CHAPTER 6

The Wrath of the Sibyl
Homeric Reception and Contested Identities in the Sibylline Oracles 3

Emma Greensmith

Introduction

At some time in (perhaps) the first century BCE, in (perhaps) Alexandria, an anonymous poet adopts the voice of the Sibyl to rage against Homer. In fiery, spluttering hexameters, this Sibyl attacks the famous bard and exposes his woeful insufficiencies: he is old, a liar, a thief, and a false later imposter of her poetic craft:

καί τις ψευδογράφος πρέσβυς βροτὸς ἔσσεται αὖτις
(420) ψευδόπατρις· δύσει δὲ φάος ἐν ὀπῇσιν ἑῇσιν·
νοῦν δὲ πολὺν καὶ ἔπος διανοίαις ἔμμετρον ἕξει,
οὐνόμασιν δυσὶ μισγόμενον· Χῖον δὲ καλέσσει
αὑτὸν καὶ γράψει τὰ κατ' Ἴλιον, οὐ μὲν ἀληθῶς,
ἀλλὰ σοφῶς· ἐπέων γὰρ ἐμῶν μέτρων τε κρατήσει·
(425) πρῶτος γὰρ χείρεσσιν ἐμὰς βίβλους ἀναπλώσει·
αὐτὸς δ' αὖ μάλα κοσμήσει πολέμοιο κορυστάς,
Ἕκτορα Πριαμίδην καὶ Ἀχιλλέα Πηλείωνα
τούς τ' ἄλλους, ὁπόσοις πολεμήια ἔργα μέμηλεν.
καί γε θεοὺς τούτοισι παρίστασθαί γε ποιήσει,
(430) ψευδογραφῶν κατὰ πάντα τρόπον, μέροπας κενοκράνους.
καὶ θανέειν μᾶλλον τοῖσιν κλέος ἔσσεται εὐρύ
Ἰλίῳ· ἀλλὰ καὶ αὐτὸς ἀμοιβαῖα δέξεται ἔργα.

And then there will be a certain false writer, an old mortal, who has a false fatherland. The light in his eyes will go out. He will be very smart and have a speech suitable for his thoughts which will be joined under two names. He will call himself an inhabitant of Chios. He will write the story of Ilium, not truthfully, but cleverly. For he will have mastered my verses and metres, since he will be the first to open my books with his hands. He will highly embellish the helmed men of war, Hector, son of Priam, Achilles, son of Peleus, and others, as many as cared for warfare. And he will make gods, in fact empty-headed people, to stand by them, writing falsely in every respect.

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And it will be a great glory for them to die at Troy. But he will also receive retribution.

(*Or. Sib.* 3.419–32)[1]

To the classicist interested in the reception of Homer in later Greco-Roman antiquity – a topic which has certainly found no shortage of enthusiasts in recent years – this tirade is a treasure chest of material. The Sibyl's words display a number of familiar patterns of Homeric reading, reception and rejection. She[2] unpicks aspects of Homer's biography – his birthplace, genealogy and physiognomy; she challenges the veracity of his epic tales; and she puts forward a reading of literary time which sees Homer, the font of Greek learning and education, as secondary, belated and derivative. In a few angry lines, notions of Homeric truth, fiction, originality and temporality are boldly articulated. And yet the oracle has received no mention in recent scholarly literature on the reception of Homer in the Hellenistic or imperial Greek worlds, nor in the studies exploring the links between these two epochs. I begin with this fact not to perform the usual move of decrying critical neglect of an underexplored work, but because it provides fundamental grounding for this chapter's central topic. For this absence is significant; but, when we consider the text's provenance, perhaps not wholly surprising.

The passage is taken from the third book of the Sibylline Oracles: the oldest, mostly Jewish, book of a vast compilation of eschatological utterances attributed to the Sibyl's voice.[3] Ranging in date from the second century BCE to second century CE, these oracles make moralising, sometimes apocalyptic[4] pronouncements, and they give elongated genealogies about the starts of the world and premonitions about the end of it, including the fall of Rome, the great superpower which will one day be brought down by its own vices. The passage, the book and the entire

[1] The text of *Or. Sib.* 3 is taken from Geffcken 1902 and the translations adapted from Buitenwerf 2003.

[2] The issue of the authorship of the Sibylline Oracles is perennially contentious: see below, 'The Sibyl and Sibyllina: A Tradition of Plurality'. In full acknowledgement of these issues, I shall refer throughout this chapter to the poet of Book 3 as 'she', partly as a means of circumventing the thorny and unsolvable question of who really wrote this work, and partly as a nod to the feminine identity of the poetic voice being appropriated (on this aspect, see Levine 1995, who reads the Oracles as part of a feminist commentary on scriptural and intertestamental literature).

[3] There are fifteen books, the last of which does not survive. For editions, commentaries and scholarship on individual books (predominantly 1–2, 3 and 5, on which scholarly work has focused), see discussion and references below, 'The Sibyl and Sibyllina: A Tradition of Plurality'.

[4] On how far the oracles can rightly be deemed apocalyptic, see Collins 1974 and 1986 with discussion in Lightfoot 2007: 111–14.

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collection are extremely difficult to contextualise: each book, and often each oracle, contains a mixture not only of dates, but also of cultural and religious politics – some are pagan, some Jewish, some Christian, some an elusive mixture of all three. The oracles' literary sources are hard to track, and their poetic sophistication is dubious and often disparaged. As a result, the collection has tended to slip into the precarious critical space between Classics and theology departments. Jane Lightfoot begins her monumental edition of the first two books of the Oracles[5] by outlining this problem: 'The Sibylline Oracles are still a relatively unexplored area. They are just that bit too classical for students of the Jewish or Christian apocrypha to feel really comfortable handling them. For classicists, their origins in the byways of . . . Jewish or early Christian culture may serve to counteract the familiarity of their classical literary form.'[6] And yet, Lightfoot proceeds with cautious optimism, everyone who has worked on the Oracles agrees just 'how interesting they are'.[7] This passage from Book 3 is from the outset highly 'interesting' to the classical scholar of late Hellenistic Homer, not only because of the issues and themes that it raises, but also because of the form that it takes. By writing in epic hexameters, the conventional metre of oracles, the author is also able to attack Homer using his own medium and textual fabric.

In this chapter, I shall take this passage as my focus, to make the case for the Oracles' significant engagement with later Hellenistic literary culture. In her attack on Homer in Book 3, the Sibyl uses her poetry to reflect, distort and disrupt notions of Homeric authority and exegesis for a new and distinctive agenda. I begin with two frameworks to contextualise this reading: firstly, the expanded authority of and investment in Homer beginning in late Hellenistic culture and reaching its zenith in the 'Second Sophistic'; and secondly, the long-stretching ancient traditions surrounding the figure and books of the Sibyl, which also intensified in late Hellenistic and early imperial times. In both discussions, we shall see how issues of competitive authority, diverse traditions, and contested points of origin emerge over and again – issues which bring the figures of Homer and the Sibyl into a provocative dialogue. The third part of this chapter brings these two frameworks together. The Sibyl of *Or. Sib.* 3, I argue, acknowledges and manipulates these shared contentious aspects of

[5] Lightfoot 2007. Lightfoot's study (which has much to say about the third book in relation to these later sections: see especially 94–152) has itself done much to usher the collection out of the critical wilderness it once inhabited.

[6] Lightfoot 2007: vii. [7] Lightfoot 2007: vii.

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Homeric and Sibylline receptions to construct herself as a rival (not just a parallel) literary authority to Homer, the avatar of Greek *paideia*. Through this undertaking, the author of this passage stands as a remarkable witness to the ways in which Homeric poetry and its criticism could be used and inverted by Hellenistic Jews of the time.

A central aim of this volume is to pursue more rigorously the potential connections between late Hellenistic and imperial Greek literature and culture.[8] This oracle offers a fascinating route for tracing such links. Seated on the cusp of the Hellenistic and imperial worlds,[9] this Jewish poetic work displays in its response to Homer and the literary tradition themes and techniques predominantly associated with classicising imperial prose. Pulling its reader forwards and backwards in time, the Sibyl's competitive self-modelling provides an instructive bridge between the literary politics of the late Hellenistic period and those of the Second Sophistic, and recasts Homeric criticism onto the most cosmic, trans-temporal of scales.

Homeric Reception, Imperial Prose

In 'Visions and Revisions of Homer', a widely read and cited piece on the reception of Homer in the Second Sophistic, Froma Zeitlin begins with an image drawn from earlier in Greek history. A Hellenistic marble votive relief from the late third/mid-second century BCE, signed by Archelaos of Priene, found in Italy but originally from Alexandria, offers for Zeitlin 'a remarkable visual witness to the expansion and consolidation of Homer's prestige in the post-classical era' (Figure 6.1).[10] The sculpture depicts the *apotheosis* of Homer: the bard is figured as one of the gods, and then receiving sacrifice, honoured with an altar and shrine. In the lowest zone, Homer is seated in splendour, being crowned on a throne, holding a sceptre and a book roll.[11] He is surrounded by personified figures such as Poetry, Tragedy and Comedy, and with two small kneeling figures before him representing the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, and two crawling mice at his feet

[8] On this 'second type of dialogue', see the Introduction to this volume.

[9] On the dating of the book, see below, 'The Sibyl and Sibyllina: A Tradition of Plurality', and for the date of our central passage within it, see 'The Sibyl vs Homer: Oracular Confrontations'.

[10] Zeitlin 2001: 197. Whilst my discussion here focuses on Zeitlin's piece, it also draws on other important art historical scholarship on the relief and its dynamics: see especially Pinkwart 1965 and Onians 1979, with further bibliography in Ridgway, 1990: 257–68.

[11] Homer also appears (in all likelihood) on the top section of the relief, where he is residing on a mountain peak with the Olympians, and placed (literally) on a pedestal.

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Figure 6.1 Marble relief showing the *apotheosis* of Homer, Archelaos of Priene; *c.* 200 BCE; from Bovillae; height 1.15 m. London, British Museum. © The Trustees of the British Museum

indicating the *Batrachomyomachia* – a parodic work in Homerising hexameters which, in earlier phases of literary history, was occasionally attributed to Homer himself.[12] An overt and ornate reflection of Homer's canonised and hyper-literary status (the scrolls suggest the bookish culture of

[12] See Graziosi 2002; Peirano 2012: 36–73.

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Alexandrian libraries), the relief also depicts a sacred shrine to the epic poet which, it has been suggested, is modelled on the Homereion, a temple which as Aelian later describes it, depicted in its own tableau Homer surrounded by all the cities which 'claimed [him] as their own.' (*Varia Historia* 13.22). The places are not named, but they could have included Chios, Smyrna, Ionia, Argos, Athens, Babylon, Rome and even Egypt, all of which laid claim to being Homer's birthplace, and in the case of Chios, Smyrna, Ionia and Argos had initiated cults specifically dedicated to the poet.

Part of a wider culture of material responses to Homer from the late Hellenistic and early imperial periods, including the much-discussed *Tabulae Iliacae* (one of which, the Tabula Capitolina, appears to be from the same villa as this relief, the Messer Paolo at Bovillae), the Archelaos imagery provides an intense and powerful vignette of the allure and authority of Homer, and the multiplicity of forms that such authority could take. This is a figure of awe, fleshed out, personified (and accompanied by personifications) and deified, of intense competition (poetic contests and geographical ones), and of textual and material literary status.[13] Homer's perennial importance, present in all phases of ancient Greek culture, is here concretised and concentrated. For Zeitlin, however, this Hellenistic illustration serves as a 'prologue' (her term) to the article's central area of enquiry: the 'seeds of investment' in Homer displayed here in the late centuries BCE, she argues, expanded to their fullest only in what happened next. In the wake of Alexander the Great's conquest of the Persian Empire and the subsequent expansion of Greek rule throughout the eastern Mediterranean, through an enlarged and diverse population and the consolidation of a 'remarkably standardized' educational system throughout the Hellenistic world[14] (of which Homer's epics stood at the centre), it was in the imperial period that the weight of Homeric prestige could exert its most 'persistently pervasive influence'.[15]

Therefore after the enticement of this Hellenistic prelude, the remainder of Zeitlin's analysis focuses on examples drawn from imperial Greek literature in the early centuries CE: specifically, the prose declamations and witty treatises of Lucian, Philostratus and Dio Chrysostom, which use close encounters with Homer and his heroes, deep textual engagement with his epics, and ironic correction of his plots, to claim a space for the

[13] On the *Tabulae Iliacae* see the seminal work by Squire 2011 and Petrain 2014.

[14] See particularly Morgan 1998, Cribiore 2001, Too 2001. 'Remarkably standardized' is from Kim 2010: 7.

[15] Thus Zeitlin 2001: 203.

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authority of Greek culture 'under' Roman rule.[16] Other scholars of post-classical Greek reception of Homer reveal a similar focus. J.F. Kindstrand's study examines Dio, Aristides and Maximus of Tyre;[17] Robert Lamberton considers the appropriation of Homer by Neoplatonist writers;[18] and Félix Buffière treats mainly the allegorical tradition.[19] In *Homer between History and Fiction*, Larry Kim treats three works from the Second Sophistic which make sustained efforts to argue against the poet and to challenge the historical truth of his account of what happened at Troy: Dio's *Trojan Oration*, Lucian's *True Histories* and Philostratus' *Heroicus* (alongside which is discussed the *Vita Apollonii*).[20] However, Kim goes so far as to argue that these texts form a *distinct* group within the field of Homeric rewritings owing to their shared interest in the historical 'truth' of Homer's account, explicit and detailed discussion of Homeric poetry, and centralisation of the figure of Homer himself. Thus Dio's *Trojan Oration* insists, following Herodotus, on the alleged testimony of an Egyptian priest that Helen was rightfully married to Paris, Hector killed Achilles, and Troy actually won the war. In the second book of Lucian's *True Histories*, Lucian actually meets the bard himself, during a stay on the Island of the Blessed, and interviews him on the truth about his life and works: this ghostly Homer 'sets the record straight' on matters of Alexandrian criticism like which of the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* came first, why he started the *Iliad* in the middle, and from which city he really came (*Ver. hist*. 2.20). And in the *Heroicus* it is revealed via the storytelling vine-dresser that 'Homer knew the truth but changed much of it to suit the subject he had chosen' (*Her*. 43.16); covering up, for instance, Odysseus' role in the murder of Palamedes as the result of a necromantic bargain struck with Odysseus himself. Through such scholarly treatments, these stars of the Second Sophistic have emerged as those who use Homer most sophisticatedly to assert their affinity to Greece in the Roman world.

This narrative is, of course, a highly familiar one. I have retraced its tenets not to provide another overview of the role of and reactions to Homer in the imperial period, but rather to stress how the gap between Zeitlin's 'prologue' and her analysis has yet to be entirely filled.[21] These types of challenge to Homer's authority are now naturally associated with

[16] 'Under' reflects the title of the volume in which Zeitlin's piece appears: Goldhill 2001, *Being Greek under Rome: Cultural Identity, the Second Sophistic and the Development of Empire*.
[17] Kindstrand 1973. [18] Lamberton 1986. [19] Buffière 1956. [20] Kim 2010.
[21] On the Hellenistic cultural politics of the relief itself, and its reflection of or engagement with Alexandrian 'institution fabric' see Pollitt 1986 and Stewart 1990: 218. Zeitlin herself uses Alexander and his phil-Homerism, and Hellenistic epigrams (many of which also attest to the

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Second Sophistic *paideia*; 'the fascinating cultural work of visioning and revisioning the bard'[22] is seen as the central (even exclusive) domain of imperial prose. And yet the Archelaos relief provides a crucial reminder of how the walls of this periodisation must not be constructed too solidly. The growth of this discourse of Homeric reception can be charted more diversely; and a meaningful dialogue can be created between the responses to Homer beginning in later Hellenistic culture, and the boisterous reworkings of the Second Sophistic.

There is however a further layer to this dialogue. The figure of Poetry on the Archelaos relief, the scrolls representing the Homeric text, and the representations of the *Iliad*, *Odyssey* and *Batrachomyomachia*, alongside the texts in both prose *and verse* found on many of the *Tabulae Iliacae* all suggest that poetry – both Homer's own verse and poetic works written in response to it – must feature strongly in assessments of later Greek strategies of Homeric response. The earliest centuries CE were for a long time considered to be an era where, in terms of literary culture, poetry was 'annexed' by prose.[23] The situation is now very different. Verse is increasingly recognised as having offered a living medium of expression in imperial Greek culture; and epic in particular, the continued apex in the hierarchy of genres during this period, is rightly seen as a powerful vehicle through which traditional language and themes were renegotiated.[24] But despite some excellent studies on individual imperial poets,[25] poetry has still not yet been fully amalgamated into the wider literary-cultural picture. In that complex, liminal space between the Hellenistic and imperial periods, the role of poetry, and particularly epic, in articulating Greek self-positioning remains under-interrogated.

My initial point therefore is a simple one. The question of how the authority of Homer was moulded and manipulated in later Greek literary culture can be posed differently. The terms of enquiry must be widened:

competitions regarding Homer's birthplace) as further 'points of departure and return' from her main imperial foci.

[22] Zeitlin 2001: 196.

[23] See Bowie 1989a and 1990 for further bibliography. More recently, König's introductory study (2009) of imperial Greek literature includes only a coda on poetry, suggesting how embedded this attitude to the forms still is.

[24] See the bibliography compiled by Cuypers for an overview of the volume of work done on these poets: https://sites.google.com/site/hellenisticbibliography/empire (last accessed 17 March 2021).

[25] See, e.g., on Quintus, Baumbach and Bär 2007, which instigated the 'Second Sophistic' reading of the poem, Maciver 2012 and Greensmith 2020, and on Nonnus, Shorrock 2011, Spanoudakis 2014 and Accorinti 2016. Cameron 2016 considers various aspects of poetic and philosophical culture in the fourth to sixth centuries CE, though he is chiefly concerned, in his own words, 'less with poetry and philosophy than with poets and philosophers' (xi).

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both in terms of period and in terms of form – from Hellenistic to imperial; poetry and prose. My strategy in what follows is to offer one, rather unconventional way of reformulating this question. Rather than offering a brief survey of the response to Homer in late Hellenistic and early imperial poetic works, I shall explore these ideas through the detailed reading of one text – the 'anti-Homer' section of the Third Sibylline Oracle – where issues of Homeric authority and poetic textuality are highly insistent. On the one hand, this text takes us far away from the milieu of the Second Sophistic authors and their Homerising games. And yet on the other, it mirrors a number of the strategies of Homeric reading and criticism displayed in and associated with these works. It therefore offers a significant opportunity to consider the different uses to which subversive approaches to Homer could be put. The passage reveals a poetic voice fully immersed in Greek 'Homer-mania', but who uses it to articulate a Jewish form of Hellenic identity: one that is self-consciously othering, programmatically obscure and proudly temporally shifty.

The Sibyl and Sibyllina: A Tradition of Plurality

From this brief resumé of responses to Homer displayed on the Archelaos relief and pursued by 'groups' of texts from the Second Sophistic, we may highlight, for all the variety, a number of recurrent themes: questions centred on where Homer was from; what he was 'like' (the divinised god receiving worship on the Archelaos relief, the ghostly spectre on Lucian's island, or a figure in the underworld in the *Heroicus*, communicating with his own heroic characters), and the nature and structure of his works. Before we turn to what the author of this passage of the Sibylline Oracles has to say about these sorts of Homeric questions, we must first address the Sibyl's own identity: her life and her works as conceived in the Hellenistic and imperial imagination. Here too we find a tradition built upon a driving sense of elusiveness: the Sibyl emerges as an obscure, compound figure, who could belong to everyone and to no one; who was the subject of competition and contention, and who occupies a number of difficult interval spaces – between human and divine; truth and falsehood; atemporal and localised identities; oral and written verse.

The Sibylline Oracles must be understood within a long and disparate tradition in Greek and Roman antiquity concerning the Sibyl as a figure and her prophecies and books. Sibyls or inspired prophetesses were well known in the Greco-Roman world: always portrayed as an old woman, the Sibyl was credited with having given oracles at the time of the Trojan

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Wars, at the dawn of Greek history. Plutarch's quotation of Heraclitus (500 BCE) is taken to be the earliest reference to the figure: here we find a frenzied, garrulous voice-piece whose words have no literary or textual value, but which convey a transcendent divine mediation, and grant eternal fame:[26] 'Σίβυλλα δὲ μαινομένῳ στόματι' καθ' Ἡράκλειτον 'ἀγέλαστα καὶ ἀκαλλώπιστα καὶ ἀμύριστα φθεγγομένη, χιλίων ἐτῶν ἐξικνεῖται τῇ φωνῇ διὰ τὸν θεόν' ('"But the Sibyl with frenzied lips," as Heraclitus has it, "uttering words mirthless, unembellished, unperfumed, yet reaches to a thousand years with her voice through the god"') (Plutarch, *De Pythiae oraculis* 397a).[27] Two plays of Aristophanes, the 'first clear testimony that the sibyl ever existed',[28] offer a different but equally ambivalent picture: in *Knights* (424 BCE) he uses the verb σιβυλλιάω as a synonym for ἀείδω χρησμούς (31). Like Plato in the *Phaedrus*, who makes the Sibyl akin to the soothsayer (the 'Sibyl and others, who by practising heavenly inspired divination have foretold many future things accurately', 244b), the emphasis is on the utility and exactitude of the Sibyl's words. In the *Peace*, however, Aristophanes ridicules the oracle-monger Hierocles, and by transferal the very practice of sibylline consultation, as meretricious and insincere, because he attends to oracles only to get a good meal.[29]

The bulk of evidence concerning the spread and use of Sibylline oracles comes from the Greco-Roman period, where a number of sources attest to traditions of both public and private consultation of the Sibyl, who prophesied events of unconditional misery (earthquakes, floods, upheavals and war) or explained phenomena as portents of catastrophes. The oracles officially preserved at Rome were consulted by a college of priests (the *quindecemviri sacris faciundis*) at the command of the Senate at serious political crises. They were all destroyed when the Capitol was burnt in 83 BCE, but a new collection was formed in 12 CE and deposited by Augustus in the temple of Apollo on the Palatine hill, where they lasted until the fifth century.[30] The content of these books does not survive, but evidence reveals both the reverence in which they were held, and the suspicion

[26] Unsurprisingly, there is no consensus on what in this description comes from Plutarch and what is Heraclitus (see Lightfoot 2007: 4, n. 4 for full references on the scholarly debate).

[27] Translation via Buitenwerf 2003: 93.

[28] Buitenwerf 2003: 94.

[29] There is also some evidence that Euripides also mentioned the Sibyl in a play now lost: see Parke 1998: 104–5 and Buitenwerf 2003: 93.

[30] Prudentius, *Apotheosis* 439–42, in the latter half of the fourth century CE wrote that 'no longer does a priest possessed utter with foaming mouth and panting breath fates drawn from Sibylline book . . . Cumae is dumb and mourns for its oracles.' For more detail on the decline in the consultation of the Oracles, possibly (though not necessarily, given the mixture of religious politics evinced in the

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which they attracted. Cassius Dio, for instance, records how the consuls in 19 CE were troubled by a particular oracle: 'when thrice three hundred revolving years have run their course, destruction shall bring civil strife upon Rome, and the folly of Sybaris too'. Tiberius declared the verses false and gave orders to examine all existing prophetic books: some were declared worthless and others preserved as genuine. People, however, did not forget this oracle, and when in 64 CE a huge part of Rome was destroyed by fire, they claimed that this sibylline prophecy – which was now deemed apocryphal, found nowhere in the sacred books – had indeed foretold the destruction that was now coming true (Cass. Dio 62.18.3). In terms of form, it is clear that these books were all written in hexameter verse, the metre also used in historical oracle centres, at Delphi and in Asia Minor, and for the literary depiction of legendary prophecy (Orpheus, Musaeus, Linus, Bacis and Epimenides). These were, therefore, popular, public and *poetic* predictions.

Our sources also affirm the fluctuating status of the Sibyl as a particular prophetess or many prophetesses with a generic name. Plutarch's Heraclitus sees the Sibyl as a lone ranger, without time or any clear place, her voice resonating throughout the ages: she is cast as an extra-temporal figure, 'almost a disembodied voice'.[31] And yet other earlier Sibyls were much more geographically centred, and in the later Hellenistic and early imperial periods, they proliferated further and became associated with specific places, which resulted in the growth of a number of key Sibylline sites. Varro in 47 CE published a catalogue of ten Sibyls, preserved by Lactantius, including the Sibyl of Persia, Libya, Delphi, Phrygia, Erythrae and (the one which receives the fullest attention) Cumae – the most famous Sibyl of Rome. Pausanias (*Periegesis* 10.12) also associated the Sibyl with Delphi, Delos, Erythrae, Marpessus and Alexandria in the Troad (where he describes her tomb beside the images of nymphs and statues of Hermes: 10.12.6) and details a competition between Erythrae and Marpessus over which place can really claim the status of being her birth town (10.12.3 and 10.12.7). The Erythraean Sibyl – a point to which we shall return – was particularly tied to Trojan premonitions: Pausanias (10.12.2) says that the Erythraean Sibyl predicted that 'Helen would be brought to Sparta to be the ruin of Asia and Europe, and that for her sake the Greeks would capture Troy', and in Varro's list as quoted by

surviving collection) in connection with the Christianisation of the Empire, see Buitenwerf 2003: 104–5, with further references.

[31] Lightfoot 2007: 4.

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Lactantius, it is the Erythraean Sibyl who calls Homer's writings 'lies' (*Div. inst.* 1.6.9). The particular association with Erythrae is also strikingly displayed on a grotto built or renovated on the occasion of a visit to the town (on the west coast of Asia Minor) by Lucius Verus in 162 CE. In an epigram carved on the gate-post, the Sibyl speaks of her parents (her mother here is the nymph Nais) and confidently asserts that whilst she has prophesied all over the world, she has only one true birthright and burial place:

I am Sibyl, uttering oracles, the servant of Phoebus
The first-born daughter of a nymph, a Naiad.
Erythrae is my only home town
And Theodore was my mortal father
The (mountain) Kissotas carried my birth, the place where I left
The womb and immediately spoke oracles to mortals
While I was sitting on this rock
I sang for the mortals predictions of future sufferings.
I lived for three times 300 years
I, an unwedded virgin, and I travelled all over the world.
But now I am again sitting here on my dear rock,
Delighted by this charming spring.
I am glad that the time of which I spoke has now come true,
The time in which, according to my prophecy, Erythrae will flourish again
And will enjoy good order, wealth, and fame,
Through a young Erythrean who comes to his beloved home.[32]

The inscription confirms the impression given by Pausanias of an agonistic attitude amongst cities towards the Sibyl's genealogy. As David Potter has argued, the Sibyl could be adopted by local communities as a celebrated and actively honoured figure.[33] These literary and inscriptional testimonies thus show how the Sibyl had become part of the complex dialogue in late Hellenistic culture between cosmopolitan and local perspectives,[34] and by the imperial period was part of a well-established practice by local communities of seizing upon sources of mythical and literary prestige and making them their own.

What therefore emerges from this nebulous tradition is the recurring preoccupation with the Sibyl's liminality, ambiguity and multiplicity. One Sibyl or many? Extra-spatial or geographically specific? True or false

[32] For the Greek text, see *IGRom.* IV, 1540; Engelmann and Merkelbach 1973: inscription 224. See also Buresch 1892: 16–36; Buitenwerf 2003: 118–19.
[33] Potter 1990.
[34] As explored productively in the contributions to this volume by Gray and Hatzimichali.

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prophecies? Mortal or divine?[35] Written, book-bound poetry or oral frenzy? Her identity is formed around such questions. These sorts of issues were of course a standard prospect for Homer himself. As Barbara Graziosi and others have well illustrated, the debates over authorship, the contents of the Homeric canon and even discussions about where Homer was from all stretch back to the sixth century. Thus the *Homeric Hymn to Apollo*, the *Margites* and the *Hymn to Artemis* – all often attributed to Homer until the final reduction of the corpus to the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* – can all be read as alluding to a special connection between Homer and a particular place: respectively Chios, Colophon or Smyrna.[36] The *Hymn to Apollo* provides the boldest and most famous early endeavour in this vein – embodying facets of Homeric biography, the poet claims to be singing as Homer himself:

μνήσασθ᾽, ὁππότε κέν τις ἐπιχθονίων ἀνθρώπων
ἐνθάδ᾽ ἀνείρηται ξεῖνος ταλαπείριος ἐλθών·
'ὦ κοῦραι, τίς δ᾽ ὔμμιν ἀνὴρ ἥδιστος ἀοιδῶν
ἐνθάδε πωλεῖται, καὶ τέωι τέρπεσθε μάλιστα;'
ὑμεῖς δ᾽ εὖ μάλα πᾶσαι ὑποκρίνασθαι ἀφήμως·
'τυφλὸς ἀνήρ, οἰκεῖ δὲ Χίωι ἔνι παιπαλοέσσηι·'

If ever some long-suffering stranger comes here and asks, 'O Maidens, which is your favourite singer who visits here, and who do you enjoy most?' Then you must all answer with one voice (?), 'It is a blind man, and he lives in rocky Chios.

(*Homeric Hymn to Apollo* (3) 167–72)

It was precisely this long tradition that enabled the Hellenistic and imperial writers to pose such questions about Homer again, with fresh energy and cynicism. These sources suggest parallel developments in the 'invention' of Homer and the Sibyl: beginning in the archaic period, these creation narratives amplify in the late Hellenistic and Roman times; so that at exactly the time that Homer's identity politics were being used to assert the Greek world's own status and cultural standing, the Sibyl and her sayings were being analogously canonised, proliferated and criticised.[37]

[35] See below under 'Final Roar: The Sibyl's Self-Disclosure' for further discussion of this question.

[36] Graziosi 2002.

[37] The connections between these traditions have been noted, most insightfully by West 1999: 364–92, who aligns the 'inventions' of the figures of Homer and the Sibyl (and others such as Orpheus and Pythagoras) from as far back as the fifth and sixth centuries BCE. See also the recent contribution by Faraone (2019), who argues that Circe's instructions to Odysseus can be read as 'an early sibylline oracle': he suggests that Homer borrows from the speech acts of hexametric oracles and 'echoes closely' traits of the archaic tradition of the Sibyl. My aim in what follows is to suggest how the Sibyl's claims about Homer in Book 3 mobilise these ideas in light of the cultural preoccupations and reading strategies of her own, later time.

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Book 3 of the Sibylline Oracles displays an intense awareness of this reception story; and, as we shall see, inventively develops the potential Homeric analogy.[38] Let us now turn to consider this book in more depth. This is the book of the Sibylline collection which has received the most critical attention, and scholars have been keenly interested in the socio-religious history which it displays: how and why Hellenistic Jews took up this traditional and diverse figure of the Sibyl as the vehicle for their prophecies.[39] As Olivia Stewart well puts it, these Jewish authors and editors both exploit and control the Sibyl's traditional power, 'bringing her into their own authoritative stories and recasting her as a servant of their god'.[40] The specific questions asked of this book, however, have been largely – almost exclusively – historical. What sort of events can be reconstructed in which the book might have originated? What is the author's or authors' attitude towards their fellow Greek inhabitants on the one hand, and the 'Roman conquerors' on the other? What was these Oracles' place in society? Who were their intended addresses? What light can they shed on the religious and ethical topics preoccupying Jews at this time?[41] Like the ancient cities who claimed her singular birthright, modern critics are driven by the paradoxical impulse to locate this wandering, mobile prophetess: to contain her, via cultural context, into one specific space.

Whilst such questions are compelling, when applied to this text, their answers are inevitably elliptical. If one enquires about the historical events reflected in the work, one is forced first to confront the issue of when exactly 'it' was composed. If the question is instead about the author's attitudes, audience and relationships in his society, then we must know first who he was, and of which 'society' he formed a part. This is all

[38] For the purpose of concision and in order to preserve the focal points of this chapter's argument, I do not provide any overall introduction and overview to the Sibylline Oracles collection. Such an outline – a mammoth task in itself, for material as diverse and inconsistent as this – has been well and fully given elsewhere. Particularly useful starting points for orientation are Lightfoot 2007, Collins 1997, Parke 1998, with shorter overviews in Levine 1995 and Bartlett 2010, each with further bibliography. In the readings to follow, I shall reference the structure, conventions and issues in the other books where they are most relevant to the themes of Book 3.

[39] For the structure and contents of Book 3, see Lightfoot 2007: 94–5; Buitenwerf 2003: 139–43. I provide my own overview of the contents of the final sections of the book below under 'The Sibyl vs Homer'.

[40] Stewart 2017: 1233.

[41] Thus for Buitenwerf 2003: 303 in his extensive study of Book 3, 'The most important question ... is what its function was in the social context of its author.' And for Bartlett 2010: 39, who takes *Or. Sib* 3 and 5 as two of the central texts to address his monograph's topic, 'Jews in the Hellenistic world', 'these oracles [reveal that] Hellenised Jews [were] happy to write in the hexameter verse made famous by Homer and studied throughout the Greek speaking world'. Collins 1974 is another example of a historically-inflected approach.

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information which we cannot definitively pin down. Whilst (to summarise absurdly, but necessarily, the detailed scholarly standpoints on the matter) most estimates now date the main corpus of the book to the middle second/ early first century BCE, with a number of later-added sections from the imperial period,[42] the oracles' deliberately obfuscating nature, and the difficulty therefore of discerning whether a prophecy is *ex eventu* or eschatological mean that any historical foothold is inherently unsteady. So too with the issue of authorship. As demonstrated by the trenchant debates between critics – who envisage the author or compiler as, variously, one 'literary' man from Asia Minor,[43] a succession or series of authors from Alexandria or elsewhere in Egypt,[44] or a patchwork of material assembled from earlier sources (in their modern textual-transmission traditions too, Homer and the Sibyl have much in common . . .) – it is clear that the act of historical reconstruction can only ever be partially successful.

And yet in spite of – or perhaps because of – the persistent focus on this reconstruction, far less attention has been paid to the *literary* engagements within the text.[45] This taciturnity is at least in part due to the fact that the poetic quality of the whole collection has been poorly regarded. If Heraclitus' view of the Sibyl sees her words as artless and charmless (and

[42] The main corpus is traditionally considered to be (in the most maximalist reading) lines 97–349 and 489–end: thus Collins 1974, with a full survey of evidence. In regard to dating this corpus, it is the conventional consensus that references to Ptolemaic kingdoms with no apparent indication that they will ever end suggest 31 BCE as a reasonable *terminus ante quem*. Collins 1974: 32–3 takes the reference to the seventh king (*Or. Sib.* 3.162–95) as a firm historical marker, and thus 'we must conclude that the main corpus of the third book of sibylline oracles . . . was compiled in the middle of the second century BC' (33). Compare, however, Nikiprowetzky 1970, who 'ingeniously' (thus Collins) attempts to suggest that this 'seventh' actually refers to a queen, Cleopatra; and Buitenwerf 2003, who thinks that the reference is better taken to refer to events belonging in the author's future and views the ordinal 7 as probably a symbolic number (as does Gruen 1998a: 272–7), and who thus suggests instead a dating range between 80 and 31 BCE. My own approach in the final sections of this chapter is to accept Collins' (and the still generally accepted) dating parameters, to locate my focus-passages within them using their own internal cues, and to consider connections between different passages in the book as a productive possibility. I thus treat the text, in its final condition, as a 'literary unity' whose characteristics, however, can only be understood against the background of its disparate origins and transmission.

[43] Buitenwerf 2003.

[44] Collins 1974: 21–35. Bartlett 2010 thinks that the oracles derive either from Alexandria or 'possibly' the Jewish military colony Tell-el-Yahudiya in Leontopolis (though he does not discuss at any length why).

[45] There has certainly been some interest in the metre, lexicon and style of, particularly, the first three books: special mention should be made of Lightfoot 2007: 153–202 on the language, style and poetics of *Or. Sib.* 1–2, and Nikiprowetzky 1970 on these aspects of Book 3. In terms of source criticism, Hornblower 2015 has recently attempted to pursue the possible links between *Or. Sib.* 3 and Lycophron's *Alexandra*, albeit with tentative conclusions. However, in general the larger questions – in terms of the work's engagement with whole literary worlds and systems of reading – have not been consistently posed.

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it was notorious that the oracles were often written in defective verse), and, like Ovid's image of the floating voice in the *Metamorphoses*, denies or ignores any textual component to her oracles,[46] then modern criticism of the Sibyllina, and of Book 3 in particular, has been similarly coarse in its judgements. The book's structure, it is claimed, is disorganised and chaotic, and its poetic diction unimpressive and at times even sloppy. If such features mirror (intentionally or otherwise) the defective metrics and 'frenzied' tone of the oracular mode, it seems from such verdicts that *Or. Sib.* 3 has done the job a little too well.[47] In general, it has also proven hard to identify firm literary sources in the text, as the non-surviving canon of Sibylline books is deemed to be one of its main influences. Rieuwerd Buitenwerf's assessment of the work's allusive range is reflective of such sentiments. Whilst he, like all readers and commentators, acknowledges that 'the [surviving] source which the author is generally believed to have used more intensively than any other consists of the works of Homer', and notes the author's borrowing of many words and phrasing from Homeric vocabulary, his final verdict is decidedly underwhelmed:

> The author was aware that his hexameters linguistically and stylistically resemble the writings of Homer. Still, this does not prove that the author actually had a copy of Homer's works at his disposal as he wrote. In the passage referring to Homer, he scarcely goes further than summarizing common knowledge about the Trojan war. He does not mention any specific detail from either the *Iliad* or *Odyssey*. Everything seems to indicate that the author used Homeric phrases because that was the way he had learned to write hexameters at school.[48]

Other scholars go further. Yehoshua Amir argues that the author of Book 3 intentionally mixed Homeric and biblical traditions in order to advocate biblical ideas, and that he makes them more attractive by rephrasing them in Homeric style and adding parts of Homeric verses which his audience were supposed to recognise.[49] Erich Gruen likewise believes that *Or. Sib* 3, like Ezekiel and the tragedian Eupolemus, was designed to bring the sentiments of Greek thinkers in line with the Torah: the author's

[46] Cf. Lightfoot 2007: 16.

[47] Amir 1985 views the book as a popular work of poor literary quality. Buitenwerf 2003, as discussed below, views the author's engagement with classical and biblical literature as superficial, not close or even necessarily direct. For a more positive view, see Nikiprowetzky 1970: 278–80.

[48] Buitenwerf 2003: 324–31, quotation at 325. On other literary sources for the collection (particularly Hesiod and the Hebrew Bible), which this chapter conceptually engages with but cannot pursue in depth, see Lightfoot 2007: 203–56 and, for Book 3 in particular, Nikiprowetzky 1970 *passim*, each with further references.

[49] Amir 1985.

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engagement with Homer 'ultimately serves to enable Jews to present their traditions in Greek disguise'.[50] However, the conception of the text's Homeric engagement in itself as superficial and unsophisticated[51] has obscured the precise nature of the self-constructed relationship between Sibylline and Homeric poetics which it conveys.

In the final sections of this chapter, I want to return afresh to the most self-consciously Homeric passage of this most self-consciously textual book. Reading the passage in tandem with the later Second Sophistic treatments of Homer – texts which, unlike *Or. Sib.* 3, are habitually lauded as complex and 'sophisticated' in their Homeric reworkings – will reveal this Sibyl's deep engagement with Homer's works, and with highly 'specific' aspects of his reception: this poetic conversation is more sustained and subversive than previous readings have allowed. In the manoeuvres undertaken in these lines, well-known features of the sibylline tradition are transformed into acts of combative, critical, *Homeric* self-posturing: the oracular mode, in its Jewish refashioning, is now made to profess openly epic ambitions.

Such a literary focus can add a further dimension to the 'Jewishness' of this Third-Oracle Sibyl. A number of scholars of Hellenistic Judaism have revealed crucial and sustained intersections between Jewish exegetical works produced in Alexandria and the larger discourse concerning the reception and interpretation of the Homeric epics in the last few centuries BCE. To take an extensive example, Maren Niehoff has read a number of strands of Jewish biblical interpretation as displaying either positive or polemical connections with Homeric scholarship, surrounding both large philosophical ideas and close-focus textual problems. Thus, for instance, Demetrius' concern with contradictions between various biblical passages reflects similar desires for Homeric non-contradiction, particularly in Aristotle's influential *Aporemata Homerica*; whereas the author of the *Letter of Aristeas* actively opposes such Homeric hermeneutic techniques, 'react[ing] to the activity of his colleagues by offering an authentic Greek text of the Bible, which must be protected against such critical work'.[52] And Philo, whom Niehoff and others have analysed most comprehensively, launches a sustained rejection of the whole comparative, universalising style of reading, which held the Bible and Homer's epics to be the same

[50] Gruen 1998a: 288–91 and 1998b.

[51] Both Amir and Gruen share Buitenwerf's judgements, for the most part, about the lack of intertextual depth in the Sibyl's use of Homer: see Buitenwerf 2003: 325 for the three scholars in dialogue.

[52] On textual problems, see Niehoff 2011 (this quotation p. 27) and 2012.

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kind of literary work, to advance his complex reformulation of scriptural interpretation.[53] This Sibylline Oracle, re-read with an eye to its deeper engagement with Homer, can take its place in this wider culture of cross-fertilisation between scriptural and Homeric reading strategies. However, by making its points as a *poem* (all of the Jewish texts cited here are prose) it also takes things further. Pairing the idea of a literary parity between Scripture and Homer with a biographical parity between Homer and the Sibyl, this author works aspects of accumulating, evolving interpretation traditions not into exegetical prose, but into new Homerising verse.

The Sibyl vs Homer: Oracular Confrontations

The Sibyl's *agon* with Homer is staged in the middle of the Third Oracle as it is now compiled. The section (295–488)[54] contains variously loosely connected prophecies against foreign nations, centred on punishment and destruction, temporary triumphs before falls.[55] A number of the initial predictions are grounded in a firm biblical or historical setting – for instance, the punishment of the Babylonians for the destruction of the Temple; the devastation of Asia during and after the Mithridatic wars (350–80); the rise and fall of Alexander the Great and his empire (388–400). The Sibyl then moves suddenly to foretell a deeper and more elusive past. She predicts that Phrygia, and especially the Phrygian town Dorylaeum, will suffer from severe earthquakes (401–10), signs which presage an even worse event: the destruction of Troy by the Greeks:

σήματα δ' οὐκ ἀγαθοῖο, κακοῖο δὲ φύσεται ἀρχή. (410)
παμφύλου πολέμοιο δαήμονας ἕξει ἄνακτας,
Αἰνεάδας *διδούς * αὐτόχθονος, ἐγγενὲς αἷμα.
ἀλλὰ μεταῦτις ἕλωρ ἔσῃ ἀνθρώποισιν ἐρασταῖς.
Ἴλιον, οἰκτείρω σε· κατὰ Σπάρτην γὰρ Ἐρινύς
βλαστήσει περικαλλὲς ἀείφατον ἔρνος ἄριστον (415)

[53] See especially Niehoff 2011: 75–130; also Niehoff 2001 and now Niehoff 2018; and Runia 1990, Calabi 2008, Cohen 1995, Winston 1990, with much useful material in the handbook by Seland 2014.

[54] Thus, according to Buitenwerf's thematic subdivisions, these comprise the 'oracles against foreign nations.' Lightfoot 2007: 95 groups verses 300–519 along similar lines.

[55] Thus, to give the briefest scene setting: God will punish Babylonians for destroying the temple; Egypt will suffer until the seventh generation of Kings, as will Gog, Magog and Libya. Rome (the 'daughters of the west') will be punished for their destruction of the temple, and there will be many portents of catastrophe and many cities in Europe, Asia and Egypt will be destroyed. Asia will take revenge on Rome, and will have a peaceful period; Macedonia will conquer the world – its most important King, Alexander the Great, will subdue Asia, but his empire will be destroyed.

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Ἀσίδος Εὐρώπης τε πολυσπερὲς οἶδμα λιποῦσα·
σοὶ δὲ μάλιστα γόους μόχθους στοναχάς τε φέρουσα
θήσει· ἀγήρατον δ' ἔσται κλέος ἐσσομένοισιν.

These signs will be the beginning of misery, and not of good. It will have princes skilled in the warfare of many tribes, and will bring forth the Aeneadae, people originating from this very country, born of the same blood. But after that you will be a prey of people in love. Ilium, I weep for you! A fury will sprout in Sparta, a very beautiful, famous, excellent shoot. She will leave the wide bay of Asia and Europe, and she will bring you the worst weeping, distress and groans. However, there will be never-ending fame among future generations.

(*Or. Sib.* 3.410–18)

The lines, and the Homeric prophecy which follows them, are considered to be one of the later, supplementary sections of the book, appended of course after Rome's conquest of Greece.[56] However, it is clear that the sibylline voice also thematises her simultaneous earliness *and* lateness in this section, and marks her special position as straddling different parts of mythic history. The prophecy itself begins chiastically: the opening verse (410) runs good into evil, and ends with a beginning, expressing in its linguistic texture an explicit sense of contradiction in time. Equally explicit is the emphasis on reverse genealogies: the fall of Troy and the Romans who will rise from its ashes (412). Almost every word in this verse conveys the intermeshed identity of these races: Troy produces Aeneas' people 'from this very country' (αὐτόχθονος), and they are 'born of the same blood' (ἐγγενὲς αἷμα). Troy and Rome, it is stressed, are always already a double act: their origins, falls and identities are structurally inverted, formed as retrospective analogies of one another. This type of layered temporal structuring must affect how we read the whole passage and its approach to Homer in the lines to come.[57]

Indeed, just as Rome's rise precedes Troy's fall, so too does Troy appear in this prophecy before Homer, the poet who gave it its glory. Before the bard is 'identified' physically, he is summoned intertextually: this depiction

[56] I broadly agree with the estimations of Collins 1974: 27–8, who uses the connections to the Erythraean Sibyl and the wider references in the section (namely the Roman civil war at lines 464–9, the 'man who will come to Asia' at 388–400, generally identified as Alexander, and general gestures to Rome and the Aeneadae) to date this passage between 146 and 84 BCE.

[57] This approach will determine my own stance on the relative dating of this passage within *Or. Sib.* 3 as a whole. Whilst it falls outside of the 'main corpus' of the book, whose date, as we have seen, is usually set at 250–100 BCE, I shall treat the section as self-consciously positioning itself *within* this corpus; in that sense its later (possibly early imperial) dating makes it perfectly suited to articulate the connections between the earlier (Hellenistic) sections and later (imperial) preoccupations and themes.

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of Troy's downfall contains engagement with the Homeric text which goes far beyond Buitenwerf's conception of an author vaguely recalling his classroom learning. The reason for the fall (414) is singular and categorical: Helen, identified but not named here, via tragedy rather than epic, as the 'Fury' from Sparta.[58] Homer's ambivalence towards Helen and her status as the *aitia* of the war is frequently expressed in the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*: debated and discussed by the chieftains at the Trojan wall and in her own self-deprecating – and self-exculpatory – narrations.[59] Her role, however, also became a staple feature of the revisionist tradition of Homeric critique. From Herodotus to Gorgias to Euripides, Helen's status in the Trojan story is used as a launchpad for undermining Homer's version of events: Helen never went to Troy, or a ghost went in her place – the Homeric tale is based on a spectre, a misrecognition, or even a *lie*. This style of reading was continued by the Second Sophistic wave of this trend. Dio's *Trojan Oration* insists, as part of its 'historical' reversal of Homer's tale,[60] that Helen was rightfully married to Paris; and Lucian reworks the motif of Helen as phantom to imagine her lingering, along with a host of heroes and villains including Homer himself, on the ghostly Island of the Blessed (*Ver. hist.* 2.25). In Lucian's account, she attempts to run off once again, this time with one of Lucian's time-travelling companions, but is captured and catapulted back to her rightful place by Menelaus' side, in what has been read as a new take on the recurring possibility of a different, counterfactual outcome for Helen in Homer and the Epic Cycle: mythic literature 'repeating itself as a farce'.[61]

In her categorical blaming of Helen, the Sibyl first marks her clear engagement with, and standpoint on, these sorts of causation debates. However in the lines to follow, she takes this question of Helen's real role in the Trojan narrative and gives it a decisively Homeric refraction. For despite the misery that Helen will cause, there will, she foretells, 'be never-ending *kleos* for future generations' (418). Now this verse replays a

[58] Helen's identification as a Fury offers a nod to the tragic reception of her tale. In Aeschylus, the coming of Paris to Troy with Helen as his bride is described as the arrival of an Erinys, one of the administrators of Zeus's justice. Cf. also Cassandra's self-identification as an Erinys in Eur. *Tro.* 457. In a fragment of Ennius' *Alexandros* (likely a close adaptation, even a translation, of Euripides' lost play of the same name), Helen is also termed 'one of the Furiae' (*quo iudicio, Lacedaemonia mulier, Furiarum una, adveniet*: R^3 1.7.56 = *TRF* 11.151.18). In this image system, Helen is not merely a ghost (as in the Herodotean motif), but a nightmarish, vengeful spirit.

[59] The famous and most extensive examples are the *Teichoscopia* of *Iliad* 3 and Helen's speeches at *Il.* 6.312–68 and *Od.* 4.220–80.

[60] On the dynamics of this reversal more broadly, see particularly Hunter 2009a.

[61] Bompaire 1958: 671–2; Kim 2010: 169.

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'prophecy' from the *Iliad*, where it is Helen herself who makes this sort of claim: she remarks, with metapoetic foresight, on the future fame that she and her fellow Trojan war participants will share: οἷσιν ἐπὶ Ζεὺς θῆκε κακὸν μόρον, ὡς καὶ ὀπίσσω / ἀνθρώποισι πελώμεθ' ἀοίδιμοι ἐσσομένοισι ('Zeus has brought an evil fate upon us, but in days to come we shall be a song for those yet to be born') (Homer, *Il.* 6.357–8). This Sibylline author, who apparently does not have the text of Homer in his hand or even really in his head, in fact cues this Homeric passge closely. Where Homer's Helen imagines Zeus 'placing' (θῆκε) evil fate upon the Trojans, here the Sibyl makes Helen perform the same action, with the same verb (θήσει). And as Helen's Iliadic prediction ends with the bold and affirmative ἐσσομένοισι – the future substantive participle in the dative – so the Sibyl signs off with the same word-form, in the same position. This verse, linguistically as well as thematically, begins and ends with Homer. It could be countered that these are perfectly common words and phrases: τίθημι in isolation would seem inconsequential as an intertext, and ἐσσομένοισι πυθέσθαι / καὶ ἐσσομένοισιν ἀοιδήν is a motif picked up frequently in sepulchral epigram. Indeed, this same book of oracles uses a similar phrase again later on in its prophecies – ἐσσομένοισι πυθέσθαι, 774. And yet in a passage so centred on Homer and his characters, the possibility for a more directed use of 'clichéd' language is strong. In other words, this Helen must be taken, on some levels, as *Homer's* Helen, whose Homeric function and language becomes entwined with that of the Sibyl: it is now the Sibyl, not Helen, who 'weeps for Ilium' and predicts its future fame. The Sibyl thus does not only pre-empt and predict the Helen of the *Iliad*. She preemptively appropriates her role, and takes a sentiment famously spoken by her character and turns it into a refracted premonition *about* her, in the deep past before she was born. In a bold redrafting of futuricity and prophecy, the source of *kleos* is thus transferred from internal Homeric characters to the status of the Homeric *text*. Such techniques pave the way for the more aggressive (and the most ludic) section of the passage, where the Sibyl tests the limits of this style of Homeric critique.

The prophecy about Homer (419–32) startlingly literalises this topsy-turvy nature of the Sibylline relationship to the poet. The text's primary literary influence is summoned as a figure of the future, not named but described with clear references to his biographical tradition, and subjected to an amazing series of refractions. Homer is 'introduced' first as καί τις (419). He is not only anonymous (τις, 'someone', nods to his famous lack of self-disclosure in his poetry), but, with καί ('and'), literally, supplementary: he and his text come after 'his' story – Helen and her *kleos*, which the

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Sibyl has now already told. With ἔσσεται he is put directly into the future tense; but this prolepsis is also knowingly undermined by the backward glance of αὖτις[62] and in the antiquity of πρέσβυς. The notion of Homer as an old man, of course, taps into the idea common by the late Hellenistic and imperial era of picturing Homer as perennially old (he is bearded on the depiction on the Archelaos relief): a physical maturity to match his canonical ancientness. However, the next noun to describe him undermines this compliment. Because this old man is *mortal* (βροτός). Now, the Archelaos relief also illustrated how by the late Hellenistic period Homer was so canonical that he could be deified. In this emphatic assertion of Homeric *mortality*, the Jewish Sibyl tears this deification down.

The following prediction that light will fade from Homer's eyes can function as an elaboration of this mortality – a shorthand metaphor for his death.[63] It also, however, addresses another common strand of Homeric biography: to think of Homer as blind. Where Lucian uses his own sight to deny Homer's sightlessness – as an eyewitness on the Island of the Blessed, he can see for himself that Homer is not blind – the Sibyl is even more provocative in her deflation: mixing the literalism of blindness with the imagery of the darkness of death, she gives Homer sight in order to take it away. In a single line, this poetic voice succinctly asserts its rivalry both with Homer *and* with existing lines of his reception.

The next descriptive markers continue this two-pronged attack. Homer is now defined by what he is not: he is a false writer (ψευδογράφος, 419) with a false fatherland (ψευδόπατρις, 420). Both terms are promptly expanded and glossed: Homer will say (καλέσσει) that he is from Chios (423). We have already glanced at the long history of claims about Homer's birthplace. The *Homeric Hymn to Apollo* has 'Homer' tell the world that he is from Chios, and the *Hymn to Artemis* posits an alternative location: the reference to the river Meles could hint at the story that

[62] Which can mean, of course, either 'in turn' sequentially or 'again' temporally – both of which work nicely here.

[63] The metaphorical use of light and darkness as expressions of life and death is commonplace in Greek myth and literature (see the survey of Greek and Indo-European versions of this trope in Giannakis 2001; with relevant discussion also in Horn 2018 and Cairns 2016). In a slightly different image, the interplay between the eyes, seeing, and death (as non-seeing) is also frequently attested in the surviving Greek canon: to take two examples, in *Odyssey* 11.93, where the blind Teiresias wonders why Odysseus left the sunlight in order to journey to the world of Hades, and in Sophocles' *Ajax*, as Athena blinds the eyes of the hero she is about to destroy. The Sibyl here seems to be merging these two strands of metaphor (and weaving in the common Homeric use of δύω to denote the movement in death down to Hades: e.g., ἔδυν δόμον Ἄϊδος εἴσω, *Il.* 11.263; δύσομαι εἰς Ἀΐδαο, *Od.* 12.383) so as to play on Homer's double status as blind and mortal/ immortal.

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Homer was born on this river in Smyrna, so as to imply a geographical connection between Artemis and Homer, goddess and bard:[64] Ἄρτεμιν ὕμνει Μοῦσα κασιγνήτην Ἑκάτοιο, / παρθένον ἰοχέαιραν, ὁμότροφον Ἀπόλλωνος, / ἥ θ' ἵππους ἄρσασα βαθυσχοίνοιο Μέλητος / ῥίμφα διὰ Σμύρνης . . . ('Sing, Muse, of Artemis, sister of the far-shooter, the virgin pourer of arrows, reared with Apollo, who after watering her horses at the reedy Meles drives her chariot all of gold swiftly through Smyrna . . .') (*Homeric Hymn to Artemis* (9) 1–4). We have also seen how such debates intensified in the Hellenistic and imperial periods, as different countries and cities vied to hold the status of being Homer's home town. Many other Hellenistic and Roman sources reflect this pointed uncertainty about Homer's origins: several ancient epigrams deal with the subject, and two school texts have been found which also discuss the issue, showing how it was explored at all levels of literary society.[65] Some authors attempt to cut through such debates by consulting the poet himself. Lucian's Homer gives a direct and surprising answer during his interview: he was originally a Babylonian named Tigranes.[66] And a Hellenistic epigram attributed to Alcaeus (*Anth. Pal.* 1.22) ventriloquises Homer to have him claim, as the earlier *Hymn to Apollo* does, that he is a Chian. However, the Sibyl's innovation here is not to make Homer settle this location debate by telling the 'truth' about where he was from, but rather to conjure him, in the future, as the author of one of these *lying* biographical claims. In their references to Chios, earlier 'Homers' like that of the *Homeric Hymn to Apollo* and the pseudo-Alcaeus epigram have thus misled posterity about themselves. Redrafting the trope of genealogical ambiguity into a personal Homeric fault, the prophecy brings together two strands of contention in Homer's biographical tradition – the 'truth' of his origin and the veracity of his work – into a singular stinging insult.

The term 'false writer' (ψευδογράφος; repeated again in 430, ψευδογραφῶν) then explicitly acknowledges the more conventional sense in which Homer was considered 'false': in terms of the historical accuracy of his account of Troy. He will write about Ilium οὐ μὲν ἀληθῶς, / ἀλλὰ σοφῶς (423–4). This idea of Homer as crafty and mendacious as well as

[64] For the possibility that this reference could indeed be taken as a link to Homer's birthplace, see Graziosi 2002: 72–7 with related discussion in Greensmith 2018: 262.

[65] On these school texts, see Tait and Preaux 1955: 387 (= *Ostr.Bodl.* 2.2174) and Cribiore 1996: 46, 215 and 219.

[66] See Kim 2010: 164–5 for the wider context of this passage, and the interesting suggestion that Homer's biography here reflects Lucian's own journey from Syria and his assimilation into Greek culture.

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simply incorrect on the one hand evokes a fundamental tenet of later Second Sophistic preoccupations: the Sibyl's phrases here could work as a pithy proleptic summary of the stance held by the 'group' of texts which Kim defines as special in their attack on Homer's poetic deceptiveness. The precise wording of the oracle here is also reminiscent of ancient debates on the attributes of Homeric characters: Plato, for instance, draws the contrast between Achilles as truthful and simple (ἀληθής τε καὶ ἁπλοῦς), versus Odysseus as 'polytropic and lying' (πολύτροπός τε καὶ ψευδής, *Hp. mi.* 365b).[67] In this reformulation, Homer himself is destined to become a slippery, Odyssean liar.

However, the reason for Homer's lying is given a remarkable and personal physicality, which takes the Sibyl far beyond these revisionist manoeuvres which she otherwise foreshadows and echoes: ἐπέων γὰρ ἐμῶν μέτρων τε κρατήσει· πρῶτος γὰρ χείρεσσιν ἐμὰς βίβλους ἀναπλώσει ('for he will have mastered *my* verses and metres, since he will be the first to open my books with his hands', *Or. Sib.* 3.424–5). The Sibyl here surpasses the authoritative knowledge of the Herodotean eyewitness or Lucianic interviewer: she knows that Homer lied because he stole his material from *her*. Homer the supplementary καί τις is now πρῶτος; but he is primary only in his theft – the original literary imposter. Now, the notion that the Sibyl predicted the Trojan war before Homer turned it into song, and thus deemed him a liar, is, as we have seen, an established part of the Erythraean strand of the sibylline tradition. The related idea that Homer imitated the Sibyl's style also finds precedent in, for example, Diodorus Siculus 4.66, where Homer is said to have copied many of the verses of the Delphian Sibyl, identified as Daphne, the daughter of Teiresias. However, set within this poetic passage of close Homeric allusion, these claims are reasserted with a new and highly textual edge. Firstly, the image of Homer's theft is rooted in a double materiality: the physical book and Homer's rapacious hands. With χείρεσσιν the Sibyl drives home her fleshy, embodied vision of the elusive poet. Like the bearded figure – man turned to god – on the Archelaos frieze, and the ghostly but recognisable character on Lucian's island and in Philostratus' underworld, the

[67] Cf. also the Platonic debate on which character truly deserves the epithet *sophos* (for Hippias it is Nestor, not Odysseus: σοφώτατον δὲ Νέστορα, *Hp. Min* 364c4–7), in contrast with, e.g., Eustathius' later discussion of σοφία as a relevant term for Odysseus too: in the *Iliad* Odysseus was not yet 'wiser' (σοφώτερος) than Nestor, but his great wanderings after the war brought him huge ἐμπειρία, 'experience', which allowed him to surpass even Nestor (*Commentary on Homer's Odyssey* 1381.61–1382.2).

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Sibyl's Homer is a 'real-life' character, whose crime is a literal one: he handles her books and opens them. The choice of verb in ἀναπλώσει, however, can also have a more conceptual sense: as well as meaning 'open', ἀναπλόω can mean 'explain' 'interpret' or 'simplify'. Under this second system of meaning, Homer is also conceived of as an exegete, doing to the Sibyl's verses what the Hellenistic scholia and Second Sophistic authors did to him. Likewise with βίβλους the Sibyl moves Homer from an oral poet of *epos* to the canonical literary author of contemporary Greek conceptions. Her premonitions of the Homeric poems themselves (421–2) already foreground this shift: the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* (like Homer, clearly identified but not explicitly named) are described first as the product of Homer's internal mind (his *dianoia* – the poet's 'intention' or, again, his interpretation or meaning), but then as an assembled (ἔμμετρον) and compartmentalised canon – 'joined together under two names'.[68]

The emphasis on Homer as a book reflects the scrolls so prominent on the Archelaos *apotheosis* (Homer is deified with, and because of, his 'written' word) and the highly 'Alexandrian' Homer on Lucian's island who, after his interview, composes new material as a 'writer', just as the Sibyl's Homer *writes* (γράψει, 423) poetry which is so clever but so wrong: 'An account of this battle was written by Homer, and as I was leaving he gave me the book to take to the people at home' (ἔγραψεν δὲ καὶ ταύτην τὴν μάχην Ὅμηρος καὶ ἀπιόντι μοι ἔδωκεν τὰ βιβλία κομίζειν τοῖς παρ' ἡμῖν ἀνθρώποις) (Lucian, *Ver. hist.* 2.24). However, here this is turned into a sibylline motif. As the doubling personal pronouns (ἐμῶν μέτρων … ἐμὰς βίβλους) make bitingly clear, the Homeric metre and the canonical books of his poetry always already belonged to her. Acknowledging the conventional metre of oracular prophecy and the double image of the Sibyl's utterances as floating voices and edited books, the Sibyl here takes the features which she and Homer already had in common and transforms them into material for competition and literary self-betterment: matching and then transcending key features of Homer's constructed identity.

The Sibyl ends her Homeric premonition by pointing out the two major errors that the poet will make (3.426–30). That Homer is wrong

[68] ἔμμετρον can also, of course, mean 'metrical' (cf. LSJ s.v. ἔμμετρος, III), so the choice of adjective allows for a witty double meaning: alluding to the fixed and assembled nature of Homeric poetry, and also its metrical properties which align it so closely with the sibylline voice.

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to praise the heroes of war accords with the general attitude advanced in *Or. Sib* 3: war, it is repeatedly stated, is the result of immoral behaviour, and will lead to punishment and destruction.[69] However, at the start of this prophecy, the Sibyl spoke complimentarily of the Aeneadae who will spring from Troy's ashes; and this praise was based precisely on their diverse skills in warfare (411). It is not, therefore, praise of heroes in war itself that is wrong: it is praise in the wrong coating, written in the wrong books, devoid of the correct moral framework which this oracular text is expounding. Just as with the pre-Iliadic, wholly Iliadic Helen, the Sibyl here glosses the Homeric reappropriation which her verses perform. Her very words take over and adapt Homer's act of heroic narration. In Ἀχιλλέα Πηλείωνα the *Iliad*'s first name and epithet is retained but shifted: Hector now comes before Achilles. And then in lieu of an extended narrative or catalogue of heroes, the remainder of the Homeric cast is reduced into the infinitely pluralised, tauntingly indefinite τούς τ' ἄλλους. Oracular poetics is thus proclaimed as the proper, truthful way of singing of arms and men.

So too with Homer's second error: his mistakes about the gods, who are mere inventions, or actually (a *hapax* compound) 'empty-headed people' (429).[70] Here the well-established tradition of criticising and challenging the Homeric divine system[71] is retold from this particular religious perspective. Homer's gods are no longer problematic because they are anthropomorphic and flawed. They are, like the poet himself, problematic because they are men, not gods at all. Now, elsewhere in this book, the oracles make frequent reference to the theme of false gods: in the opening sections, the Sibyl elaborates on various forms of false religion (including idolatry and zoolatry), before affirming the worship of the true God, in imagery well known from the Hebrew Bible.[72] Soon after this Homeric prophecy, the Greeks are further denounced for their false religious practice: they 'trust in mortal leaders' and 'give idle presents to the deceased' and 'sacrifices to images' (3.545–50). So in our passage, the wider theology of this oracular text is mobilised as material for Homeric critique; and, in

[69] E.g., see 3.204–5.

[70] On μέροψ and its dubious meaning in Homer see LSJ s.v. μέροψ. Its potential connection to speech is usually grounded in the phrase μερίζοντες τὴν ὄπα. The Sibyl elsewhere in this book uses it thus: for example, in her excursus on the genealogy of men and the division of speech the tenth race are twice described as μερόπων ἀνθρώπων (cf. *Or. Sib.* 3.108).

[71] On this long and wide-ranging tradition, the best synthesis remains Feeney 1991.

[72] See esp. 3.20–8.

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reverse, well-known challenges to Homer's gods are deployed as evidence for the text's religious agenda.

This agenda continues into Homer's own afterlife. For all of his crimes, this poetic ψευδογράφος will receive retribution (ἀμοιβαῖα δέξεται ἔργα, 432). Many versions of Homer's life-story provide their own unsavoury endings, imagining him in scenarios very different from the celestial heights carved by Archelaos. In the *Certamen Homeri et Hesiodi*, to take one early imperial example[73] (and a version of events also reflected in other sources) after his loss in the competition, Homer meets a bathos-filled demise, dying by slipping on some mud and falling on a stone.[74] And both Lucian and Philostratus envision a static, eerie aftermath for the poet after death.[75] This prophecy once again goes a step further: rather than just narrating Homer's fall from grace in the future, the Sibyl also enacts her predicted punishment in the present, by the very poetry she is composing. Homer's ἀμοιβαῖα ἔργα are received *now*, in the unveiling of this oracle. With ἀμοιβαῖα also hinting at a sense of antiphonic, melic competition, Homer's *amoibaion* now gets its true *responsion*, as the Sibyl 'exchanges' his poetry and all of its power and grandeur for her own.

This oracle thus presents a reading of Homer which is wholly recognisable from 'pagan' Hellenistic sources, and the proleptic links with Second Sophistic twists on these motifs emphasise just how immersed in such approaches to Homer this author really is. But this immersion, in turn, can affect the tone in which we take the wider religious manoeuvres at play. For a significant move found in some of the prose Jewish Alexandrian works which we have previously discussed was to make renowned Greek authors and thinkers dependent on Jewish tradition. So for instance the pseudographic 'Testament of Orpheus' contains a text that called on Orpheus as a witness to monotheism.[76] And Aristobulus, at the forefront of this style of interpretation, made a huge range of Greek philosophers and poets directly indebted to Moses. Thus for example Socrates' famous

[73] The surviving text is dated to the second century CE but almost certainly had earlier precedent in some form: see references in n. 74.

[74] *Certamen* 323–38. See also Proclus, *Life of Homer* 5; Tzetz. *Alleg.* 89–92 Boissonade; Tzetz. *H.* 123–42 Colonna. On the *Certamen*, see the recent critical edition and commentary in Bassino 2013. For more on the biographical facets which this work brings to light see the lucid remarks in Graziosi 2002: esp. 83–4, 172–3 and 211–12.

[75] Cf., e.g., Luc. *Ver. hist.* 2.2, where Lucian describes the island, filled with shadowy, ethereal heroes and celebrities plucked from the classical canon, who never grow old, but wander 'like shadows . . . upright and dark'.

[76] See Charlesworth 1985: 831–2.

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'divine voice' puts him in the company of Pythagoras and Plato, who claimed that they heard the voice of God when they observed the form of the universe so meticulously created and sustained, and used Moses' words to affirm this point. And Homer too 'took significant material from [Moses] and was admired accordingly'; as evidenced by, for example, the fact that he and Hesiod, 'having taken information from our books, say clearly that the seventh day is holy' (Euseb. *Praep. evang.* 13.12.13).[77] As Gruen observes, by making such claims, Aristobulus 'needed to be creative': for 'unless [Homer and co.] miraculously gained a command of Hebrew, they could hardly have had access to the laws of Moses'.[78] Aristobulus' solution lies in compounding a fiction: Greek translations of at least parts of the Bible had been available some centuries before the compilation of the Septuagint.[79] The Sibyl's story of Homer's theft – a 'fiction' enabled precisely and only by the connections between the figure of Homer and her own poetic persona – thus shows her creative participation in these debates within Hellenistic Judaism about cultural priority and the origins of knowledge.

The Sibyl's Homeric feud, then, is fundamentally based on a *relationship*: between two poets, figures and sources of epic revelation; but also between two exegetical traditions, critical traditions and religious frameworks. Like Rome and Troy in the oracle's opening, Homer and the Sibyl cannot escape from one another: the prophetess' rivalry with her world-famous imitator is based on a similarity (books and metre), an overlap (Trojan topic) and a claustrophobic closeness which strains against all professions of distance. This agonistic attachment does not end here. The book's final oracle moves to make the links between the classical Homer and the Jewish Sibyl more drastic and direct, and their competitive relationship reaches its climax.

Final Roar: The Sibyl's Self-Disclosure

The Homeric oracle implicitly manipulates connections between the Homeric and sibylline traditions, and their shared liminal status between different conceptual modes: mortal/divine; song/book; old/

[77] For the use of allegorical readings of the poets to support these readings (focusing, for instance, on lines of Homer where he seems to give some importance to the seventh day) and for Aristobulus' use of spurious or false Homeric quotations, see, e.g., Dawson 1991: 74–82 and, most recently, Mülke 2018: 61–124.

[78] Gruen 2016: 145. [79] Gruen 2016: 145.

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ageless. *Or. Sib.* 3 ends with another take on this analogy, which provides a crucial coda to the Sibyl's pre-Homeric poetics.

ταῦτά σοι Ἀσσυρίης Βαβυλώνια τείχεα μακρά
(810) οἰστρομανὴς προλιποῦσα, ἐς Ἑλλάδα πεμπόμενον πῦρ
πᾶσι προφητεύουσα θεοῦ μηνύματα θνητοῖς
— — — — — — — — — — — — — — — — — —
ὥστε προφητεῦσαί με βροτοῖς αἰνίγματα θεῖα.
καὶ καλέσουσι βροτοί με καθ᾽ Ἑλλάδα πατρίδος ἄλλης,
ἐξ Ἐρυθρῆς γεγαυῖαν ἀναιδέα· οἳ δέ με Κίρκης
(815) μητρὸς καὶ Γνωστοῖο πατρὸς φήσουσι Σίβυλλαν
μαινομένην ψεύστειραν· ἐπὴν δὲ γένηται ἅπαντα,
τηνίκα μου μνήμην ποιήσετε κοὐκέτι μ᾽ οὐδείς
μαινομένην φήσειε, θεοῦ μεγάλοιο προφῆτιν.
οὐ γὰρ ἐμοὶ δήλωσεν, ἃ πρὶν γενετῆρσιν ἐμοῖσιν·
(820) ὅσσα δὲ πρῶτ᾽ ἐγένοντο, τά μοι *θεὸς* κατέλεξε
τῶν μετέπειτα δὲ πάντα θεὸς νόῳ ἐγκατέθηκεν,
ὥστε προφητεύειν με τά τ᾽ ἐσσόμενα πρό τ᾽ ἐόντα
καὶ λέξαι θνητοῖς. ὅτε γὰρ κατεκλύζετο κόσμος
ὕδασι, καί τις ἀνὴρ μόνος εὐδοκίμητος ἐλείφθη
(825) ὑλοτόμῳ ἐνὶ οἴκῳ ἐπιπλώσας ὑδάτεσσιν
σὺν θηρσὶν πτηνοῖσί θ᾽, ἵν᾽ ἐμπλησθῇ πάλι κόσμος·
τοῦ μὲν ἐγὼ νύμφη καὶ ἀφ᾽ αἵματος αὐτοῦ ἐτύχθην,
τῷ τὰ πρῶτ᾽ ἐγένοντο· τὰ δ᾽ ἔσχατα πάντ᾽ ἀπεδείχθη·
ὥστ᾽ ἀπ᾽ ἐμοῦ στόματος τάδ᾽ ἀληθινὰ πάντα λελέχθω.

These things (I say) to you, after I left the long Babylonian walls of Assyria in a rage, I, a fire sent to Greece. I prophesy revelations of God to all mortals,
— —
so that I prophesy divine riddles to the mortals. Throughout Greece, mortals will say that I am from another fatherland, and that I am a shameless one, born in Erythrae. Others will call me raging, lying Sibyl, whose mother is Circe and whose father is The Knowing One. But when all these things happen, then you will remember me. Nobody will call me raging anymore – me, a prophetess of the great God. For he did not reveal to me the things he revealed previously to my parents. God (?) passed on all the things to me that happened first, and God put into my mind all things that would happen later, so that I can prophesy both future and past and tell them to mortals. For when the world was inundated with waters, and a certain man, a single famous person, survived by sailing upon the waters in a wooden house, together with the beasts and birds, so that the world would be filled again . . . his relative am I, and I am of his blood. To him the first things occurred, and the last things were revealed. So let all that is uttered from my mouth be taken as true.

(*Or Sib.* 3.809–29)

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In this passage – which is likely to be earlier than the Homer prophecy in its date of composition,[80] but placed so as to come after it in this compilation – the Sibyl defines not Homer, but herself. In the prophecy about Homer, Homer remained unnamed, and was subjected to a series of lies, speculation and false claims. Here the Sibyl, by contrast, is able to self-identify – to name herself, to acknowledge in the first person all of the lies which have also been told about her (the scorn and mistrust which, from Aristophanes' *Pax* to Tiberius' ban, we know her prophecies could attract) and to put them right in her own voice.

The first objection raised against the Sibyl is that she is a foreigner – Greece is not her native country (πατρίδος ἄλλης, 813). We have seen how various sources in the Hellenistic and imperial periods attest to the debated issue of the Sibyl's birthplace. Now the Sibyl ventriloquises her own version of this contested history of belonging. But this particular version is focused specifically on Erythrae, where people will falsely claim that she is from.[81] As Buitenwerf remarks, 'we can infer from these lines that the author of Book 3 took the famous Sibyl of Erythrae as his model'.[82] He is right, but there is another aspect to this modelling. We have seen how in Varro and Pausanias it was specifically the Erythraean Sibyl whose story was increasingly associated with Homer's.[83] By focusing on this location, the Sibyl gives valence to this association, encouraging the reader to pursue the similarities between Homer's tradition and her own. Read as a double act with the later-composed tirade against Homer, we can see how in both passages, the Sibyl activates and pushes the possible connections between their legends and reception, carving out her identity using carefully selected raw material from their traditions.

As a hinge between the two oracles, Erythrae thus allows us to read the Sibyl's self-definition here in polemical contrast with Homer.[84] Let us conclude by briefly considering the points in this contrast, as they are

[80] This argument is, as per the dating parameters sketched above, taking the passage as part of the main corpus of the text.

[81] The Greek wording on the Erythraean inscription discussed above (πατρίς δ' οὐκ ἄλλη, 'Erythrae is my only home town') is in fact reminiscent of line 813.

[82] Buitenwerf 2003: 297–8; he also points rightly to the plural βίβλους in 425 showing that the author knows of the existence of several such Sibylline books.

[83] Cf. also Lightfoot 2007: 12: 'it is a particularly intriguing suggestion by Jacoby that at some point, perhaps in the works of Apollodorus of Erythrae … the Homeric legends had in fact crossed over into and begun to influence those of the Sibyl, at least, of the Erythraean sibyl, whose wanderings were modelled on Homer'.

[84] We can even consider the possibility that the Homeric oracle was composed with this earlier passage of the collection already in mind, intentionally positioning itself within the Erythraean discourse, and making explicit the anti-Homeric sentiments which are connected to this strand of the Sibyl's

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developed in this closing passage of the book. For it is here that the Sibyl's *Jewish* identity makes her conquer her epic rival once and for all. Whereas Homer is emphatically mortal, the Sibyl here flaunts her slippery status between human interlocutor and divine truth-giver. The slanderous claim that her mother is Circe – an unusual and otherwise unattested genealogy –[85] evokes one of Homer's most famous mystical non-humans, seen here as an attempt by the Sibyl's critics to disqualify her as a prophetess via such a greedy, licentious association.[86] In contrast, she asserts her actual authority through two strands. First, this authority is rooted in the nature of her words – her prophecies are both 'riddles' (αἰνίγματα), a nod to the famous obscurity of oracles, but also perhaps to the long-standing allegorical interpretations of epic poetry, as a means of confronting problematic 'surface' meanings,[87] and θεοῦ μηνύματα (revelations or evocations of [or from] God).[88] And secondly, it comes from the status of her informants (823–8): with a Hesiodic flourish,[89] she asserts how the knowledge of the past and future was revealed to her not by the Muses, but by God.

In this section of the book where the author is most focused on asserting this sibylline 'biography', he also stands most firmly on his monotheistic religious source. This religiosity is continued in the affiliation with Noah (823–8). Noah is presented in terms very similar to Homer: another anonymous καί τις, easily identifiable through the ensuing description. However, whereas the non-name-games in the Homer oracle are designed to undermine this false pretender who has trampled on the Sibyl's Trojan territory, the Sibyl here celebrates her closeness to this 'man' (ἀνήρ) and pushes it as far as possible: she makes herself a kinswoman of Noah, and claims to have entered the ark with him.[90]

biography. On the identification of *Or. Sib.* 3.419–32 with the Erythraean Sibyl, see also Collins 1974: 27–8.

[85] This relationship may also add valence to the hypothesis of Faraone 2019 that the Homeric Circe is indebted to sibylline traditions and speech forms. The author of this much later oracle could be showing once again how the relationship works both ways.

[86] On Circe's negative associations with luxuriousness and greed in Greco-Roman ethics, see among others Hor. *Epist.* 1.2.17–31, with the phrase 'drinking from Circe's goblets.'

[87] On this tradition and its pronounced relationship to Homer's poetry, see particularly Keaney and Lamberton 1996; Buffière 1996; Lamberton 1986 and Struck 2004.

[88] The text here is problematic: see Geffcken 1902 and Buitenwerf 2003: 296. I agree with Buitenwerf, *pace* those editors who print, e.g., μηνίματα, that μηνύματα makes better sense and that there is little reason to emend it.

[89] ὥστε προφητεύειν με τά τ' ἐσσόμενα πρό τ' ἐόντα (822); cf. Hes. *Theog.* 38: εἰρεῦσαι τά τ' ἐόντα τά τ' ἐσσόμενα πρό τ' ἐόντα.

[90] At *Or. Sib.* 1.287–90 the family ties between Noah and Sibyl are made more explicit – there she is cited as his daughter-in-law, in what is probably 'an exposition of, and elaboration on this line' (Buitenwerf 2003: 300).

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These claims thus become all the more telling if read as part of the Sibyl's anti-Homeric self-positioning.[91] Epic poets themselves, of course, offer models for human-divine interaction through poetic revelation: Hesiod's *Theogony* 22–8 presents the meeting of a humble shepherd with the Muses in all their awe-inspiring glory; and in his famous second Muse-call before the catalogue of ships, Homer himself expresses his awe and wonder at the Muses whose information he must transmit into song (*Il.* 2.484–92). The Sibyl mixes her connection to the Pentateuchal patriarch Noah with her Homeric-Hesiodic qualities to show how through her Jewishness, she can become something more than these gentile poets could ever hope to be. Harnessing a number of features of knowledge-transmission from *both* epic *and* scriptural traditions, this oracle presents the Sibyl as the true, fully realised epic bard; capitalising on the *topoi* of epic inspiration to inscribe this alternative revelation of the real, singular divine truth.

Coda: Literary Bridges

At least five centuries after the composition of the anti-Homer oracle, another epic poet claims in a brazen aside that Homer got it wrong. In the *Dionysiaca*, set in the midst of the Indian war, Nonnus of Panopolis names Homer, conceives of his work as a 'book', and corrects one of his famous gnomic truths: γυναιμανέοντι δὲ μούνῳ / οὐ κόρος ἐστὶ πόθων· ἐψεύσατο βίβλος Ὁμήρου ('But only the man mad for women never has enough of longing. Homer's book lied!') (*Dion.* 42.180–81; cf. *Il.* 13.636–9). This is the only other surviving passage of Greek epic which accuses Homer of lying in this way. Both the (probably) Christian Nonnus[92] and the Jewish Sibyl attack a bookish Homer in Homerising hexameter, in a mythical setting which predates his narratives. An extreme version of Alexandrian 'contrast imitation', and a close encounter more intense and entwined than the sophists of imperial prose, both poets at once reveal their deeply exegetical, culturally inflected modes of Homeric inheritance and constantly deny the linear temporality on which this inheritance is based.

The Homeric oracle of *Or. Sib.* 3 as this chapter has read it can thus represent a crucial interlocutor in these Homeric discussions, standing before and linking between the prose treatises of the first and second

[91] This connection also provides a route through a perceived incongruity here: that the Sibyl's claims here to a mixed descent (through Circe and Noah) rub awkwardly against her status as a monotheistic voice-piece of God, which has led to the unnecessary hypothesis that this section was borrowed from an earlier pagan treatment of the Erythraean Sibyl (see Buitenwerf 2003: 300).

[92] For overviews on the vast debate surrounding Nonnus' religion, see Shorrock 2011 and Accorinti 2016.

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centuries CE and Nonnus' vast poetic novelty in the fifth. And yet in viewing it in this way, it may be countered, do we risk veering into ahistoricism; replacing the excessive contextualisation of previous assessments of the oracles with a literary circularity, which ignores the cultural, social and religious factors which must render distinct, say, the Archelaos relief from the Jewish Sibyllina from Lucian?

By taking seriously Book 3's literary complexity, we can perceive how these divides are as false and unhelpful as the disciplinary binaries ('Theology vs Classics departments') that held back the study of this material for so long. The oracles' Homeric interactions, illuminated by recourse to a broader range of Hellenistic and imperial comparisons, must be viewed as *part of* their cultural strategy: this sophisticated and subversive self-position functions not as a counterpart or concession to 'mainstream' Greek erudite culture, but a move fully embedded within it. The attempt to appropriate the Sibyl as a figure for Jewish (and later, Christian) prophecy on the one hand, and to attack the foundational text of 'Greekness' on the other must form part of a double act of redrafting the prophetic and apocalyptic tradition to assert the primacy and power of Hellenistic Judaism. And this passage attempts this reappropriation not from a textual and critical distance, like the Second Sophistic treatises, Demetrius' chronicles or Aristobulus and Philo's theses, but by assuming Homer's original literary mode. Vision and revision of Homer, then, is not just a matter for 'Greek' second sophistry, but also Jewish religiosity; and not just for prose, but for poetics. The result, as conveyed so strongly in this oracle, is not merely the 'dressing up' of Jewish material in a Homeric-exegetical, classicising disguise. Rather, it leaves us with a fierce demonstration of how both traditions – Hellenistic Judaism and imperial Greekness – are characterised by ambiguity, elasticity and fluidity, but also irony, mischievousness and wit,[93] as this text shows how it is not only the later-born Lucian, Philostratus and Nonnus who can cynically confront Homer on his own terms. Through mythology, through prophecy and through poetry, the Jewish Sibyl has the last laugh.

[93] An instructive parallel can be found in Gruen's approach to the *Letter of Aristeas* 'not just as evidence for a foundation myth about the origins of the Septuagint but as a repository of light comedy', and the assertion by the Jewish writer Artapanus that Moses introduced to the Egyptians their distinctive worship of animal gods as 'a product of mischievous wit' (Gruen 2016: quotation from Martin Goodman's introduction, p. 3).

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