

OLIVIA STEWART LESTER

Prophetic Rivalry,
Gender, and Economics

*Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen
zum Neuen Testament 2. Reihe*

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Olivia Stewart Lester

Prophetic Rivalry, Gender, and Economics

A Study in Revelation and Sibylline Oracles 4–5

Mohr Siebeck

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For Mark

Preface

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May 2018
Oxford, England

Olivia Stewart Lester

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Introduction

Prophets and Their Rivals

I am not an oracle-utterer of false Phoebus, whom vain men called a god, and falsely called a prophet, but of the great God, whom no hands of men made like speechless idols of polished stone.¹ (Sib. Or. 4.4–7)

But I have against you that you tolerate the woman, Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess, who both teaches and deceives my slaves to commit fornication and to eat food sacrificed to idols.² (Rev 2:20)

John and the Jewish writers who produced Sibylline Oracles 4–5 were faced with daunting questions in the century after Rome destroyed Jerusalem: Would imperial rule continue forever? How should people who saw themselves as subject to the God, of the Jerusalem Temple live in this new reality, marked by the destruction of that Temple? Did allegiance to this God necessitate active resistance to Rome, or was it possible to be both peaceful subjects of the empire and subjects of God? John and the Jewish sibyllists stabilize the authority of their positions on these matters by turning to write prophecy. They construct their own viewpoints as true prophecy, propounded by true prophets, and they cast rival viewpoints as false prophecy, coming from the mouths of false prophets.

The two passages above, both written in the century after Rome destroyed Jerusalem, introduce a divide between true and false prophecy, in the interest of presenting their own viewpoint to the best advantage. In the first text, the Sibyl of book 4 differentiates herself from the Delphic Pythia or any Sibyl prophesying for Apollo. In the second text, John pens these words of Jesus

¹ οὐ ψευδοῦς Φοίβου χρησιμηγόρος, ὄντε μάταιοι ἄνθρωποι θεὸν εἶπον, ἐπεψεύσαντο δὲ μάντιν· ἀλλὰ θεοῦ μέγαλοιο, τὸν οὐ χέρες ἐπλασαν ἀνδρῶν εἰδώλοισι ἀλάλοισι λιθοξέστοισιν ὅμοιον. Greek follows J. Geffcken, *Die Oracula Sibyllina* (Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1902). Greek translations are my own throughout, unless otherwise indicated. Translations of the Sibylline Oracles are my own, in consultation with John J. Collins, “Sibylline Oracles,” in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, ed. James H. Charlesworth (vol. 1; Garden City: Doubleday, 1983), 317–472.

² ἀλλὰ ἔχω κατὰ σοῦ ὅτι ἀφεῖς τὴν γυναῖκα Ἰεζάβελ, ἣ λέγουσα ἑαυτὴν προφῆτιν, καὶ διδάσκει καὶ πλατῆ τοὺς ἐμοὺς δούλους πορνεῦσαι καὶ φαγεῖν εἰδωλόθυτα.

against a rival teacher in the community at Thyatira, condemning her accommodationism with Rome and that of her followers. In the larger context of his book, the implied contrast with “Jezebel” works to establish John’s own identity as a true prophet, and this is part of an ongoing demarcation of true and false prophecy.

Drawing their lines in the sand between true and false prophecy, both texts invoke traditions in which gender and economics play integral roles. With respect to gender, Revelation and Sibylline Oracles 4 use women’s vulnerability to divine violence to reinforce the legitimacy of their true prophecy. Sibylline Oracles 4 distances the Jewish Sibyl of the book from Apollo and, by implication, from his female prophets – both Pythias and other Sibyls. Certain ancient portrayals of both Pythias and Sibyls highlighted the masculine dominance of Apollo over them during inspiration. The Jewish sibyllists retain a motif of violent divine control, but relocate it, so that the deity inflicting violence against the prophet is no longer Apollo, but their own God. Within the world of the text, God is in complete control of the message in Sibylline Oracles 4. In Revelation, John accuses his rival “Jezebel” of teaching fornication and threatens her with violence; this is part of a larger pattern in the book of associating women with illicit sex and emphasizing their vulnerability to violence. In both instances, the rhetorical construction of true prophecy relies in part on divine violence against women’s bodies as a means of control: in the first, divine violence ensures that God is the source of the prophetic message; in the second, divine violence punishes a false prophet.

With respect to economics, both texts take up prophetic figures involved in the wrong kinds of economic activity for certain ancient audiences in their polemics against false prophecy. The Delphic Pythia – one of the rhetorical targets of Sibylline Oracles 4 – was part of an elaborate system of oracular consultation that involved numerous financial transactions. As I will discuss in more detail below, complaints about this system were widespread, often including accusations that Apollo and his Delphic personnel were motivated by greed. At least one ancient reader of Sibylline Oracles 4 knew about these economic polemics and used them in his own attempts to discredit Apollo’s prophecy: Clement of Alexandria.³ In naming “Jezebel” in Rev 2, John interprets traditions from 1 Kings about a foreign queen who supported the wrong kinds of prophets in her royal court. He draws on a character associated with sponsoring false prophets to counteract teaching that results in economic activity, the eating of meat sacrificed to idols, which John cannot countenance. Thus gender and economics work together to present the fourth Sibyl and John as true prophets, and the Pythia and “Jezebel” as false prophets.

Beginning with these two passages from Rev 2 and Sib. Or. 4, which each receive fuller discussion in the chapters that follow, introduces the three in-

³ See chapter 6.

terrelated foci of this study of written prophecy in Revelation and Sibylline Oracles 4–5: interpretation, gender, and economics. The ongoing interpretation and reworking of earlier traditions demonstrates the continued liveliness of prophecy as a rhetorical strategy in Hellenistic Judaism, early Christianity, and a larger Ancient Mediterranean context in the first and second centuries CE. Gender contributes to a discourse of divine violence against prophets in texts from the Ancient Mediterranean, including Hellenistic Jewish and early Christian texts, that works rhetorically to emphasize the validity of the prophetic message. I trace this discourse of divine violence against prophets in texts considered throughout the book, finding that male prophets are emasculated and female prophets are vulnerable to masculine divine domination. This rhetorical effort ensures that the prophet is under the control of the deity, and within the world of the text, that the prophetic message is true. Economics are part of the prophetic worlds created by John and the Jewish sibyllists in their books, and also the contemporary world in which they wrote their texts. Both John and the sibyllists write prophecy in part to resist the economic actions of political groups around them, especially Rome, and to imagine an alternate universe. In this alternate universe, God becomes an economic actor as well, forcing restitution from human beings whose evil behavior incurs debt. Economics were also frequently connected with prophecy in the world in which John and the Jewish sibyllists were writing, and their audiences were receiving, their texts. This book thus also follows the ways accusations of greed and swindling worked in surrounding texts to strengthen polemics against false prophecy, situating Revelation and Sibylline Oracles 4–5 in a larger ancient landscape of prophecy and economics. The reworking of earlier traditions, gender, and economics are three essential and intersecting features of written prophecy, and this book will trace their relationship in Revelation and Sibylline Oracles 4–5, and in ongoing debates about true and false prophecy in texts throughout the Ancient Mediterranean.

A. The Texts

The book proceeds in two major movements, considering constructions of true prophecy first in Revelation and then in Sibylline Oracles 4–5. Placing these texts side by side offers several benefits. The first is that reading Revelation and Sibylline Oracles 4–5 together reveals a shared rhetorical tendency obscured by later religious and canonical boundaries. The second is that because they interact with so many other texts and traditions, Revelation and Sibylline Oracles 4–5 further destabilize narratives of the “decline of prophecy” in ancient Judaism, early Christianity, and a larger Ancient Mediterranean religious context in the first and second centuries CE.

I. Prophecy Across Religious and Canonical Boundaries

It can be tempting to think of Revelation as “Christian” in contrast to Sibylline Oracles 4–5 as “Jewish,” but this distinction does not do justice to the historical moment in which these texts were written. John and the Jewish writers and editors who produced Sibylline Oracles 4–5 all appeal to Jewish texts and traditions as they construct true prophecy, and the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple by the Romans poses difficult questions for all of them. For John in Revelation, Jesus does play a significant role in answering the questions raised by the destruction of the Temple and in the literary act of constructing true prophecy. Revelation does not fit exclusively, however, into the category of “early Christianity,” or of “Hellenistic Judaism.” It participates in some ways in both categories, and it was written well before we can posit any kind of widespread and consistent separation between the people represented by these two labels.⁴ A careful historical reading of Revelation must avoid later universalizing distinctions and, especially, universalized opposition between “Jewish” and “Christian,” looking rather for specific moments of affiliation and resistance instead of locating texts in firmly-entrenched, anachronistic categories. Written in a period too early to distinguish Hellenistic Judaism and early Christianity neatly from one another, Revelation offers us a look at the ongoing appeal of prophecy as a rhetorical strategy within both movements. Sibylline Oracles 4–5, written in a very

⁴ See Annette Yoshiko Reed and Adam Becker on the “Parting of the Ways”: “As recent research has shown, the data can support theories about a variety of different ‘Partings’ at different times in different places; even with regard to the Roman empire, a strong case has been made that the fourth century CE is a far more plausible candidate for a decisive turning point than any date in the earlier period. It is, however, perhaps less profitable to debate the exact date of the ‘Parting’ than to question our adherence to a model that prompts us to search for a single turning point that ushered in a global change for all varieties of Judaism and Christianity, in all communities and locales. What proves significant is that attempts to ‘part’ Christianity from Judaism did not cease with the moment of their alleged success, whenever that moment may have been” (Annette Yoshiko Reed and Adam H. Becker, introduction to *The Ways that Never Parted: Jews and Christians in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages*, ed. Adam H. Becker and Annette Yoshiko Reed [Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003; repr. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2007], 1–34 at 22–23). Paula Fredriksen describes Jewish-Christian relations as follows: “The ideology of separation was initially an optative principle, intimately and immediately allied to textual practices, articulated and developed by an intellectual minority (redundancy intended) beginning, perhaps, in the early second century CE. It was an ideal vociferously – or, depending on our degree of empathy for figures like Chrysostom, perhaps plaintively – urged in the fourth. It was a policy ineffectually legislated, in pockets of the old Roman world, in the sixth. It was never in this culture, for the entire period from the coming of Christianity to the coming of Islam, a native reality universally lived” (Paula Fredriksen, “What ‘Parting of the Ways’? Jews, Gentiles, and the Ancient Mediterranean City,” in *The Ways that Never Parted*, 35–63).

different style than Revelation, nevertheless offer roughly contemporaneous examples of Hellenistic Jewish prophetic writing, grappling, like Revelation, with the ascent of Roman power and the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple.

Revelation and Sibylline Oracles 4–5 also transcend modern distinctions between “canonical” and “non-canonical” texts. These three texts now reside in very different collections, despite their prophetic resemblances, and they differ in canonical status. Revelation is found within Christian Bibles; the Sibylline Oracles, meanwhile, are made most accessible through Charlesworth’s *Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*.⁵ This category of “Old Testament Pseudepigrapha” can present several challenges to modern scholarly readers. I will discuss these problems more fully in chapter 4, but for the purposes of methodological introduction, Annette Yoshiko Reed has considered the effects of grouping texts into “Old Testament Pseudepigrapha” on scholarly views on the significance of these materials:

The compartmentalization of “Old Testament Pseudepigrapha” to scholarship on the Second Temple Jewish “background” of the origins of Christianity has been naturalized by periodizations based on now-authoritative literary canons and corpora; just as the Jewish Tanakh and Protestant Old Testament form the basis for common notions of a “biblical” period centered on pre-exilic Israel, so other similar and related writings (whatever their dates or their status in other Christian Bibles) are described as “post-biblical.” Current canonical status (esp. in the West) is thus blurred into judgments of temporal priority.⁶

Taking Reed’s caution seriously here, this book does not read Sibylline Oracles 4–5 as “background” for early Christianity, nor does it read later canonical distinctions backward into the late first and early second centuries CE. Rather, Sibylline Oracles 4, Sibylline Oracles 5, and Revelation receive attention together as different instantiations of a shared literary strategy: the construction of true prophecy.

II. Revelation, Sibylline Oracles 4–5, and Prophecy’s Decline

The first benefit of reading Revelation and Sibylline Oracles 4–5 together is the exposure of resemblances across anachronistic boundaries, both religious and canonical. The second is that these three texts challenge multiple and widespread narratives of the “decline of prophecy.” Narratives of decline appear in ancient texts and modern scholarship from multiple cultural vantage

⁵ James H. Charlesworth, ed., *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha* (2 vols.; Garden City: Doubleday, 1983). The collected Sibylline Oracles can be found at 317–24.

⁶ Annette Yoshiko Reed, “Old Testament Pseudepigrapha and post-70 Judaism,” in *Les Judaïsmes dans tous leurs états aux Ier-IIIe siècles*, ed. C. Clivaz, S. Mimouni, and B. Pouderon, JAOC 5 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2015), 117–48 at 127. For a discussion of the history of the category “Old Testament Pseudepigrapha” and its relationship to historical Jesus scholarship, see eadem, “The Modern Invention of Old Testament Pseudepigrapha,” *JTS* 60.2 (October 2009): 403–36. See also chapter 4.

points, including Second Temple Judaism and ancient Christianity. In response to this idea of a “decline of prophecy,” there is a growing body of scholarship emphasizing the ongoing liveliness of prophecy in the Ancient Mediterranean. I seek in this book to add to this growing body of scholarship. I find evidence for the liveliness of prophecy in the writing of prophecy and the literary production of prophetic figures in Revelation and Sibylline Oracles 4–5, rather than in reconstructing the lives of historical prophets. The ongoing appeal of rhetorical constructions of true and false prophecy among Hellenistic Jews and Christians in this period says something important about prophecy’s endurance. The persistence of prophetic rhetoric, especially among writers in politically tenuous situations, challenges the “decline of prophecy.” Revelation and Sibylline Oracles 4–5 have a bearing on three different iterations of this narrative of decline, because they interact with so many different texts and traditions. In this introduction, I consider each of the three in turn, beginning with the decline of prophecy in postexilic and Second Temple Judaism, followed by the decline of prophecy in early Christianity, and then the decline of prophecy in Greek and Roman narratives.

Benjamin Sommer has argued that among Jews there was “a decline of prophecy in the Second Temple period – or perhaps a transformation of prophecy that resulted in the end of the forms of divine communication found in the Hebrew Bible.”⁷ Sommer’s version of a decline or transformation of prophecy allows for the revival of older, lapsed prophetic traditions, especially when an author believed the eschaton was near. This is how Sommer explains the presence of prophecy in New Testament texts and in Josephus; it is a “return of prophecy.”⁸ The dominant trend within Second Temple Judaism for Sommer, however, is one of decline. These revivals of prophecy in the New Testament and in Josephus are the exceptions that prove the rule, prompted by a belief that the world was ending soon. Sommer acknowledges that there are claims to inspiration in the literature from Qumran (e.g., 1QpHab 7:2–4), but he labels these claims as “inspired exegesis” rather than “prophecy.”⁹ In Sommer’s more recent work, he continues to use the language of prophecy ceasing in Second Temple Judaism, although he allows for

⁷ Benjamin D. Sommer, “Did Prophecy Cease? Evaluating a Reevaluation,” *JBL* 115.1 (Spring 1996): 31–47 at 36.

⁸ Sommer, “Did Prophecy Cease?” 36. Sommer writes of prophecy in the New Testament: “That some people viewed Jesus or John the Baptist or certain members of the community as prophets need not imply that they believed in an unbroken chain of prophecy going back to the preexilic era. Rather, members of the early Christian community presumed that the arrival of the Messiah sparked the renewal of a tradition that had long been dormant” (Sommer, “Did Prophecy Cease?” 37).

⁹ Sommer, “Did Prophecy Cease?” 43 and 47 n. 65.

ongoing revelation and interaction with that revelation in what he terms “postbiblical Judaism.”¹⁰

James Kugel formulates this in a slightly different way. He suggests that in the postexilic period, “the institution [of prophecy] had fallen, or was falling, into disrepute ...”¹¹ Although some prophets interpreted the works of earlier prophets, Kugel argues that this is evidence of the increasing priority of the written word of God over the words given by divine spokesmen.¹² Importantly, Kugel asserts that prophecy did not cease as a phenomenon during this period; although some texts would suggest that cessation, Kugel notes that there are others that contradict such a notion.¹³ He concludes, “It seems not so much that prophecy ceased as that the prophet’s very identity and role came to be redefined and significantly broadened, while at the same the conviction was spreading that the *great* prophets were a thing of the past (and, perhaps, the future).”¹⁴ Kugel’s description of a broadening of prophecy, while compatible in some ways with Sommer’s, helpfully reminds the reader that although some texts would indicate a decline in the phenomenon of prophecy, there is also evidence to the contrary. The shift Kugel notes is one from the prophet as God’s spokesman to the interpreted written word as divine revelation.

Hindy Najman has extended the notions of the transformation, redefinition, and broadening of prophecy by proposing that we can speak about “revelation inflected by destruction” as a literary tendency in Second Temple

¹⁰ Benjamin Sommer, *Revelation and Authority: Sinai in Jewish Scripture and Tradition*, AYBRL (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015), 177–78, 188–208. “At some point in the Second Temple period prophecy ceased in Israel, and the text of the Bible became less flexible. Nevertheless, traditions continued to evolve outside the biblical canon among Pharisees and tanna’im (who enthusiastically acknowledged the existence of these traditions) and among non-Pharisaic groups (whose denial in this matter hardly shows that their own version of tradition did not exist). Further, written scripture in post-biblical Judaism became available only through practices of recitation, interpretation, and contextualization. As a result, revelation remained a matter of interaction as much as a product ...” (ibid., 177–78).

¹¹ James L. Kugel, *The Bible as it Was* (Cambridge; London: Harvard University Press, 1997), 11.

¹² Kugel, *Bible*, 11.

¹³ Kugel, *Bible*, 12 n. 8. Texts listed which suggest a cessation of prophecy include 1 Macc 4:46, 9:27, 14:41; *Prayer of Azariah* 15; 2 Bar 85:3; Josephus, *Ag. Ap.* 1:40–41. Texts listed which affirm the continuation of prophecy include Wis 7:27; Philo, *Heir* 259; 1QH Thanksgiving Hymns 4:16; 1 Cor 11:4–5, 12:10, 14:4–5; Josephus, *Ant.* 13:311–13, 20:97, 169.

¹⁴ Kugel, *Bible*, 12 n. 8. The possibility of a future prophet, a prophet “like Moses,” is attested in texts such as 1QS Community Rule and the Testament of Benjamin (Kugel, *Bible*, 508–10, discussing Deut 18:9–18; 34:10–12; 1QS Community Rule 9:10–11; Testament of Benjamin 9:2).

Judaism.¹⁵ This proposal includes an allowance that in postexilic and Second Temple Judaism, prophecy experienced a rupture, caused by exile and destruction.¹⁶ This rupture did not lead to a full end, however, but to a transformation of “persistent claims about accessing the divine via angelic mediation, dream, symbolic vision, inspired interpretation, and so forth.”¹⁷ Claims to divine revelation, including but not limited to prophecy,¹⁸ continued in transformed ways, and increasingly in written ways.¹⁹ These claims became even more tenacious in the face of the destruction of the Second Temple, in addition to the destruction of the First Temple. “Destruction is never overcome, but revelation persists. It is the linkage between destruction and revelation that is captured in the phrase ‘revelation inflected by destruction.’”²⁰ Najman’s description of persistent revelation in the face of destruction fits well with John and the Jewish sibyllists, who all utilize prophecy (as one type of revelation out of many conceptually available in this period) as an authorizing strategy in the era after the Second Temple’s destruction. “Revelation inflected by destruction” frequently takes on a polemical edge in Revelation and Sibylline Oracles 4–5, directed either against the Roman empire, against rival forms of prophecy, and against other forms of teaching. The production of literary prophecy becomes a weapon in the arsenal of these late first- and early second-century CE writers, who oppose ideological and political enemies and advance their own positions in a fragile, post-destruction context.

There is a second version of the “decline of prophecy” narrative to address, namely the one found in portrayals of ancient Christianity. Laura Nasrallah has insightfully traced this narrative of the decline of prophecy in scholarship on early Christianity and diagnosed the problems with it in her book, *An Ecstasy of Folly*.²¹ Finding one of its most potent expressions in the work of Max Weber, this narrative takes the development of Christianity (and all religions) over time as a movement from charismatic leadership to gradual institutionalization; Weber describes this progression as the shift in leadership from prophets to priests.²² This model takes Paul’s writings (especially 1

¹⁵ Hindy Najman, *Losing the Temple and Recovering the Future: An Analysis of 4 Ezra* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), esp. 6–7.

¹⁶ Najman, *Losing the Temple*, 4.

¹⁷ Najman, *Losing the Temple*, 7.

¹⁸ Najman notes that there is an “absence of full-blown classical prophecies” in this era of transformed revelation, but she reaffirms that prophecy continues (Najman, *Losing the Temple*, 7).

¹⁹ Najman, *Losing the Temple*, 4–6.

²⁰ Najman, *Losing the Temple*, 7.

²¹ Laura Nasrallah, *An Ecstasy of Folly: Prophecy and Authority in Early Christianity*, HTS 52 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003).

²² Max Weber, *The Sociology of Religion*, trans. Ephraim Fischoff (Boston: Beacon, 1993), esp. 60–69.

Corinthians) and texts about the Montanist movement (or the “New Prophecy”) as the beginning and ending of early Christian prophecy, tracing a linear movement from charisma to institutionalization.²³ On this model, the Montanist movement represented the “last charismatic gasps”²⁴ of prophecy. Nasrallah’s work takes 1 Corinthians together with several third-century CE texts to counter this narrative and explore the diversity of early Christian discussions about ecstasy.²⁵ My examination of literary prophecy in Revelation builds on Nasrallah’s work on the historical continuity and diversity of prophecy within early Christianity, by identifying further examples of prophecy as a rhetorical tool in late first century. Although my observations apply to a period between Nasrallah’s work on Paul and her later work on third-century Christian texts, I hope to contribute to Nasrallah’s larger counter-narrative about prophecy in early Christianity, challenging the idea that the growth of Christianity over time was a movement away from prophecy.

Certain ancient Greek and Roman authors were also familiar with a narrative of a decline of prophecy and divination in the first centuries BCE and CE. Cicero’s *De divinatione* provides numerous examples of the cessation of divination by art (what we might call “divination”) and divination by nature (what we might call “prophecy”).²⁶ In the first book of the treatise, the character Quintus complains that in his day Roman augurs neglect auspices.²⁷ He also notes that the consultation of entrails occurs less frequently than in times past.²⁸ Turning from divination by art to divination by nature, Quintus also describes a change in the oracle of Delphi. While in the past it was a crowded, famous, trustworthy site, such is no longer the case. Quintus offers tentative explanations for this, including the suggestion that inspiration has dried up like a river, but his emphasis is on the fact that it would never have been so busy if its prophecies had not been true.²⁹ Quintus appears in the treatise as a character sympathetic to and advocating for the importance of prophecy.

²³ Nasrallah, *An Ecstasy of Folly*, 3.

²⁴ Nasrallah, *An Ecstasy of Folly*, 3.

²⁵ Nasrallah, *An Ecstasy of Folly*.

²⁶ Quintus: “There are two kinds of divination: the first is dependent on art, the other on nature” (*Duo sunt enim divinandi genera, quorum alterum artis est, alterum naturae*). Cicero, *Div.* 2.6.12, trans. William Armistead Falconer, LCL (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1923), 235.

²⁷ Cicero, *Div.* 1.15.25–26. Taking auspices included examining the flight of birds (*Div.* 2.33.70), lightning (*Div.* 2.35.74), and the eating of birds (*Div.* 2.34.71–72). For a helpful introduction, see Mary Beard, John North, and Simon Price, *Religions of Rome* (vol. 1; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), esp. 21–22.

²⁸ Cicero, *Div.* 1.16.28.

²⁹ Cicero, *Div.* 1.19.37–38.

Marcus Cicero,³⁰ on the other hand, is much more skeptical and antagonistic. In the second book, he states that the Delphic oracle is silent now and has been silent for a long while, and he claims that its oracles are despised.³¹ I will not adjudicate between the two characters in the treatise on the value of prophecy or try to locate Cicero the author's own views in this treatise. For our purposes, what is significant is that these passages from Cicero attest to a narrative of decline for the oracle at Delphi.

This same narrative occurs in other texts contemporaneous to and slightly later than Cicero. Lucan writes about the shrine having been long silent during the era of Caesar's clash with the Senate; it revives, however, in the course of his account of this struggle.³² Plutarch has one of the characters in his treatise *De defectu oraculorum* speak about a decrease in oracular activity in his day at the shrine of Delphi, rather than a complete cessation. While in previous generations there had been two Delphic priestesses busily giving oracular answers, with one in reserve, by the time Plutarch was writing, only one priestess was needed.³³ I do not cite these examples as determinative for reconstructing the historical state of prophecy as a phenomenon in the Roman empire; rather, it is useful to note that a similar narrative of the decline of prophecy exists in both Jewish texts after the exile and in Greek and Roman texts about Delphi and divination in the first centuries BCE and CE. The persistence of this narrative makes it all the more interesting that Revelation and Sibylline Oracles 4 seem to resist prophecy associated with Apollo in the late first and second centuries CE, long after the shrine is supposed to have been if not inactive, at least significantly diminished.

This study does not ask about active or waning historical prophetic practices; rather, it asks about literary strategies that appeal to ancient writers in the late first and second centuries CE.³⁴ From this perspective, prophecy

³⁰ Not to be conflated with the author Cicero. Cf. Mary Beard, "Although it may be tempting (whatever the theoretical problems) to equate the words of a writer apparently speaking *in propria persona* with the 'correct meaning' of his work, that temptation here proves elusive; the 'authorial voice' in *De Divinatione* and the related *De Natura Deorum* constantly evades definition" (Mary Beard, "Cicero and Divination: The Formation of a Latin Discourse," *JRS* 76 [1986]: 33–46 at 35).

³¹ Cicero, *Div.* 2.57.117.

³² Lucan, *Civil War* 5.110.

³³ Plutarch, *Def. orac.* 414B.

³⁴ A significant amount of scholarly work has been done on historical practices of prophecy, with regard to a variety of different cultures and contexts, engaging questions of their persistence or decline. There are far more works than one could list in a footnote, but a few examples include the following. Regarding ancient Judaism: Robert Wilson, *Prophecy and Society in Ancient Israel* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1980); Sommer, "Did Prophecy Cease? Evaluating a Reevaluation"; John J. Collins, *Seers, Sibyls, and Sages in Hellenistic Judaism* (Leiden: Brill, 1997); Kugel, *The Bible as it Was*; Jonathan Stökl and Corrine L. Carvalho, eds., *Prophets Male and Female: Gender and Prophecy in the Hebrew Bible, the*

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