings which incorporate prophetic testimonies applicable to Christ. So, for example, the obstinate refusal of Israel to recognize Jesus as the Messiah in *Sib Or* 1:360–364; 368–371, is read alongside Isa 6, quoted in the Gospels and the Acts. The bad treatment reserved to the Messiah in *Sib Or* 1:365–366 and *Sib Or* 8:288–290 is also inspired by Isa 50 and 53, which are themselves paraphrased in the Synoptics. The same thing happens with the gall and the vinegar which come from Psalm 68 LXX, alluded to by John and clearly reinterpreted by Matthew. The Sibyls oscillate constantly between the Gospels, the Prophets as quoted in the Gospels, and the original prophetic sources, sometimes through a New Testament citation (*Sib Or* 1:365–366: πτύσματα; *Sib Or* 8:289: ἐμπτύσματα; *Sib Or* 1:367

⁶⁸ Lightfoot, *The Sibylline Oracles* (n. 1), 426 finds a single – perhaps accidental – echo of Luke (*Sib Or* 1:371).

⁶⁹ Lactantius, *Div. Inst.*, 7:18:8: “*He will take away the intolerable yoke of slavery which is placed on our neck, and he will do away with impious laws and violent chains.*” (Translated by W. Fletcher, *The Ante-Nicene Fathers* [n. 27], 116.)

⁷⁰ Tatian's *Diatessaron* is the first known Harmony of the four Gospels, but Tatian's teacher, Justin, seems to have already known such a synoptic harmony. See also Nicklas, “Apokryphe Passionstraditionen” (n. 3), 274, n. 52, and Lightfoot, *The Sibylline Oracles* (n. 1), 426–427.

and 8:303: *χολή* and *ὄξος*), sometimes not (*Sib Or* 1:365–366: “unclean lips;” *Sib Or* 8:299: “polluted mouths;” *Sib Or* 1:375: “a monstrous dark night in midday;” *Sib Or* 8:306: “dark monstrous night for three hours;”) while adopting a way of reading the Prophets which derives directly from the canonical Gospels. The Sibyls of these Books belong therefore to currents of early Christian exegesis of Scriptures in which they embody a pagan prophetess supposed to prophecy the Gospels alongside with the Hebrew Prophets, towards whom the Sibyl of Book 1 even pretends to distance herself, since she announces their end (v. 386).

Regarding the Passion narrative, two different perceptions can be seen in these books of the *Sibylline* collection. Books 1 and 6 are extremely hostile to the Jews (1:360–371; 387; 6:21–25): they are responsible for the Messiah’s death. This aspect is also found in the *Gospel of Peter*,⁷¹ but it does not imply that there is a literary dependence between these texts. Nothing of this has any parallel in Book 8, where the Jews are never named and Jesus’ enemies hardly identifiable, except by their impiety (v. 287). If Book 1 is openly polemical against Israel, at the same time it is favourable to the mission to the Gentiles (*ἔθνη*; vv. 345–347 and 383–384), which could mean that his author “sees himself primarily in terms of the Gentiles and not as a sect of, or development, from Israel.”⁷² Unlike him, the author of Book 8 seems to be simultaneously concerned by the conversion of both the Jews and the pagans (v. 316b–317: “so that, born from above, they may no longer serve the lawless customs of the world,”⁷³ v. 324: “Rejoice, holy daughter of Sion, who have suffered much,”⁷⁴ v. 332: “Set aside the former [gods or customs] and wash from his blood.”)

In Book 1 (v. 364) Jesus is called Son of God (*παῖς θεοῦ*), while in Book 8 (v. 288) he is named God (*θεός*). These two titles, of which we have other examples (*Sib Or* 1:324, 331 and *Sib Or* 8:242, 249–250), reflect different christologies. Although too vague to be connected with a specific Gospel, the christology of Book 1 is rather close to the canonical tradition, while Book 8 reflects a form of “*modalist monarchianism*”, in which Father and Son are perfectly identified. We have other striking

⁷¹ On this, see T. Nicklas, “Die Juden im Petrus-evangelium (PCair 10759). Ein Testfall,” *NTS* 47 (2001), 206–221, as well as J.D. Crossan’s and J. Verheyden’s contributions in: Kraus/Nicklas (eds.), *Das Evangelium nach Petrus* (n. 3), 117–134 and 281–300.

⁷² Charlesworth, “Jewish and Christian Self-Definition” (n. 38), 50.

⁷³ These “*lawless customs of the world*” might refer to the pagan as well as to the Jewish practices.

⁷⁴ See Isa 62:11 and, above all, Zec 9:9: “*Rejoice greatly, O daughter Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter Jerusalem! Lo, your king comes to you; triumphant and victorious is he, humble and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey*” [NRSV]), this one quoted by Matt 21:5 and John 12:15.

examples of this in Book 6 (vv. 22–24) of the *Sibylline Oracles*, which I believe is one of the earliest Christian compositions of the collection (A.D. 150–250): “For you were malicious, and did not recognize your own God / When he came with mortal eyes. But you crowned him / with acanthus, and terrible gall you mixed...,”⁷⁵ as well as in Book 7 (v. 53: “because they did not recognize God,”) vv. 66–67: “Wretched one, you did not recognize your God, whom once Jordan washed three times, and the Spirit flew like a dove.”⁷⁶

The Christian authors who quote the Sibyls of our books do so in order to show the concord (συμφωνία) between the message of the Old Testament and that of the (supposed) pagan prophecies.⁷⁷ Thus Lactantius, in the fourth book of his *Divine Institutes*, draws heavily on the christological section of Book 8 (vv. 272–314), citing first an Old Testament prophecy, then a passage of Book 8 which is supposed to corroborate it. As we have seen, Lactantius often quotes the very biblical passage on which the Sibyl relies, and presents her text as if it was an independent prediction (cf. *Sib Or* 8:287–790 in *Div. Inst.* 4:18:13–15; *Sib Or* 8:303–304 and *Sib Or* 6:22–24 in *Div. Inst.* 4:18:18–20). In so doing, Lactantius is the Sibyl’s ideal reader, since he interprets her exactly as she hopes to be interpreted, simultaneously “raising and dismissing the possibility of forgery.”⁷⁸ Lactantius, in using 8:272–314, shows no other interest than in the narrative parts of the section, in other words, in the predictions of events related to the life of

⁷⁵ My translation. *Sib Or* 6:22–23: αὐτὴ γὰρ δύσφρων τὸν σὸν θεὸν οὐκ ἐνόησας / ἐλθόντα θνητοῖσιν ἐν ὄμμασιν· ἀλλ’ ἀπ’ ἀκάνθης ... – Strikingly, neither the name of Jesus or his designation as “Christ” appears in this book. It is also the case in the preserved fragments of the *Gospel of Peter*; see Nicklas, “Apokryphe Passionstraditionen” (n. 3), 267, n. 20.

⁷⁶ My translation. *Sib Or* 7:53: ὅτι δὴ θεὸν οὐκ ἐνόησαν. *Sib Or* 7:66–67: τλήμων, οὐκ ἔγνωσ τὸν σὸν θεόν, ὃν ποτ’ ἔλουσεν / Ἰόρδανος ἐν τριτάτοισι καὶ ἔπτατο πνεῦμα πελεῖ’ ὡς. For a French translation and a commentary on Books 6, 7 and 8 of the *Sibylline Oracles*, see Roessli, “Les oracles sibyllins” (n. 26), as well as my dissertation on this topic to be published in the *Series apocryphorum* of the *Corpus Christianorum*.

⁷⁷ See J.-M. Roessli, “Catalogues de sibylles, recueil(s) de *Libri Sibyllini* et corpus des *Oracula Sibyllina*. Remarques sur la formation et la constitution de quelques collections oraculaires dans les mondes gréco-romain, juif et chrétien,” in E. Norelli (ed.), *Recueils normatifs et canons dans l’antiquité. Perspectives nouvelles sur la formation des canons juif et chrétien dans leur contexte culturel. Actes du colloque organisé dans le cadre du programme plurifacultaire “La Bible à la croisée des savoirs” de l’Université de Genève, 11–12 avril 2002* (PIRSB 3; Lausanne 2004), 47–68, here 64.

⁷⁸ Lightfoot, *The Sibylline Oracles* (n. 1), 425. See Lactantius, *Div. Inst.*, 4:15:26: “His testimoniis quidam reuicti eo confugere ut aiant non esse illa carmina Sibyllina, sed a nostris ficta atque composita.” “Some, refuted by these testimonies, are accustomed to have recourse to the assertion that these poems were not by the Sibyls, but made up and composed by our own writers.” (Translated by Fletcher, *Ante-Nicene Fathers* [n. 27], 116.)

Jesus. He passes over the theological reflections which constitute a main feature of Book 8 (cf. vv. 279–286; 295–298; 299–301; 307–311) and which differentiates it so strongly from Book 1. Lactantius' use of the *Sibylline Oracles* will be followed by the author of the *Tübingen Theosophy*, who sees the Sibyl as “a seer in accord with the holy prophets.”⁷⁹ Let us note that the parallelism between the supposed pagan prophecies of the Sibyls and that of the Hebrew prophets is at the origin of the iconographical correlation that Christian art will draw from the eleventh century onwards and which will bring the artists to juxtapose Sibyls and Hebrew Prophets in a single scene.⁸⁰

From the fact that Lactantius and early Christian literature before the *Tübingen Theosophy* (5th-6th century)⁸¹ cite both Books 8 and 6 and not Book 1, some scholars have concluded that Book 8 is prior to Book 1. In a further step it has been assumed that Book 1 derived from Book 8, until Kurfess argued that both Books had drawn independently from the New Testament and that similarities between them were accidental.⁸² With Waßmuth and Lightfoot, I consider that the numerous similarities between the two books militate against a total independence of the two books. More recently, Olaf Waßmuth, following Kurfess, argued for the priority of Book 1 over Book 8, among other reasons because its theology is more complex and sophisticated. This divergence of views explains the difficulty in dating Book 1 and 8, particularly Book 1, some arguing for a Christian rewriting of a Jewish oracle in the middle of the second century (Friedlieb, Collins, Waßmuth)⁸³, some in the third (Geffcken)⁸⁴, and finally

⁷⁹ *Tübingen Theosophy*, § 10 (Erbse [n. 5], 80,294): ὡς δὲ σύμφωνός τις ἢ πρόμαντις τῶν προφητῶν.”

⁸⁰ See E. Mâle, *L'art religieux du XIII^e siècle en France* (Paris 1919 [1898]), 339–343; id., *L'art religieux de la fin du Moyen Âge en France* (Paris 1949 [1908]), 254–279; L. Réau, *Iconographie de l'art chrétien* (II, 1; Paris 1956), 420–430; G. Seib, “Sibyllen,” in: E. Kirschbaum (ed.), *Lexikon der christlichen Ikonographie* 4 (1972), 150–153; Redaktion, “Propheten,” in: id. (ed.), *o. l.* 3 (1972), 461–462; F. Gay, “Sibille,” in *Enciclopedia dell'arte medievale* X (1999), 586–589.

⁸¹ If we except a possible allusion to *Sib Or* 1:283ff. in the *Constantine's Discourse to the Assembly of the Saints* (18,2), dated between 313 and 325 (see J.-M. Roessli, “Vies et métamorphoses de la Sibylle,” review article about M. Bouquet and F. Morzadec (eds.), *La Sibylle. Parole et représentation* [Collection « Interférences »], Rennes 2004, and about J. Pigeaud (ed.), *Les Sibylles. Actes des VIII^e Entretiens de La Garenne Lemot, 18 au 20 octobre 2001*, Nantes 2005, in *Revue de l'histoire des religions* 224/2 [2007] 253–271, here 259–260), the first textual evidence for Books 1 and 2 comes from the *Tübingen Theosophy*.

⁸² A. Kurfess, “Oracula Sibyllina I/II”, *ZNW* 40 (1941), 151–165, here 159–160.

⁸³ J.H. Friedlieb, Χρησμοὶ σιβυλλιακοί. *Oracula Sibyllina ad fidem codd. mscr. quotquot extant recensuit, praetextis prolegomenis illustravit, versione Germanica instruxit, annotationes criticas et indices rerum et verborum locupletissimos adiecit*, Leip-

some seeing in Books 1 and 2 a Christian composition of the second (Lightfoot [n. 1], 149), the third (Alexandre)⁸⁵ or the fifth century (Bleek, Goodman).⁸⁶ Whatever the priority, what is important to understand is that the author who wrote after felt free to use his sources (Bible and *Sibylline Oracles*) in his own way.

zig 1852 / *Die sibyllinischen Weissagungen, vollstaendig gesammelt nach neuer Handschriftenvergleichung, mit kritischem Commentare und metrischer deutscher Uebersetzung* (Leipzig 1852), XIV–XXII and LIX; Collins, “The Sibylline Oracles” (n. 1); Waßmuth, *Sibyllinische Orakel 1/2* (n. 1).

⁸⁴ J. Geffcken, *Komposition und Entstehungszeit der Oracula Sibyllina* (TU 8.1; Leipzig 1902), 47–53.

⁸⁵ Ch. Alexandre, *Oracula Sibyllina* (vol. 2, *Excursus ad Sibyllinos libros*, V, cap. x. *De primo libro et secundo*; Paris 1856), 389–401.

⁸⁶ F. Bleek, “Ueber die Entstehung und Zusammensetzung der uns in 8 Büchern erhaltenen Sammlung Sibyllinischer Orakel; eine kritische Untersuchung mit besonderer Rücksicht auf Thorlacius,” *ThZ* 1 (1819), 120–246, here 167–197; M. Goodman, “The Sibylline Oracles,” in *The History of the Jewish People in the Age of Jesus Christ (175 B.C.–A.D. 135)* (ed. G. Schürer; revised and edited by G. Vermes, F. Millar and M. Goodman; vol. III.1; Edinburgh 1986), 618–654, here 645.